

# Books

## Christendom Indicted

Arnold Jacob Wolf

Two prominent Christian thinkers present us a bill of particulars that accuses their own church of shocking crimes against the Jews. In *The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience* (Harper and Row; 153 pp.; \$7.95) Professor Franklin Littell shows how Christian Europe not only committed the Holocaust but has continued to cover up its own demonic behavior. In *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Seabury; 294 pp.; \$9.50) Rosemary Ruether carefully analyzes Christian texts from Paul to our own time, disclosing an unbroken theme of Jew-hatred. These books represent a major investigation by learned Christians who hope to turn their own community around before it destroys itself in its fury at the Jews.

Littell, an angry Methodist with a penchant for the free church tradition, affirms absolutely the "right of the Jewish people to self-identity and self-definition" in the face of a continuing Christian refusal to admit that right. Jews can live, however endangered, independently of Christianity. The reverse, says Littell, is quite impossible; a child never outgrows her mother. Like his mentors Elie Wiesel and Emil Fackenheim—but in my judgment far more appropriately, since the Holocaust is a Christian and not a Jewish phenomenon—Littell is preoccupied with Hitler, his offspring, and his coconspirators. The latter Littell takes to be the "educated technicians [who] built Auschwitz." They are "baptized Christians" in league with abstracting, confused, forgetful, "musically, linguistically, and morally tone-deaf" science-worshippers who perpetrated the greatest atrocity in the history of mankind. Littell is angry at his church not only for presiding at genocide but for still not trying to find out what went wrong.

It all began when Christianity sold out its Jewish antecedents for world power as successor to the Roman *imperium*. Paul, struggling with the dialectic of loyalty to mother-Judaism and his dream of true catholicism, "solved his primary problem with considerable skill." The later Church Fathers, however, not only unloaded their Jewish "baggage," but bitterly attacked the Jews for not joining in the dismantling. Littell moves from Chrysostom to Charles Clayton Morrison in five pages, because (unlike Ruether) he is not much interested here in documenting the record of theological crimes

against the Jews. What concerns him deeply, almost monomaniacally, is the enormous historical price of Christian pseudouniversalism. That price is lethal hatred of the Jews. For Littell this hatred explains a multitude of Christian sins. Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the much admired theologian, meant to put the Jews down, though he ended up dying more or less for them when he was killed by the Nazis. Another Christian martyr, Kurt Gerstein, wore the uniform of the S.S., but only in order to find out the worst. In any case, the Vatican ignored what he found out while supposedly spying for the Church. "The mass murder of Jews by Christians in the heart of Christendom" speaks for itself. And since Karl Barth was right—"The question of the Jews is the question of Christ"—the question appears to have been profoundly and finally answered with a NO! Heretical Christians have denatured their Faith and made it a collaborator in mass-murder. Christ is now lost with his people; Christianity, with its Lord.

It was not, of course, only in Europe that the church bells pealed as Jews were carried off. Only a few decades ago distinguished American Christians accused the Jews of inventing the Holocaust, and insisted that the doors of Palestine and of the United States remain permanently closed to them. When Christians thus apostatize, "the Jews are left exposed as the one continuing counterculture which cannot assimilate, which cannot become good gentile heathen again." American Christendom has clearly turned itself into a quasi-paganism of which the Jews are likely to be the first local victims.

The evidence of all this, writes Littell, is the Christian refusal to come to terms with the Jewish state. A crisis for Islam in the Middle East, Israel is equally critical for Christian self-understanding in the West. It is not Israel's power or power politics that so annoy most of the Church; it is its mere existence, its *chutzpah*, its refusal to be understood in someone else's language. In short, what outrages Christians is the age-old Jewish refusal to lie down and die. Israel will live, Franklin Littell believes, but he is not so sure about Christendom. It is still reeling from the Holocaust, and has undertaken no measures to heal itself. It is still whoring after new gods, perhaps because its Lord continues to wear a Jewish face. "When the Messiah comes [*sic*] to consummate the longings and hopes of all mankind, he will be of the lineage of Abraham and David, not a timeless and faceless wraith, his head wreathed in abstractions." Littell is waiting for a Jew to save his church.

One admires the passion, relentlessness, and courage of this book and of its author, yet it is all vaguely unsettling. It is not only that

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Frank Littell cannot spell *yahrzeit* or thinks the (American?) Bar Mitzvah is a profound exploration of maturation into Judaism at the very time most of us are looking for ways to dump it; it is not only that he is as shrill as the most bitter of our survivors and as Zionist as the most patriotic of our Israelis, but that somehow he isn't quite sure of what he is saying after all. Is it Christianity that hates the Jews or is hatred of the Jews apostasy from Christianity? Are such haters Christians or ex-Christians or pseudo-Christians? Do they hate Jews because of what the Jews are or simply because they are? Is the remedy in Judaizing or in Christianizing? Is it in knowing more (mere technique?) or empathizing more? And how does one come to do that? Littell's paradigmatic exemplum, a service in memory of the Holocaust, is simply a collection of banal Jewish texts on the subject, which, although perhaps fresher to Christians, is hardly likely to do the trick. He is full of good will, but his self-reproach spills out into confusion and dismay.

Especially on Israel he is dangerously extreme. He insists that "no one can be an enemy of Zionism and be a friend of the Jewish people today," despite the Satmer Rebbe and Pope John XXIII. Worst of all, he permits himself a terrifying racial slur on Muslims: "A religion to which immediate worldly success is a direct corollary to religious orthodoxy, a religion which flees from the awful and mysterious, a religion in which the Suffering Servant plays no part—neither as model for individuals nor as a force in history—cannot bear to hear about crucifixion." In a kind of parody of Rosenzweig, who also disparaged Islam unmercifully, Littell repeats the very canards that have often been hurled against the Jews. A churchman who thinks that "peace, social justice, civil rights for homosexuals, women's lib" are only "fads" is not a very useful ally, nor a very comfortable encomiast. Littell has learned from the best that Judaism has to teach, but also, I fear, from its worst.

**R**osemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* is, in every way, a better book. It is passionate but controlled, precise but not technical, radical but never trendy, serious but never merely theoretical. If Littell is angry at Christians for what they have done to Jews and to themselves, Ruether is angry at Christianity for what it now proclaims and always has proclaimed about the Jews. Anti-Semitism is no aberration; it is the fruit of a tree poisoned at its roots. Hitler was no mere pseudo-Christian, no antique pagan; he was a true inheritor of Church Fathers who meant exactly what he said. The Holocaust is not a reversion to pre-Christian norms; it is a playing out of the oldest and strongest theme in the literature of the Christian Church.

It all begins (*contra* Littell) in the New Testament. In the synoptics, as everywhere in Christian literature on messianism, Christology takes on a bitterly anti-Jewish flavor. Jesus may have been a Hillelite *am-*

*haaretz*, but the Evangelists were concerned to show him as enemy to Jewish stiff-neckedness, neither colleague nor son of the Pharisees, but their mortal adversary. The Church, as the true Israel, inherited the Scripture and promise of the Jews, who were some day to be rooted up and thrown into the fire. In the Book of the Acts Christendom's first martyr offers the most anti-Semitic of all Scriptural speeches: Solomon's temple is idolatrous, Israel was never the true people of God and must now be discarded and destroyed. Misinterpreting the Hebrew Bible willfully, the Book of the Acts chooses "an antithetical relation to an apostate Israel." The Jews hate Paul and would have him imprisoned, whereas the Romans are friendly, if uncomprehending. The very term "Jew" in Acts and John (the most vicious of the gospels) is "a constantly repeated hostile formula." Jews have never kept the Torah, have always killed their prophets, have resisted salvation in each of its forms. The time has come for them to pay for their sins against God and man.

Paul never "solved his problem" either. It is because of the Jews, Paul insists, that the name of God is blasphemed around the world. Their Torah was only a concession to the Jews because of their sinfulness. Circumcision is forbidden under the New Covenant. A Gnostic more than a Jew, Paul insists that "the reign of Torah is equivalent to the reign of [these] demonic powers," and "the Mosaic and Christian covenants have no common inheritance.... Paul's position was, unquestionably, that of anti-Judaism." True, a remnant of Jews will be gathered into the new people of God, but not because of Jewish merit, only "to assure the ultimate vindication of the Church." John's Gospel, writes Ruether, is even more damaging: "The Jews," for John, are the very incarnation of the false, apostate principle of a fallen world, alienated from its true being in God." The Jews are "of the Devil"; their Father has taught them to be killers and deceivers and the enemies of man. The New Testament is not accidentally anti-Semitic. Its Christology and anti-Judaism are inextricably connected. To accept Jesus as the Christ *means* to reject, despise, and ultimately endanger the Jews.

**S**ome of her texts have long ago been considered by Malcolm Hay, Claude Montefiore, and James Parkes, among others. But Ruether's chapter on the Church Fathers is so detailed and so stunning that it defies summarization. Suffice it that the greatest of Christian saints called not only for Jewish conversion but for Jewish blood. Jews are harlots, infanticides, cannibals. "The prophetic dialectic of judgment and promise is presumed to apply not to one people, the Jews, but to two peoples, the Jews and the future Church." The Jews are the dark and evil side of history, the Christians the Children of Light. When the Christian suffers, he is a martyr; the Jew is only getting what he deserves. The Torah, the Synagogue, the holy days are not simply revoked; they

are denounced as "diabolic and anti-Christian. Jews could no longer ever produce a Messiah; they have no land, no autonomy, no chrism. And, clearly, that is the way patristic Christianity means for things to remain. The problem is not that the Church Fathers were bad men; it is that Christianity seems to them to require that they discard and destroy in practice what they have superseded in theory.

"In the fourth century, however, Christianity became the religion of the Graeco-Roman Empire. What had previously been theology and Biblical hermeneutics now was to become law and social policy." The Jewish condition in Christendom deteriorated steadily. A right once lost was never recovered; the Jews suffered ever new kinds of discrimination "until, finally, one arrives at that state of total vilification, rightlessness, and ghettoization that was to characterize Jewish life in Western Christendom from the Later Middle Ages to the Emancipation." Successive codes legalized invidiousness. Synagogues were destroyed by bishops, and communities exiled by princes. The Crusades, which killed more Jews than Muslims, was only the climax of centuries of brutalization by Christian emperors and Catholic popes. A Masada, a unique community suicide under the Romans, became epidemic on the Rhine a thousand years later under Christian domination. The diabolic "remained the basic image of the Jew up to its use by Nazism." Hitler is not only Luther's but also St. John the Evangelist's heir.

Ruether's "theological critique of the Christian anti-Jewish myth" is apposite and strong. It unpacks "the schism of judgment and promise," defends Jewish particularism against vague and self-serving

Christian ecumenism, and a putative Jewish theology of the word and deed against quasi-Gnostic spiritualism and other "tricks of realized eschatology." For her Christ can in no sense be "final" unless Christianity is to seal off history, condemning not only Jews to death. He must point beyond himself to the "One who is yet to come." "For [present] Christianity there can be no 'way' to the 'end,' because the 'end' [Christ] is the way. For Judaism, which had Torah without the Messiah, Christianity substitutes the Messiah without Torah." But this premature messianism, she asserts, is merely triumphalist; it prates of victories not won, and which are, in fact, unwinnable unless such anomistic theology is overcome. Christianity must Judaize or die. It "can lose its anti-Judaism only when it is able to hear and internalize the message from Judaism which heretofore it has repressed and projected back as the sin of Judaism in 'rejecting Christ.'"

The key is a new Christology. "Is it possible to say 'Jesus is the Messiah' without implicitly or explicitly saying at the same time 'and the Jews be damned'?" Her answer is a qualified No. Christianity will have to surrender its claim to finality. It will have to become a kind of incident in the working out of a (Jewish?) story; it will have to look forward to a Messiah who has not yet come.

For a Jew such a prospect seems unlikely and fearsome. If the Christian must change his spots before we Jews are safe from the leopard, we are in graver danger than even Franklin Littell thinks. Rosemary Ruether has made a strong, convincing case against Christianity. But I hope, with Littell, that it is only Christians we have to fear.

## Politics and Crime by Hans Magnus Enzensberger

(Seabury; 215 pp.; \$8.95)

### Charles W. Kegley

Enzensberger has produced a very unusual book. It will at once inform and irritate; it will stimulate with its originality and literary brilliance and at the same time anger with its sweeping generalizations and cynicism.

Part of the explanation of the odd character of *Politics and Crime* is to be found in the author's own personality and philosophy. He is a sterling representative of that unusual breed—well known on the European Continent but almost nonexistent in America—the

poet-social-critic. His book, *Gedichte*, appeared in Frankfurt in 1962. The power of his writing, whether in prose or poetry, makes the sociopolitical criticism of American folk singers sound like mere chatterings of the teeth. English readers were jolted by the strength of this poet-essayist when they read *The Havana Enquiry* and *The Consciousness Industry*. Now, in six essays written between 1964 and 1975, we have a still more provocative encounter with the high quality of his

social and political philosophy. Although he is a bit too heady for most undergraduates, we dare not ignore this work. This book probably establishes Enzensberger, at age forty-six, as the most brilliant Continental leftist now writing.

A splendid example is his lead essay (1964), "Towards a Theory of Treason." Operating with the Freudian view of paranoia, Enzensberger analyzes the allegedly arbitrary notion of "national security." He writes: "...what is primarily secret is what is a secret and what isn't; that is perhaps the actual state secret." From Roman law on one encounters the view that treason, which arose as sacrilege, advances the "ruler taboo," the primary aim of which is to make the ruler secure. But the psychological mechanism at work—projection—allows the mod-