

UNFINISHED *TESHUVAH*:
A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY INTO THE SACRED MARGINS OF IDENTITY
TO HEAL CHRISTIAN ANTI-JUDAISM AND ANTISEMITISM

A thesis by
David A. Sylvester
presented to
The Faculty of the
Graduate Theological Union
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
Berkeley, California

October 2012 (with corrections, June 2017)

Committee Signatures

Deena Aranoff, Coordinator Date

Thomas Cattoi, Member Date

Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Member Date

Table of Contents

Prologue	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Holocaust and Christian Anti-Judaism	11
A. The Tradition of Christian Anti-Jewish Teaching.....	12
B. Jules Isaac's Prophetic Challenge To Christians	17
Chapter Two: The Response Of Christian Post-Holocaust Theology	25
A. The First Wave: Prophetic Theology	29
B. The Second Wave: Reformulation Of Christian Doctrine	34
C. The Third Wave: "Postliberal" Theology.....	39
Chapter Three: Signs of an Impasse to Progress	43
A. The Challenge of a New Historical Crisis.....	45
B. Pope Benedict XVI's Re-Assertion Of Christian Particularity	52
Chapter Four: The Spiritual Problem and <i>Teshuvah</i>	68
Chapter Five: The Path To A New Relationship	76
A. Two Theories about Difference, Unity and Identity	77
B. Transcending Religious Differences: Lessons from Buddhist Meditation.....	84
Chapter Six: Two Proposals For <i>Teshuvah</i> in Liturgy and <i>Yeshiva</i> Education	94
A. A Personal Reflection: A Roman Catholic Encounters Judaism	100
Conclusion	114
Bibliography	117

Acknowledgements

Much of this thesis did not come from books but from my relationships and conversations with more people than I can name. With some, I discussed the project directly; with many others, I learned the most through their presence and religious involvement. Among these friends and conversation partners are: Dave Belden, Sukwah Bernstein, Ben Bernstein, Chava Boyarin, Marcia Diaz, Shirley Jowell, Sheila Kogan, Tricia Gibbs, Irene (Baer) MacPhail, David MacPhail, Neil Penn, Alana Price, Judy Rosenfeld, Alan Shore, Renna Ulvang, Gregg Zachary, Beringia Zen, and Marina Zilbergertz. I also owe a special thanks to:

- Rabbi Michael Lerner and the Beyt Tikkun community. for their openness to a Roman Catholic to join in the Shabbat and High Holiday services and Torah study,
- Naomi Seidman, director of the Center for Jewish Studies, and the Bernard Osher and Koret Foundations, for their support that made this inquiry possible and,
- Professors Deena Aranoff, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski and Thomas Cattoi as the readers of this thesis, whose suggestions were invaluable.

Most of all, I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Deena Aranoff as my thesis advisor. This project would not be completed without her wonderful encouragement and counsel. Her classroom method of the “close reading” of Jewish texts has become my primary way of teaching the classical texts. And her suggestion that I start by studying modern Hebrew, not biblical Hebrew, has made all the difference.

I cannot claim to have faithfully listened to their wise advice. As the author, I’m solely responsible for the shortcomings of this thesis.

Prologue

How could you gaze with glee
On your brother that day,
On his day of calamity!
How could you gloat
Over the people of Judah
On that day of ruin!
How could you loudly jeer
On a day of anguish!

How could you enter the gate of My people
On its day of disaster,
Gaze in glee with the others
On its misfortune
On its day of disaster,
And lay hands on its wealth
On its day of disaster!

How could you stand at the passes
To cut down its fugitives!
How could you betray those who fled
On that day of anguish!

As you did, so shall it be done to you;
Your conduct shall be requited.
Yea, against all nations
The day of the LORD is at

וְאַל-תִּרְא בְיוֹם-אֲחִיךָ בְּיוֹם נִכְרְוֹ וְאַל-תִּשְׂמַח לְבִנְי־יְהוּדָה בְּיוֹם
אֲבָדָם וְאַל-תִּגְדֹּל פִּיךָ בְּיוֹם צָרָה:

אֲל־תָּבוֹא בְּשַׁעַר-עַמִּי בְּיוֹם אִיָּתָם אֲל־תִּרְא גַם-אַתָּה בְּרַעְתּוֹ בְּיוֹם
אִיָּתוֹ וְאַל-תִּשְׁלַחנָה. בְּחִילֹו בְּיוֹם אִיָּתוֹ:

וְאַל-תַּעֲמֹד עַל-הַפֶּרֶק לְהַכְרִית אֶת-פְּלִיטָיו וְאַל-תִּסְגֹּר שְׁרִיזָיו בְּיוֹם
צָרָה: כִּי-קָרוֹב יוֹם-יְהוָה עַל-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ
גְּמֻלָּה יָשׁוּב בְּרֹאשֶׁךָ:

(Obadiah, 1:12-15)

Introduction

In this inquiry, I will examine one of the most painful and persistent challenges confronting the worldwide Christian community: the need to heal the damage to Christian identity and legitimacy after the Christian failure to defend their Jewish neighbors during the Nazi extermination program during the Holocaust. The destruction of one third of the worldwide Jewish community was a catastrophe for Jews and Judaism, but it also left Christians confronted with what one theologian called an “agonizing crisis of conscience” and questions about “the intrinsic worth of the Christian faith itself.”¹ What kind of people would see the destruction and death of their neighbors as fulfilling a curse from God and fail to speak out in protest?² What kind of religion would preach “love the neighbor as yourself” and define the neighbor as those from other cultures, such as the ancient Samaritans, yet submit to Nazi racism and domination?³ As soon as the war ended, a number of prophetic voices challenged the Christian community to

¹ Alan T. Davies, “Response to Irving Greenberg,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner, (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974), 57.

² Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust,” in Fleischner, *idem*, 12-13, 46.

³ **Luke 10:25-37** ²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, ³⁴ and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

recognize its responsibility for creating a culture⁴ that made the Nazi Holocaust⁵ possible. One of the most passionate was the voice of French historian Jules Isaac who accused the Church of a “teaching of contempt” for Judaism and Jews.⁶ For the past 60 years, the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have responded to his call in a range of pastoral statements repudiating anti-Judaism and antisemitism⁷ and seeking a mutual, respectful dialogue with the worldwide Jewish community. The task of examining Christian doctrine and tradition has fallen to theologians who have worked to identify and reject the historically anti-Jewish Christian teachings and polemics

⁴ Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke,” 12-13. He notes that the strength of Christian fundamentalism in the areas occupied by the Nazis was “a critical variable” in the survival of Jewish population. The stronger the fundamentalism, the fewer Jews survived. Antisemitism “played a role in the decision not to shield Jews – or to actually turn them in.” This led him to conclude that “something in Christianity teaching supported or created a positive context for antisemitism and even murder. See discussion on Christian influence leading to in Holocaust on pages 14-15.

⁵ In this thesis, the English term *holocaust* has no theological meaning beyond naming the Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish communities in Europe. The term *holocaust* in English may originally have been chosen for its relationship to the Greek word *holocaust*, a burnt offering to God in early Israelite time, but through modern usage, it has lost this biblical connotation. By contrast, the Hebrew word *shoah* may be more exact within the Hebrew-speaking communities, whether Jews or Hebrew-literate Christians, but is so unfamiliar in ordinary English parlance that it lacks the emotional impact of the catastrophe in the way that the English word *holocaust* has. In addition, I will use the English term Holocaust to refer to the Nazi efforts to destroy the Jewish populations, even though another 5 million people were murdered, including Poles and Polish army officers, prisoners of war, Christian clergy, gypsies and homosexuals. The Holocaust was a unique event based on a highly articulated and specific system of thought that claimed that Jews had no right to life, even after baptism or intermarriage. As such, the Nazi efforts were not another one of the historical genocides to occur in history or outbreaks of mass murder against its opponents. Its unique anti-Jewish character is preserved by using the word Holocaust.

⁶ Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: The Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

⁷ In this thesis, “anti-Judaism” refers to hostile and condemning ideas that are used to invalidate Judaism as a religion, and “antisemitism” as a hatred of the ethnic Jewish people, whether this hatred is expressed in theological terms or not. The term “anti-Jewish” encompasses both, the theological repudiation of Judaism and the ethnic denigration of the Jewish people. It must be made clear that Christian identity can affirm itself yet still disagree with Judaism, but when this disagreement spills over into an attack on Judaism, it becomes destructive anti-Judaism. In some cases, one system of belief by its nature must destroy an opposing system. For example, during the civil rights movement in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the belief in racial “integration” as an expression of equality of human rights was a necessary rejection and destruction of the belief in segregation, in spite of the theological, social and legal defense of segregation. The two could not coexist. This thesis takes the perspective that such a mutually antagonistic relationship is not intrinsic to Christianity and Judaism. Both emerge from a relationship to one God. Also, note: the spelling “antisemitism” is preferred over “anti-Semitism,” except when in direct quotes from another text or in titles. “Anti-Semitism” incorrectly implies the existence of “Semitism.” See: *Memo on Spelling of Antisemitism*, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 2015.

and re-interpret traditional dogmas from a perspective of respect.⁸ However, recently, this effort seems bogged down in internecine academic controversies and has become disconnected from changing world events, such as the conflict in the Middle East between the State of Israel and the Palestinians. Most importantly, the post-Holocaust re-interpretation of traditional Christian doctrines has faced resistance from core Christian beliefs, raising the question: Can the effort to purge all rejection of Judaism from Christian doctrines go too far and sacrifice Christian identity? If so, this would present a serious challenge to greater progress in Christian post-Holocaust theology.

⁸ The Christian and Jewish analysis of anti-Judaism and antisemitism is enormous, and the following is only a selection of some works. A fuller listing is contained in the bibliography. Among the noted Catholic theologians writing in the 1960s were Gregory Baum who published *The Jews and the Gospel* (1961), republished as *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?* (1965), followed by Edward Flannery's *The Anguish of the Jews* (1964). In the 1970s, post-Holocaust writing included the controversial critique from Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (1974), a rebuttal from John M. Oesterreicher, *Anatomy of Contempt: A Critique of R.R. Ruether's Faith and Fratricide* (1975) and John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (1982). More recent authors include Mary C. Boys, such as *Has God Only One Blessing?* (2000) and *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation* (2005).

Among Protestant theologians, Paul M. Van Buren began with *Discerning the Way* (1980) that became Part I of his three-volume *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (1983). Also in the 1980s, Clark M. Williamson wrote *Has God Rejected His People? Anti-Judaism in the Christian Church* (1982), followed by an extensive re-statement of Christian theology, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Christian Theology* (1993). Later, R. Kenneth Soulen continued theological reinterpretation with *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (1996).

Among Jewish rabbis and academic specialists are David Flusser with *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (1988), Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser with *Judaism and the Christian Predicament*, articles by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, including "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust" in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. Eva Fleischner (1977), 7-55, Richard L. Rubenstein with *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (1966) and *After Auschwitz: history, theology and contemporary Judaism* (1992), Amy-Jill Levine's study of the Jewish Jesus in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (2006), and David Novak with *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (1989) and *Talking with Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian* (2005).

Among academics, there is a vast literature, including Alan Davies' *Antisemitism and the Christian Mind* (1969), followed by an edited collection of articles in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (1979), and John G. Gager's *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (1983).

In this thesis, I will argue that the symptoms of an impasse in post-Holocaust Christian theology are a reflection of the overly conceptual approach to the problem. With every passing decade, the theological approach to Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism has become more and more misinterpreted as a problem of incorrect concepts. The assumption is that with enough thought and discussion, the problem of anti-Jewish beliefs and attitudes can be solved through intellectual reformulations of Christian doctrines.

Instead, I will propose that while, clearly, this re-thinking process is an important step, it is only a part of a larger, more important process, the process of transforming a spirit of contempt for Judaism within Christianity into a spirit of respect. As Jules Isaac noted, the real problem is not primarily intellectual, or doctrinal, but spiritual. I will suggest that the anti-Judaic doctrines in Christianity do not emanate primarily from incorrect concepts but from the spirit in which those concepts are interpreted, just as a defective lens distorts everything seen through it. For Christianity, the lens through which it views Judaism has been distorted historically by a spirit of hatred and its more subtle manifestations of arrogance and self-sufficient superiority, what Jules Isaac so correctly named as contempt. Essential Christian doctrines and Jewish beliefs may be mutually exclusive, but it is the spiritual lens of contempt and superiority that has created their mutual antagonism historically. Not only has this anti-Judaism blinded Christians to a proper understanding of Judaism as a religion and led to a racialized, ethnic antisemitism toward the Jewish community as a people, but it has also damaged Christianity. Until recently, the Christian antipathy toward Judaism has deflected the Church from turning a prophetic critique on itself, obscured the Jewish origins of Christianity and devalued the embodiment of the early Christian community in its historical reality. Franz Rosenzweig critiqued what he saw as a Christian tendency to exaggerate the spiritual at the expense of the carnal as “a deification of the

Spirit” or “a spiritualization of God.”⁹ Just as important, Christian complacency and arrogance has prevented Christians from facing their profound failure to obey the call of Jesus to love God and neighbor, even unto death, when it has counted the most.

If this spirit is healed and the lens repaired, a Christianity free of hateful anti-Judaism and antisemitism will understand both Judaism and Christianity more deeply. Such a repair – *tikkun olam* in Hebrew -- requires spiritual healing through *teshuvah*, the Hebrew word for repentance and a return to God. *Teshuvah* has the power to turn the very real differences in Christian and Jewish belief from intellectual swords into plowshares, from weapons into tools for deeper understanding and new energy. As the Roman Catholic Church has recognized, much has been done but the necessary *teshuvah* must be “confirmed and deepened.”¹⁰ Finishing the process of *teshuvah* will allow Christians to hear the one God speak in two voices.

To support these conclusions, this thesis is divided roughly into two parts, the problem and the solution. First, I will first examine and specify the problem of what is meant by Christian anti-Judaism. This will focus on four basic elements: 1) the “rejection” of Jesus by the Jewish people, 2) the accusation of “deicide,” or the alleged Jewish responsibility for Jesus’ death, 3) the claim that the Jewish Diaspora was a punishment from God for the Jewish rejection of Jesus and 4) “supersessionism,” a broad contention that the early Christian church became a new universal Israel that had superseded and replaced the unfaithful old Israel since the new Covenant had “replaced” the old Covenant between God and the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai.

⁹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli, (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), Part III, Book III, page 422.

¹⁰ International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*, pref. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, December, 1999. Section 5.4.
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html. (Accessed Sept. 23, 2012.)

Then I will analyze some of the extensive literature in post-Holocaust theology that has tried to ameliorate or reinterpret these anti-Judaic doctrines, and I will show that these efforts have recently stalled. I will argue that there are three signs of this problem. First, the academic debate among post-Holocaust Christian theologians has become increasingly internal as it has become balkanized into fields and sub-fields under such names as liberal, post-liberal, post-postmodern, Radical Orthodoxy, and others. Once a response to the historical event of the Holocaust, the scholarly discussion has now reified the responses and begun to debate them for themselves, casting the original catastrophe into the shadows. Concepts are no longer interpretations of events, but are treated as events themselves, with less and less progress in the original goal, purging anti-Jewish ideas from Christianity.

The second sign of an emerging impasse is that too much of the academic theological discussion is failing to recognize to a new historical reality and respond to the dangerous conflict in the Middle East, including Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, terrorist threats against Israel and the confrontation between Israel and Iran over its nuclear program. A small but influential group of politically progressive critics, often Jewish, accuse Christian post-Holocaust theologians of having gone too far in diluting the Christian prophetic and universalist message. In their view, Christians are more worried about being called anti-Semitic than about confronting a new peril to the Jewish people, a religious legitimization of the Middle East crisis, its contribution to Jewish and Muslim extremism and the State of Israel's destructive responses. Although it is premature to draw final conclusions from this fierce political controversy, a schism within both the Christian and Jewish communities does appear to be worsening over these policies. A constructive theological engagement is urgently need to avoid the danger that theology stays focused more on interpreting the past than a prophetically illuminating the

present. After all, it is a historic tragedy that what became post-Holocaust Christian theology was not done when it was needed, pre-Holocaust.

The third sign of an impasse becomes apparent from an examination of the declining impact of post-Holocaust theology on institutionalized Christianity. After considerable efforts to change Christian self-understanding, key Christian doctrines seem to be re-asserting themselves. For this, I will turn to the ideas of Pope Benedict XVI in his most recent reflection on the life of Jesus in the first two volumes of his *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007 and 2011). I will argue that the pope's ideas serve as a bellwether for how far the post-Holocaust interpretations have been accepted in mainstream Christianity. Certainly, his views are historically conditioned and subject to various interpretations, but nevertheless, they constitute an important statement of mainstream Christianity. An analysis of the books, particularly the second volume interpreting Jesus' trial and crucifixion during Holy Week, will show that the pope is clearly influenced by reconciliatory post-Holocaust interpretations of historically anti-Jewish passages, but that he also doesn't budge from a basic Christian stance. He holds to the idea that Christianity "fulfills" Judaism, clearly implying that Judaism remains "unfulfilled." While not strictly supersessionist because he does not claim Christianity has replaced Judaism, this position does not honor Judaism as an independent and valid religious tradition. It still asserts Christian superiority.

Faced with these signs of a theological impasse, I will propose a solution in the second half of this thesis. By examining several inter-religious theories and experiences, I will suggest that the differences between Christianity and Judaism should be embraced, even honored as sacred gifts of God. If the infinite spirit of the Divine acts as a unifying force in creating a relationship of mutual respect and friendship, these differences do not need to become divisive, as they have in the past. Balanced by what Martin Buber called the "I-Thou" relationship,

Christians and Jews can discuss the differences that lie at the margins of their religious identities in a way that may provide renewing insight and energy for both. This proposal is based on a discussion of post-colonial theory, Buber's mystical philosophy, the experience of Buddhist meditation among American Christians and Jews and my personal encounter with Judaism as a Roman Catholic.

To conclude this inquiry, I will make two suggestions for how Christians can experience the divine "I-Thou" in Judaism: participation in Jewish liturgical services and the spiritually based study of Jewish texts in the manner of the traditional Jewish *yeshiva* with a discussion partner, or *chevruta*. This model of relationship might be what Pope John XXIII had in mind when he met with some Protestant monks from the ecumenical Taizé community in France who were visiting in 1962 during the time of the Second Vatican Council. The pope asked them what kept Catholics and Protestants apart. "We have different ideas," said their leader. "Ideas, ideas!" the pope replied. "What are ideas among friends?"¹¹

Because the problem of anti-Judaism is spiritual, this cannot be a purely abstract inquiry. Christian anti-Judaism is not an object of intellectual curiosity, a puzzle to solve like a mathematical problem or a scientific mystery. To paraphrase a rabbinic interpretation, the ideas in this thesis are written in the black letters of the words, but it is only possible to read them against a white background.¹² In this case, the white background is anguish. I feel great anguish in examining the wound of anti-Judaism in Christianity, a religion founded on a self-giving love of others, a religion that has inspired the cathedrals of Europe, the symphonies of Mozart, the

¹¹ Robert Blair Kaiser, "A Look Back on Vatican II Almost 60 Years Later," American Catholic Council, <http://americancatholiccouncil.org/resources/notes-toward-an-essay-on/> (Accessed on September 9, 2012.)

¹² Ramban (Nachmanides), *Commentary on the Torah, vol. 1, Genesis* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Judaica Press, 2005), 8

frescoes and sculptures of Michelangelo. Yet I feel an even greater anguish from the victims of anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Figuratively speaking, in the background, long lines of invisible refugees stretching back across the centuries of Christian Europe still wait in silence for recognition and healing, untold numbers of people who were tortured and murdered during persecutions and pogroms, Jews who spoke a dozen languages, from the humble tradesman to the wealthy financier who believed himself insulated from persecution until it was too late. A similar awareness led Rabbi A. James Rudin, interreligious advisor for the American Jewish Committee, to remember his ancestors when he was invited to speak at a Good Friday service in 1995. He felt a presence that he knew his Christian listeners did not share. In his remarks, Rudin recognized that Good Friday was a symbol for Christians of “a mystical bridge between earth and heaven, between life and death, between past and future.” But for Jews, Good Friday evokes what he called “poignant painful personal stories.”

As a child, my grandparents told me how Christians in their native villages would each year rush from their churches at the conclusion of Good Friday services in countless towns, cities and villages in Europe ... rushing as an angry mob intent to do harm, to rape and to murder their Jewish neighbors. Somehow Good Friday provided an annual religious mandate for open hunting season on Jews.

‘Christ killers!’ they called out. ‘Yids! Kikes! You have killed our Lord and you must die!’ these mobs would shout in a variety of languages, but whatever language the murderous Good Friday mobs used, their intent was always lethal.”

The anguish of these memories led him to remind the church-goers of the victims of Good Fridays in the past. “I acutely feel the presence of my spiritual and physical ancestors at this moment. Their faces are pressed against the windows of this church. Their voices of earnest prayer resonate within me. Their songs of longing for God echo in my head. I am comforted by

this link with those Jews who have lived before me. They are with me today, as I am with them.¹³

Anguish must remain the ground of the post-Holocaust theological enterprise. In recalling the cries of 1.5 million Jewish babies, burned alive by the Nazis to save the cost of killing them with poison gas, Rabbi Irving Greenberg asserted his often quoted working principle of theology: “No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.”¹⁴

¹³ A. James Rudin, “A Rabbi Speaks at Good Friday Services,” in *Journal for Preachers*, Lent 1995.

¹⁴ Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” 23. See discussion in Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 13.

Chapter One

The Holocaust and the Tragedy of Christian Anti-Judaism

In 2009, Avraham Burg, a former member and speaker of the Israeli Knesset, began to write a book reflecting on the impact of the Holocaust, called the *Shoah* in Hebrew, on modern Israelis. At first, he titled the book *Hitler Won*, because he was convinced that Israel would never heal from the wounds and scars of the destruction of six million European Jews. “To many, the *Shoah* was and will forever be an incurable wound. To others, the *Shoah* is the nucleus of their identity. To everyone, the *Shoah* is a present, tangible experience wherever we go.”¹⁵ However, as he wrote, optimism returned to him. He began to feel the challenge that Israel must stop being frozen in time and start living. He changed the title to *Defeat Hitler*. Finally, as he finished the book, he changed it once again to *The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from its Ashes*. He recognized that it isn’t so much a title as a message.¹⁶

For someone born in Germany to a father who survived the Holocaust and a mother who escaped a massacre in Hebron in 1929, Burg feels the presence of the Holocaust every day. He describes it as an unbearable heaviness in his life, a buzz in his ear.¹⁷ Yet, he has come to believe that this haunting memory is extracting its price from Israelis who won’t or can’t let go; it has cost them their personal independence. “As time passes, the deeper we are stuck in our Auschwitz past, the more difficult it becomes to be free of it. We retreat from

¹⁵ Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from its Ashes*, trans. Israel Amrani (New York: Palmgrave Macmillan, 2008), 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.