

TOWSON UNIVERSITY  
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

NORTH AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO THE  
HOLOCAUST

by

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A thesis

Presented to the faculty of

Towson University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Department of Jewish Studies

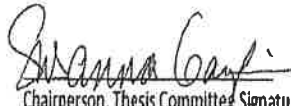
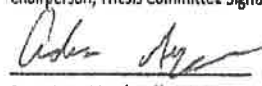


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December 2015

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Evangelical Christian Responses to the Holocaust

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my subject specialist, Dr. Adam Gregerman, for his considerable help in support of this project: For his encouragement to pursue my field of study; extensive knowledge in Jewish, Christian, and post-Holocaust theologies; and prompt attention, including re-reading the thesis during his vacation and while out of the country. His direction and valuable advice helped me during both the formation and writing of the paper.

My warm thanks also goes to my thesis chairperson and student adviser Dr. Susanna Garfein, who has supported me from the first day I walked into her office at Baltimore Hebrew University, and who knows better than anyone how great the debt of gratitude I owe.

I would also like to thank the rest of my thesis committee, Dr. Valerie Thaler and Dr. Uta Larkey, for their insightful observations and editing suggestions. Dr. Thaler's expertise and kindness guided me in the formative stages of this thesis, and Dr. Larkey's Holocaust course at Goucher provides a model for any student of the Holocaust and greatly increased my knowledge of the German churches during the Nazi regime.

I am grateful to Kurt Pfund for reading an extremely rough first draft of my paper and making multiple helpful suggestions.

I would lastly like to thank my two daughters for their cheerful enthusiasm, and my husband for his enormous patience in providing critical computer technical support and also for never once complaining that I purchased every single one of the hundreds of books I read for this project.

## Abstract

### North American Evangelical Christian Responses to the Holocaust

Angela Winter Ney

This project examines some of the ways the evangelical Christian community views the Holocaust by comparing the positions of four seminal mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians to those of five evangelical theologians, observing theological differences which affect the two groups' positions. The project compares evangelical and mainline Protestant responses to charges of Christian theological and actual complicity in the Holocaust. It further compares responses of the two groups, primarily in the United States, to requests by post-Holocaust theologians for specific theological or doctrinal changes from contemporary Christianity. Critical differences emerge between the mainline Protestant and evangelical responses. Significant differences also emerge within the evangelical responses examined. Commonalities which affect the evangelical response to the Holocaust include evangelicalism's Holocaust rescuer hagiography and its view of the Bible as an authoritative, objective revelation from God. An essential question remains the limitation of theological boundaries for orthodox Protestants in the re-examination of faith.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER II	
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
CHAPTER III	
RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS OF EVANGELICALISM.....	16
CHAPTER IV	
NON-EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSES .....	28
CHAPTER V	
FIVE EVANGELICAL RESPONSES TO HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY .....	50
CHAPTER VI	
DISCUSSION .....	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	130

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust confronted Christian leaders with grave ethical and theological questions and raised the spectre of Christian complicity in a crime of unfathomable proportions. Historically, how did the Christian churches in Europe respond to the persecution and genocide of the Jews? Is the New Testament itself antisemitic? Should the legacy of the Holocaust affect ongoing Christian teaching? Many segments of the Church have devoted serious attention to addressing these and similar questions, finally acknowledging problems of antisemitism and thereby contributing to an improvement in Jewish-Christian relations. Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics have led these efforts.<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Christians in North America (here defined as the United States and Canada) have lagged behind, in part due to historic tensions between evangelicals and both mainline Protestants and Catholics which have made evangelicals leery of ecumenical endeavors.<sup>2</sup> Such tensions have also made mainline Protestants in the United States particularly wary of accepting evangelicals at the interfaith discussion table. As this study will suggest, certain theologically foundational aspects of evangelicalism have also contributed to the disinterest evangelicals have generally shown in considering points

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<sup>1</sup> Mainline churches refers to a group of Protestant churches in the United States that contrast in theology with evangelical, fundamentalist and charismatic Protestant groups. In the United States, mainline churches include the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ and the Reformed Church in America. Theologically and often politically, mainline Protestants are more liberal than non-mainline Protestants. Used as a theological term, liberalism refers to a series of attempts to accommodate traditional Christian doctrinal belief to various aspects of modern knowledge (history, literary criticism, the natural sciences or the human sciences). Evangelicals perceive some mainline churches as having moved away from their original evangelical characteristics. See *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1993), 321, 492-493, 526-530.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Poling, "Changing Jewish Perceptions of Evangelicals Through Interfaith Text Study" (D Min. diss., Biblical Theological Seminary, 2012).

raised by Holocaust historians and post-Holocaust theologians. With certain notable exceptions, most of the issues raised by Holocaust theologians have received relatively little sustained attention from North American evangelical academic circles.<sup>3</sup>

This study will examine how some North American evangelical scholars understand the relationship of Christian faith and the Holocaust, and observe some of the ways in which these evangelicals have responded to post-Holocaust theological challenges. All scholars whose works were analyzed for this paper have researched and published in English-speaking countries. Because of the well-documented diversity of evangelical Christianity, the evangelical community's views affecting these questions are neither united nor uniform, and no one person or organization speaks for all evangelicals. Some important themes and commonalities may be observed, however.

Before engaging with evangelical Holocaust responses, one must first define this large grouping of Protestant Christians. Modern use of the term evangelical originated with eighteenth century revivalism in Europe, whose emphases included born-again, or new-birth experiences and intense spiritual piety. Although driven by particular beliefs, these revival movements were not churches or denominations.

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<sup>3</sup> An exception on the popular level would be Zionist organizations such as the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and Bridges for Peace, both organized in the 1970s. The stated goal of these organizations is to promote understanding between Jews and Christians and build broad support for the State of Israel; both work to counteract antisemitism worldwide. A Bridges for Peace book intended for church Bible study groups includes a detailed chapter acknowledging that “without Christian anti-Semitism, the Holocaust would have been inconceivable.” The author emphasizes that “the Holocaust did not happen in a vacuum” but was the tragic culmination of anti-Jewish attitudes and practices that had been left unchecked in and near the church for 2,000 years. Rebecca J. Brimmer, ed. *Israel and the Church* (USA: Bridges for Peace International, 2006), 200-206. It should be noted that these organizations, known for their extensive philanthropic work in Israel, have generated criticism in the Jewish community over fears they support Christian missionary activities; IFCJ and Bridges for Peace state that they do not attempt to missionize Jews. See Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013) 192.

Scholars of religion generally consider evangelicalism difficult to define but most begin with four theological points, which historian of American Christianity Mark Noll summarizes as : (1) the need for conversion (“a definite turning away from self and sin in order to find God in Jesus Christ”); (2) an emphasis on the Christian Scriptures as the ultimate authority for all matters of faith and religious practice; (3) an emphasis on activism, to works of charity, social reform and spreading the message of salvation and (4) an emphasis on faith in the death of Christ on the cross and the resurrection of Christ.<sup>4</sup> While most Christians ascribe to these points in some fashion, evangelicals are marked by the degree of emphasis they place on them. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* points out that aside from these four beliefs (called the Bebbington quadrilateral), all other theological matters for evangelicals have tended to be regarded as ‘matters of indifference,’ resulting in a substantial degree of pluralism within the movement.<sup>5</sup>

Due to this theological diversity within modern evangelicalism, theologians and scholars of Christianity struggle to accurately generalize about it. The movement’s numerical strength—an estimated 60 to 100 million evangelicals in the United States alone as of 2010, depending on who is counting and how they are defining

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Noll, “What Is ‘Evangelical?’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21. Noll here references British historian David Bebbington’s fourfold definition, or quadrilateral. See D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

<sup>5</sup> *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 183.



evangelicalism—also complicates attempts to generalize.<sup>6</sup> Several broad observations may be helpful. Evangelicalism is transdenominational, meaning it is not confined to one denomination and is not a denomination itself, although certain Protestant denominations (notably in Brazil, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Indonesia) tend towards evangelicalism.<sup>7</sup> Evangelicalism also may be defined in terms of self-identification, although relatively small numbers of people self-consciously use the evangelical label.<sup>8</sup> As noted, one may define the movement in terms of its theology; thus one may speak of Anglican evangelicals, Methodist evangelicals, Catholic evangelicals.<sup>9</sup> It is also predominantly an English language movement, reflecting its initial development within Britain and the United States.<sup>10</sup> It is a global movement, both international and multicultural, encompassing many kinds of Christians around the world.<sup>11</sup>

Fundamentalist Christians comprise a subcategory overlapping with evangelicalism, or a smaller subset within evangelicalism. While both evangelicals and fundamentalists profess trust in the Christian Scriptures above all other authorities, self-described fundamentalists tend to read the Bible more literalistically than evangelicals do.

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<sup>6</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, “Demographics of Global Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*, ed. Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, Mark Hutchinson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 34-47.

<sup>7</sup> Zurlo, *Evangelicals Around the World*, 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>9</sup> A survey of the North American population from the mid-1990s found that many people who embraced Bebbington’s four markers were in the Catholic church; 13 percent of the Americans and 25 percent of the Canadians who called themselves “evangelical” were Catholics. See David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:13-14.

<sup>10</sup> *Blackwell*, 187.

<sup>11</sup> As of 2010, eight of the ten countries with the largest evangelical populations were in the global South; Africa has the highest percentage of evangelicals of any continent (115 million). Zurlo, 42.

Evangelicals tend to pay more attention to genre and literary and historical content.<sup>12</sup>

(For example, more fundamentalists would understand Genesis 1 and 2 to include scientific statements about human origins.) Fundamentalists tend to be more wary of the general culture than other evangelicals and also typically place great emphasis on rules and restrictions.<sup>13</sup>

It is significant to note that North American evangelicalism is a completely different theological grouping than the German Evangelical Church or *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, which is the state church comprised of 28 regional churches.<sup>14</sup> The German term *evangelisch* more accurately corresponds to the English term Protestant; the German Evangelical Church is thus similar to mainline Protestantism in North America. Within and also outside of the mainline German Evangelical Church are churches or groups whose theology (and in some cases, worship styles) reflect North American

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<sup>12</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> American evangelicals are a distinct religious grouping, although they do have strong historical links to British evangelicals such as George Whitefield, and have since spread abroad, through evangelism and migration, to now comprise religious groupings in many other countries. Unlike transnational mainline Protestant or Catholic groups, contemporary American evangelicals had no real ecclesiastical counterpart in 1930s Germany. Nonetheless, many evangelicals who concern themselves with the Holocaust identify closely with the Confessing Church. True historical comparisons are murky; the evangelical lineages of Europe and America bear further study, which falls outside the scope of this paper.

evangelicalism.<sup>15</sup> Neither the German counterpart to mainline Protestantism in the United States nor the German version of North American evangelicalism is under consideration here.

### Significance of Study

Written as an introductory study within the field of Holocaust studies, this project provides an initial comparison of some North American mainline Protestant and evangelical responses to the challenges of Holocaust theology. With the exception of a chapter in Jewish Studies professor Yaacov Ariel's seminal work *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews*, which describes the tendency of evangelical Holocaust literature to focus on Nazi-era Gentile rescuers, Holocaust studies as a discipline has paid little attention to the evangelical response. Both documentation emerging from an evangelical encounter with Holocaust theology and also scholarly evaluations of such encounters are scarce. Within the literature on the relationship of Christian faith and the Holocaust, this study offers a comparison of several prominent

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<sup>15</sup> *The Evangelische Alliance* represents a loose-knit federation of the theologically conservative Christians of Germany, including the Baptist churches, the U.S. style evangelical fellowships within the State Church, and the groups defined as charismatic churches. Because no word existed to connote American-style evangelicalism, which came into prominence in Germany through the 1960s, the *Alliance* began to use a new word (*evangelikal*) to describe their theologically conservative churches. See Mark Hutchinson, "Evangelicals in Western Europe," in *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*, ed. Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, Mark Hutchinson, 385-388. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 388.

Theologically conservative evangelicalism represents a minority of churches within German Protestantism but is a rapidly growing movement. The cover of the May 16, 2015 German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* asked "Are Evangelicals Conquering the World?" and described the first German American-style megachurch in Stuttgart, a charismatic (Pentecostal) church attracting 2,000 people a Sunday. *Der Spiegel*, accessed 9/22/2015, [http://magazin.Spiegel.de/digital/index\\_SP.html#SP/2015/21/134995232](http://magazin.Spiegel.de/digital/index_SP.html#SP/2015/21/134995232).

Charismatic churches are distinguished by their belief that modern Christians can experience the power of the Holy Spirit in ways similar to the disciples of the New Testament.

mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians and several evangelical scholars who have engaged with the Holocaust. The literature consulted comes from overlapping disciplines, including Holocaust studies, the historiography of the German Protestant churches during the Second World War, the history of Christian antisemitism, post-Holocaust Christian theology (hereafter referred to simply as Holocaust theology) and evangelical theology. I have also consulted, but do not explicitly examine in this project, primary works of Holocaust theology by Catholic and Jewish authors.

In order to explore some evangelical academic responses to the Holocaust, this study will proceed by comparing and contrasting the conclusions of four seminal mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians from the United States with five evangelical responses. Such a sampling cannot be considered definitive, and any conclusions may be suggestive but are necessarily limited.

### Methods and Materials

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and reactions of evangelical Protestants to the questions raised by mainline Protestant post-Holocaust theologians. A descriptive research methodology with case studies of individuals is being used for this study. After examining relevant characteristics of evangelicalism, I will review the overall mainline Protestant and Catholic Christian responses to the Holocaust. I will then examine the salient positions regarding Christianity and the Holocaust of four prominent Holocaust scholars and theologians who emerged from North American Protestant mainline denominations before examining the corresponding positions of five evangelical theologians, including four Americans and one Australian.

Several factors necessitate an analysis of mainline Protestant post-Holocaust views before examining the positions of evangelical scholars. The earliest Holocaust theology and some of the most significant Holocaust theology to develop emerged from the mainline Protestant traditions, establishing new positions within the Christian community. The views of these mainline Protestants would be considered mainstream within most post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian dialogue. An analysis of these mainline Protestant views establishes a baseline of comparison with the reactions of other Christian groups, in this case that of evangelical Protestants. I will highlight positions the mainline Protestant theologians hold in common, in particular their call for the Christian community to accept historical responsibility by acknowledging the role of Christian anti-Judaism in facilitating the Holocaust and by acknowledging the failure of the European churches to defend Jewish people. I will also highlight the requests by mainline Protestant theologians for the revision of traditional Christian beliefs, including the request to recognize the validity of Judaism. I will then compare and contrast the mainline primary responses to those of five evangelical theologians and historians who have addressed the Holocaust from a deliberately evangelical perspective, observing certain differences in underlying theological tenets which affect the two groups' positions.

This study foregrounds four mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians. Those selected represent seminal voices within the field of post-Holocaust theology, scholars who have written extensively about the challenges facing Christian theologians and Christian churches. The evangelical theologians and historians selected emerge from a

considerably smaller pool due to the inattention paid by the evangelical scholarly community to the questions raised by post-Holocaust mainline theologians. As a result, the evangelical scholars selected do not self-define as Holocaust theologians. Rather, they are evangelical theologians who have written at least one journal article or book about the Holocaust or they are historians engaged in Holocaust study who identify as evangelical Christians. Reflecting the broad nature of evangelicalism, the evangelical scholars selected vary considerably in their approach to the questions which emerge from mainline, mainstream Protestant Holocaust theology. However, this study will also observe commonalities in the evangelical responses.

While questions of New Testament antisemitism, supersessionism, two covenant theology and the theological relationship between the church and Israel will emerge in this project, any concentrated discussion of the ongoing evangelical scholarly conversations on these complex questions lies beyond the scope of this paper.

## CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Marvin Wilson, professor of Biblical Studies at Gordon College, successfully engaged in dialogue with the Jewish community in the 1970s, evangelicals have slowly entered into interfaith discussion with Jewish scholars and theologians. Although the Holocaust has not featured prominently in evangelical-Jewish dialogue, biographies, memoirs and children's books about the Holocaust have become popular in evangelical circles. A number of evangelical universities now offer Holocaust and Judaic Studies courses and invite survivors to speak at their campuses. This growing interest, however, has generated little official attention from evangelical groups. In contrast to more than 100 declarations from mainline churches, the Catholic church and European church organizations since 1945, American evangelicals have not issued any formal statements whose primary purpose is to examine Christian faith or practice in light of the Holocaust. In 1983, the evangelical Lutheran Church Missouri Synod issued a resolution addressing antisemitism – but notably, it did not mention the Holocaust.<sup>16</sup> More recently, evangelical groups including the Southern Baptist Convention, the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) have all issued statements affirming

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<sup>16</sup> [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org), accessed January 12, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Ariel, who has written the definitive work on the history of Jewish evangelism in America, defines Jewish evangelism as Christian attempts to missionize or convert Jews to belief in Jesus as Messiah. Conflicts arise from the Jewish perspective when Christian evangelists deny continuing meaning and validity to Judaism and when Jewish converts to Christianity affirm their religious adherence to Judaism. Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

their commitment to Jewish evangelism.<sup>17</sup> Of these, the PCA and WEA statements very briefly mention the Holocaust and denounce antisemitism.<sup>18</sup>

To gauge evangelical interest in the Holocaust, I examined articles and book reviews in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* published from 1969 to 2013. In that 42-year period, only two articles and seven book reviews from the *JETS* relate directly to the Holocaust. Additional *JETS* essays discuss the question of perceived antisemitism in the gospels and the Christian understanding of Israel. Excluding work done by the Messianic Jewish community,<sup>19</sup> evangelical scholarly works that specifically address the challenges posed by Holocaust theologians include fewer than ten books and a handful of articles in other journals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net); [www.worldevangelicals.org](http://www.worldevangelicals.org); accessed June 24, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> The group related to evangelical Christianity which has produced the most scholars directly engaging post-Holocaust Christian theology is the Messianic Jewish community, self-defined believers in Jesus who view themselves as fully Christian and also fully Jewish. (Messianic Judaism remains a highly contentious issue for Jews and liberal Christians who perceive Judaism and Christianity as entirely separate faiths). Several American, European and Israeli Messianic scholars have highlighted questions of soteriology, mission and hermeneutics in relation to the Shoah. See Eliyahu Lizorkin, “Biblical Foundations for Post-Holocaust Messianic Soteriology,” (paper presented at the European Messianic Jewish Symposium, Berlin, Germany, 2013); Michael L. Brown, “Messianic Jewish Reflections on the Holocaust and Jewish Evangelism,” in *Jesus, Salvation and the Jewish People*, ed. David Parker (London: Paternoster, 2011) and Mark S. Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005). Kinzer’s view that Jewish people may receive eternal salvation without their conscious acceptance of Jesus as Messiah arguably places him outside the mainstream of American evangelicalism, but most Messianic Jews remain traditionally evangelical in their soteriology.

<sup>20</sup> This description excludes historical works by scholars who may consider themselves evangelicals but are not identified as such in their scholarly work. This description also excludes discussions of New Testament antisemitism, replacement theology or Israel which are not formulated as responses to the questions posed by Holocaust theologians.



In contrast to the relative paucity of identifiable evangelical responses, mainline Protestant, Catholic and Jewish theologians have produced substantial scholarship examining the theological implications of the Holocaust for Christianity's relationship to the Jewish people and to Judaism. These discussions have resulted in requests for both theological and practical changes by Christians. Victoria J. Barnett and Robert P. Ericksen have called for Christians to accept historical responsibility for the Holocaust in two ways, asking Christians to (1) acknowledge the role of Christian anti-Judaism in setting the stage for the persecution of Jews in the Holocaust and (2) to acknowledge the overall failure of the European churches to publicly defend Jewish people during the Nazi regime. Since the 1960s, mainline Holocaust theologians such as Franklin Littell and Roy A. Eckardt have also demanded a revision of traditional Christian beliefs, including calls to recognize the validity of Judaism, discontinue attempts at seeking the conversion of Jews to Christianity and re-examine New Testament texts considered to contain antisemitic passages.

Relatively few studies within the conservative Protestant segment of Christianity have addressed these questions as a response to the Holocaust. Some evangelicals including David Rausch (1984) and Barry Horner (2007) have discussed the historical responsibility of the church for Christian anti-Judaism. Likewise, David Gushee (1994 and 2003) and Colin Barnes (2014) have analyzed the role of historic anti-Judaism in the Holocaust and strongly condemned the failure of the German Protestant and Catholic churches to publicly oppose Hitler's regime.

Taking a contrary position, Gene Edward Veith (1993), Richard Terrell (2011) and Joseph Keysor (2010) shift responsibility from Christian anti-Judaism to Nazi paganism, fascism (Veith and Terrell), or theological liberalism (Keysor and Terrell). Besides Nazi paganism, Keysor (2010) also attributes blame to pre-Christian anti-Semitism. Other evangelicals such as Steven T. Davis (1981) place blame for the Holocaust on 19th century literary critics of the Old Testament for separating the church from its Jewish roots.<sup>21</sup> In considering the theological implications of the Holocaust, Steven T. Davis (1981) and John T. Johnson (2001) both reject the premise that the Holocaust requires a fundamental restructuring of Christian theology. John J. Davis (2005) argues that the Holocaust should be viewed eschatologically, suggesting (in line with several Jewish philosophers) a post-mortem compensation for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Steven T. Davis, Terrell and Amy Karen Downey (2012) defend the historical evangelical stance on evangelism, or proselytism of Jewish people; other evangelicals such as Richard Mouw (2001) reaffirm the Christian call to witness to their faith but ask for greater sensitivity in doing so.

Editorials in popular evangelical publications briefly acknowledge the shortcomings of most European churches during the Nazi regime. At the same time, these editorials defend the record of Christians under Nazism by emphasizing a perceived difference between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi antisemitism, or else by emphasizing Gentile

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<sup>21</sup> Old Testament literary criticism argued that the Old Testament could not be considered divinely inspired, and therefore non-authoritative for Christians. Davis contends that the door was open to the extermination of Jews because biblical criticism convinced Christians it was no longer possible to believe in the divine authority of the Old Testament and the uniqueness of Jews as God's chosen people. Steven T. Davis, "Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology," in *Christianity and Judaism: The Deepening Dialogue*, ed. Richard W. Rousseau S.J. (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1983), 111.

rescuers (David Neff, 2009). This tendency of evangelicals to focus on rescuers has been examined briefly by Mark Stover (2005) and then at length by Yaacov Ariel (2013). In similar fashion, Steven R. Haynes, a neo-orthodox mainline Presbyterian and Religious Studies professor at Rhodes College, also has examined the hagiography within evangelicalism surrounding figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1997, 2004, 2006).

As a different response to the Holocaust, New Testament scholar Scot McNight is one of a number of evangelicals who have become profoundly aware of the Jewishness of Jesus. This is a result of a new conversation between Christian theologians and Jewish scholars who have studied Jesus in his Palestinian context (C. Montefiore, D. Flusser and others) and also a result of Christians rediscovering first-century Judaism (W.D. Davies, K. Stendahl, E.P. Sanders). With the evangelical interest in the Jewishness of Jesus has come renewed emphasis on the biblical promise of land as realized in the modern State of Israel.<sup>22</sup>

The evangelical emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus in some senses parallels – though ends in a distinctly different place from – the work of mainline Holocaust theologians such as Jurgen Moltmann and Paul van Buren, who are concerned with the Jewish identity of Jesus as an essential part of Christian faith and the significance of Israel for Christian theology. I have not focused on the evangelical “New Paul” and Israel research in this project as such emphases do not directly respond to the challenges of

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<sup>22</sup>This concept has been developed by evangelicals such as Craig A. Blaising and Gerald McDermott, among others. In “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” Blaising, professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Institute, rejects supersessionism, argues against two-covenant theology and propose a non-supersessionist (and non-dispensationalist) evangelical view of Israel. He bases this on St. Paul’s perspective of Israel’s future, itself based on Isaiah 60, where the prophet promises the land to Israel forever. Craig Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *JETS* 44/3 (September 2001) 435-50.

Holocaust theology in terms of addressing the role of anti-Judaism in the Holocaust or evaluating German Protestant behavior under Nazism.

The scholarly books and journal articles emerging from the American evangelical tradition range widely in their responses to and awareness of the questions posed by Holocaust theologians. With the exception of Ariel's analysis of evangelical focus on Holocaust rescuers, no studies of which I am aware have attempted to delineate evangelical responses to the Holocaust. This study provides the first extensive analysis of the ways in which some American evangelicals have reacted to the challenges raised by Holocaust historians and theologians. Is there an evangelical consensus on the role of Christian anti-Judaism in setting the stage for the persecution of Jews in the Holocaust? Do evangelicals generally agree with the position of most Holocaust historians that the European churches overwhelmingly failed to defend Jewish people during the Nazi regime? How has the evangelical community responded to the calls by mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians for the revision of certain traditional Christian beliefs? The scholarly books and journal articles emerging from the American evangelical tradition have addressed some of these questions but have not attempted a broader examination of evangelical responses. This project seeks to begin to address this void by comparing American evangelical responses to the positions of mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians, illuminating the underlying tenets of evangelical reactions to the Holocaust and providing context for the differing responses from the two communities.

### CHAPTER III RELEVANT CHARACTERISTICS OF EVANGELICALISM

When religious historians and sociologists attempt to identify evangelicalism, they often run amuck in the amount of qualification and nuance required to pin down this group of Christians. American evangelicals themselves constantly debate what it means to be an evangelical. As defined by *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, the term ‘evangelical’ dates to a Greek noun in the New Testament which means “glad tidings” or “gospel.”<sup>23</sup> Notre Dame historian of American Christianity Mark Noll shows the origins of the evangelical movement in Pietism, the eighteenth-century awakenings, and the Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup>

It is safe to say that about 30 to 35 percent of the American population identify as evangelicals.<sup>25</sup> What defines this large number of people? One definition is that an evangelical is an orthodox Protestant, or a non-liberal Protestant, generally meaning someone who adheres to the traditional historic creeds of the Christian church, such as the Nicene Creed and the Apostle's Creed, as well as holding a particular view of the Bible. Underneath this agreed-upon definition also lie complexities which are significant for the focus of this study.

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<sup>23</sup> *Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-28. Pietism was an influential religious reform movement emphasizing personal faith that began among German Lutherans in the 17th century. The Great Awakening was one of several revivalist movements in England and British America in the 1730s and 40s which emphasized spiritual growth.

<sup>25</sup> Larry Eskridge, “How Many Evangelicals Are There?” Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College, 2012, accessed May 8, 2015, [www.wheaton.edu](http://www.wheaton.edu).

As noted in the introduction, the British historian David Bebbington, in his seminal 1989 study *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, defined evangelicalism in terms of four distinct characteristics: biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism, and activism. Most English-speaking evangelical theologians have embraced Bebbington's "quadrilateral" as a sound definition of evangelical theology. However, Noll considers the term evangelical "slippery" is because it can be used to designate religious groups and denominations, but also can be used to transcend denominations.<sup>26</sup> For instance, theologically conservative, or orthodox Protestants within mainline denominations might also be considered evangelical in their theology (in contrast to the mainstream of a mainline denomination, which could be termed theologically liberal.)<sup>27</sup>

Historian Larry Eskridge, who defined evangelicalism for the World Evangelical Alliance's *Handbook of Evangelicalism in the 21st Century*, further nuances the definition by pointing out that the term can be used in three senses today.<sup>28</sup> The first is to view as evangelical all Christians who affirm a few key doctrines and practical emphases, such as Bebbington's four hallmarks. A second sense is to look at evangelicalism as a group of movements and religious traditions, inclusive of groups spanning Pentecostals;

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<sup>26</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Before Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Between 1940 and the turn of the century, many denominations within Protestantism began to reflect less certainty in the concept of absolute religious truth, allowing Christians to reinterpret elements of their creeds once considered absolute. Liberal mainstream Protestants moved from the position that the Bible was the literal Word of God and that belief in Jesus was the only means of securing salvation, to a general belief that all roads and perhaps all faiths lead to God.

<sup>28</sup> Larry Eskridge, "Defining the Term in Contemporary Times." Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College, 2012. <http://www.wheaton.edu>

fundamentalists; most Baptists and most African-American denominations; as well as Dutch Reformed churches; traditionalists such as Lutherans and Anglicans; nondenominational megachurches and participants in parachurch ministries involved in missions, relief work, evangelism and discipleship.

Eskridge delineates a third way of using the term, as a self-described label for a group that came into being during the Second World War as a reaction against the perceived anti-intellectual nature of the fundamentalist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. (Fundamentalist Christians, who hold to a more literal interpretation of the Bible and are more wary of the general culture than mainstream evangelicals, remain a smaller subset within the evangelical umbrella.) Organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Theological Seminary and Wheaton College would tend to claim the term in this way. Given the imprecision involved in defining evangelicalism, establishing a precise estimate of numbers is also difficult.<sup>29</sup>

However measured and however defined, evangelicals claim a significant place within American and British Christianity. Several facets of evangelicalism may have particular relevance in providing a framework to assessing evangelical responses to the Holocaust. First, the most significant aspect of evangelical theology in relation to Holocaust theology may be the group's biblicism. Evangelical Alister McGrath, professor of science and religion at the University of Oxford, has defined this as an adherence to "the supreme authority of Scripture, recognizing that the language of Scripture is

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<sup>29</sup> Between 1976 and 2005 the Gallup organization polled Americans, asking whether they would describe themselves as a "born again" or "evangelical" Christian. The numbers who did so ranged from 33 percent in 1987 to 48 percent in 2005, averaging just under 39 percent of the population. Eskridge, "How Many Evangelicals Are There?"

culturally conditioned but through it God has nevertheless conveyed the eternal, unconditioned Word. Scripture is to be interpreted with the help of reason and the best tools of scholarship, with attention to different genres.”<sup>30</sup> As *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology* explains, evangelicals tend to use the principle of *sola scriptura* (the Protestant belief that the Bible is the supreme authority in all doctrine and practice) more radically than the mainline Protestant traditions out of which it grew. When evangelicals subscribe to the doctrines of the great creeds of the church, the handbook explains, “they do so not because the creeds teach the doctrines but because they believe the doctrines have biblical support.”<sup>31</sup> Evangelical theologians say they reject liberal Protestantism’s faith in human experience as the final norm for truth; instead, evangelical theology emphasizes the “particularity of Christian revelation and the uniqueness of Christian spirituality.”<sup>32</sup>

Overall, the most important conviction of evangelical scholars is that the Bible is true, says Noll.<sup>33</sup> What does this mean? All evangelicals believe the Scriptures are inspired by God and that they constitute divine revelation, although how this is defined is a matter of considerable internal debate (unsurprising, given the breadth of the movement). Evangelicals agree that all essential spiritual truth is to be found in the Bible; Scripture both is and contains the Word of God.<sup>34</sup> Evangelicals believe that the biblical

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<sup>30</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Noll, *Before Faith and Criticism*, 143.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.



text possesses a claim upon the believing Christian and the believing community; the average American evangelical would recognize some version of what is called “biblical inerrancy” and “infallibility” as foundational to their faith. As Evangelical scholar J.I. Packer phrases it:

‘Infallible’ denotes the quality of never deceiving or misleading, and so means ‘wholly trustworthy and reliable’; ‘inerrant’ means ‘wholly true.’ Scripture is termed infallible and inerrant to express the conviction that all its teaching is the utterance of God ‘who cannot lie,’ whose word, once spoken, abides forever, and that therefore it may be trusted implicitly . . . To assert biblical inerrancy and infallibility is just to confess faith in (i) the divine origin of the Bible and (ii) the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God.<sup>35</sup>

This means that the Old and New Testaments are considered a revelation from God and objectively true, fully and uniquely authoritative for Christians. Precisely how the Bible is the word of God and ought to be interpreted remains a subject of considerable heated debate within evangelical scholarship, leading to issues such as whether the book of Genesis should be interpreted in ways that make space for the theory of evolution.<sup>36</sup> As this study progresses, it will be critical to view the reactions of evangelicals to Holocaust theology via the lens of this foundational principle of evangelicalism: The Bible is the primary source for the Christian in all matters of faith and practice and is, according to a frequently quoted New Testament verse, “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). Because it is God-breathed, within an evangelical framework, one can dissect and reinterpret the Bible but not dismiss or reject any portion of it.

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<sup>35</sup> J.I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 95-96.

<sup>36</sup> See Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn’t Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012) or J. Daryl Charles, ed., *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2013).

In addition to Biblicism, the second quality of evangelicalism that may have affected how evangelicals responded to Holocaust challenges is the unofficial, loosely organized nature of the group—there is no magisterium or central church authority like in the Catholic church or in mainline denominations since evangelicalism transcends denominations and also includes many who belong to no denomination at all. This structurally diffuse aspect of evangelicalism allows for considerable disagreement within the community on many matters (even significant ones such as how to define belief in the authority of the Bible). Because no one group can claim to speak for all evangelicals, finding consensus for official statements purporting to represent the entire community is always a difficult task. Lacking a hierarchical structure, the intelligentsia within evangelicalism also have no efficient way to influence the laity.

Evangelicalism's decentralization as well as its biblicism have undoubtedly contributed to the lag time in evangelical participation in post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian discussion. Evangelicals have traditionally been wary of dialogue with mainline theologians, in part because evangelical theology did not easily fit with all of the goals of the ecumenical movement. As mainline Protestant churches moved in the direction of a pluralism that affirms all faiths, evangelicalism has retained its insistence of acceptance of Jesus for salvation. This stance has not endeared evangelicals to either the Jewish community or to more theologically liberal mainline Christians. Mainline theologians, for their part, were not eager to include evangelicals in early interfaith discussion between Jews and Christians. The situation has changed somewhat, as some evangelicals have

become more involved in interfaith dialogue. Nevertheless, mainline Protestants and evangelicals still remain somewhat wary of one another.<sup>37</sup>

Another aspect of evangelicalism that may have affected evangelical Holocaust responses is a historically rooted philosemitism strongly linked to support of the nation of Israel. When the Holocaust is mentioned, evangelicals frequently respond by pointing out their strong belief that God's covenant with the Jewish people contains the promise that the land of Israel would be theirs forever.<sup>38</sup> Evangelicals in the nineteenth century, especially the newly emerging premillennial literalists, looked for a role for Jews to play in the end-time drama of salvation.<sup>39</sup> Yaacov Ariel, a Religious Studies professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill whose research has focused on the attitudes of evangelical Christians towards the Jewish people and the Holy Land, has pointed out the unusual situation involved in which one religious group claimed that another group had a special relationship with God and put hope in that group as essential for universal

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<sup>37</sup> A related issue is the marginalization of evangelicals within American academic culture. Evangelicals, who view themselves as distinct from the more culturally insular and sometimes less-educated fundamentalist Christians, feel somewhat misunderstood by the wider culture, including academia, as Mark Noll has observed. Noll has himself criticized the evangelical community, most markedly in his influential 1995 book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). He does acknowledge that evangelical academics have made progress both in their intellectual lives, and, within limited fields, in finding a place at the table with the country's elite, including at Ivy League universities (*Scandal*, 17). Yet the perception of being viewed as country cousins persists; in 2004, an evangelical professor at Harvard reported a colleague as saying, "You know, I think you're the first Christian I've ever met who isn't stupid" (D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 92. The slowly changing status of evangelicals in academia is reflected in some increased evangelical participation in interfaith discussion.

<sup>38</sup> McDermott, "Evangelicals and Israel," 137.

<sup>39</sup> Dispensationalist premillennialists believe that Christ will return and literally reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 years in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The prophetic material of the Old Testament dealing with national Israel has yet to be fulfilled. For this theological movement within fundamentalism, biblical references to Israel are understood as always referring to Israel, never to the Christian church or to Gentiles. See *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1993), 107.

salvation.<sup>40</sup> (This has resulted in the paradoxical nature of conservative Protestant missions to Jews: Dispensationalists in particular view the Jewish people as both “chosen” and in need of believing in Jesus and thus have been more dedicated to focusing on Jews in their missionary efforts than has any other Christian group.) Evangelical historian David Bausch argues that the evangelical movement on the whole “recognized at an early date that the Holocaust was impending and believed that six million Jews had been murdered at a time when most liberal Christians were denouncing 'Jewish atrocity propaganda.'”<sup>41</sup> Canadian evangelical historian Paul Merely suggests that in the years leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel, evangelicals were the strongest champions of the restoration of the Jews to Israel.<sup>42</sup> From the 1960s through the 1980s, most fundamentalist and evangelical Christians welcomed the state of Israel as a sign that God's covenant with the Jews was still ongoing, and many evangelical groups have worked to support Israelis and the Jewish state, often with great passion and enormous amounts of money. This support of Israel has sometimes been met with skepticism from the Jewish community, who associate it with the violent end-times scenarios held by some pre-millennialist fundamentalists. This concern, while overstated, is not without warrant. Yet not all philosemites are dispensationalist pre-millennialists. Many evangelicals insist that their support of Israel is not based on eschatology, that is, their

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<sup>40</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1985-1945* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991), 119.

<sup>41</sup> David Rausch, “Evangelical Protestant Americans,” in Moshe Davis, ed., *With Eyes Toward Zion* (New York: Arno, 1977), 323-32.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 219.

belief about the end of the world (with the exception of these premillennial dispensationalists), but on either political positions or their view of biblical covenant.<sup>43</sup>

Where theology is paramount, the predominant theological reason has nothing to do with eschatology, says George Mamo, vice president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. Rather, it “has to do with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis.”<sup>44</sup> Joe Carter, Director of the Evangelical and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, attributes evangelical philosemitism to the influence of the Hebrew Bible on the evangelical imagination. Lacking a heritage that includes saints and martyrs, evangelicals turn to the Old and New Testament for their heroes, says Carter. With this Old Testament-oriented view, evangelicals also tend towards what Carter calls a “truncated view of Jewish history,” meaning that for some evangelicals, the Jewish people exited the stage after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and only reemerged with the Holocaust and the birth of modern Israel. Carter observes that historical ignorance has also contributed to the pro-Israel views held by evangelicals. “The result of making the unmediated connection between ancient Hebrews and modern Jews is that many evangelicals are accidental Zionists,” observes Carter. “The idea that the Jews have a right to the land of Israel is simply not something that many evangelicals question.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> George W. Mamo, “Luckier Than Moses: The Future of Jewish-Evangelical Alliance,” in *Uneasy Allies: Evangelical and Jewish Relations*, ed. Alan Mittleman, Byron Johnson, and Nancy Isserman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 80.

<sup>44</sup> Mamo, cited by Alan Mittleman in *Uneasy Allies*, xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Joe Carter, “Why Evangelicals Love the Jews,” *First Things* (5/27/10), accessed Sept. 7, 2015, <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/05/why-evangelicals-love-the-jews>.

Evangelicals today are more divided in their view of Israel than in the past, with some prominent evangelicals rejecting Zionism; “Christian anti-Zionism” of an evangelical stripe is in fact growing rapidly, especially among younger and less politically conservative evangelicals.<sup>46</sup> Overall, however, evangelicals have viewed themselves as having a supportive view of Israel, which, at least from an evangelical perspective, is generally also understood as providing support to Jewish people.<sup>47</sup> This Zionism mixed with evangelical philosemitism (whether perceived or real) provides an important context through which evangelical theology deals with the Holocaust.<sup>48</sup> For dispensationalists in particular, the Holocaust has become a motivating force in their support of Israel.<sup>49</sup>

Evangelical reactions to the Holocaust have also likely been affected by the hagiography that surrounds Christian “heroes” such as German theologian Dietrich

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<sup>46</sup> Dexter Van Zile, “Evangelical Anti-Zionism as an Adaptive Response to Shifts in American Cultural Attitudes,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, accessed June 15, 2015, <http://jcpa.org>

<sup>47</sup> Gerald R. McDermott, “Evangelicals and Israel,” in *Uneasy Allies*, 146-7.

<sup>48</sup> For some Jews, evangelical support of Israel is not viewed as a remedy for the Holocaust, since for evangelicals the support is generally accompanied by the belief that Jews are spiritually dead and in need of salvation through Christ. Contends Abraham H. Foxman, “You cannot say to the Jewish people, we are opposed to anti-Semitism, but we want you to disappear as the people that you are.” (Foxman cited by Lawrence Grossman, “The Organized Jewish Community and Evangelical America,” in *Uneasy Allies*, 60.) Lawrence Grossman has pointed out that Christian Zionism did not bring Jews and evangelicals closer together because evangelicals “often harbored clearly conversionary motives” (Grossman, “The Organized Jewish Community and Evangelical America,” in *Uneasy Allies*, 50). Evangelicals, in particular dispensationalist fundamentalists, have been more dedicated to focusing missionizing efforts on Jews than any other Christian group, since dispensationalists believe the evangelization of Jews is of prophetic importance.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Spector recounts attending an evangelical pro-Israel event in New Jersey in 2005, in which 700 evangelicals listened to a pastor reference the Christians’ “tragic and unspeakable past treatment of Jews” and continue, “But we recognize that a new generation has arisen and we have made a solemn pledge—Never Again!” These evangelicals, Spector asserted, “openly confess their grief and their guilt, over the persecution that Christians inflicted on Jews over the span of centuries. They are horrified that it was Christians who perpetrated the destruction of the European Jews in the 1940s,” and consider their support of the state of Israel as a sign of repentance and religious kinship. Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4-5.

Bonhoeffer, a founding member of the German Confessing Church and an anti-Nazi dissident, and certain Protestant Christians who defended or rescued Jews. In grappling with questions of Christian complicity, evangelicals “claim as our own the righteous Gentiles who stood up to the horror,” says one editorialist in *Christianity Today* magazine.<sup>50</sup> Evangelical books for youth that feature Jewish characters, and Holocaust memoirs written for Christians, also describe Christians as heroic rescuers. This focus on Christian rescuers has allowed the evangelical community to concentrate on those rare Christians who refused to cooperate with the Nazi regime or who risked their lives to save Jewish people. However, the inadequacy of this approach is evident; Ariel points out the danger of holding up the actions of a heroic few and ignoring the inaction or evil actions of the many. He has examined what he calls an over-emphasis on rescuers in the way that evangelicals embrace Holocaust heroes and present their heroism as normative.<sup>51</sup>

The reactions by evangelicals to Holocaust theology should be viewed through characteristics most relevant to the movement. As noted, these include the loosely organized nature of evangelicalism, which has affected evangelical participation in Jewish-Christian dialogue; the group’s philosemitic identification; and the hagiography of evangelical rescuer literature. Particular emphasis should be placed where evangelicals

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<sup>50</sup> David Neff, “Holocaust Remembrance and Christian Responsibility,” *Christianity Today*, April 21, 2009, accessed Sept. 18, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2009/april/holocaust-remembrance-and-christian-responsibility.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2009/april/holocaust-remembrance-and-christian-responsibility.html)

<sup>51</sup> Yaakov Ariel, “The Faithful in a Time of Trial: The Evangelical Understanding of the Holocaust” (*Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 3, 2001), 1.

themselves place it: On their view of the Bible. This biblicist perspective will frame evangelical responses to the challenges raised by mainline Protestant Holocaust theology.



## CHAPTER IV NON-EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

For the average Christian, the Holocaust represents a historical nightmare, but also an event seen as irrelevant to their faith or history. The churchgoer who has thought hard about Christian responses to the Holocaust is rare. For North American Christians, removed from the Holocaust by both time and geography, the Holocaust is often dismissed as something terrible that happened to other people in another place, with no particular relevance for the individual parishioner. On the other hand, theologians who have “encountered” the Holocaust in a serious way respond with a broad range of approaches. Taken as a field of investigation, Holocaust theology has been defined as holding the view that Nazi atrocities against Jews constitute a moral crisis for Christianity and should lead to a rethinking of Christian faith and practice.<sup>52</sup> Because this paper analyzes specifically Protestant evangelical responses, I will confine my direct comparison of this group's reactions to those of several significant mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians. However, Jewish Holocaust theologians such as Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim and Irving Greenberg were among the first to ask how one can view God after the Holocaust and how the Holocaust should affect Jewish theology. Roman Catholic theologians, who will also not be the primary focus of this paper, have produced some of the most significant Christian works of Holocaust theology.

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<sup>52</sup> Sarah K. Pinnock, “Atrocity and Ambiguity: Recent Developments in Christian Holocaust Responses,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75-3 (2007): 499-523.

### Questions of Historical Awareness

An overview of Christian responses to the Holocaust begins with the precondition of historical awareness, an acknowledgement that many who claimed to be Christians were either openly antisemitic or at least complicit in Nazi atrocities. Following World War II, the churches' experience of coming to grips with the Holocaust followed a similar path as that of the general public. For more than a decade after the end of World War II, the Holocaust was sparsely studied and publicly discussed only slightly. By the 1960s, attention started to grow with the publication of books such as Elie Wiesel's *Night*, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, and efforts to collect testimony of survivors. In the following decades, the well-known analyses of Victoria Barnett—*Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust* and *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler*—chronicled the tragic track record of German Protestants' failure to challenge the Nazis. Barnett comments: “Protestant and Catholic religious leaders loyal to creeds professing that love can withstand and conquer evil, were unable or unwilling to defy one of the greatest evils in human history. And so the Holocaust will continue to haunt the Christian churches for a very, very long time to come.”<sup>53</sup>

In similar fashion, Jewish scholar Susannah Heschel's research into the role of German theologians during the Second World War demonstrates how the German Protestant church struggled to preserve its autonomy within the Nazi dictatorship and goes on to analyze the church's failure to oppose Hitler's regime and the mass murder of

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<sup>53</sup> Victoria J. Barnett, “The Role of the Churches: Compliance and Confrontation,” *Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies* published by the Anti-Defamation League’s Braun Holocaust Institute, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://archive.adl.org>. This article originally appeared in *Dimensions*, 12/2, 1998.

the Jews. Anti-Jewish thinking permeated Christian theology and prevented members of the Confessing Church from speaking out and acting without compromise on the Jewish question, as Heschel recounts in *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, which she co-edited with historian Robert P. Ericksen.

Similarly, Uriel Tal's work on anti-Nazi German Lutheran establishes that Christian opposition to National Socialism did not imply support for German Jews (*On Modern Lutheranism and the Jews*). Wolfgang Gerlach's *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews* demonstrates that Christians responded ambivalently to the persecution of Jews due in part to a long, theologically-rooted tradition of hostility towards Jewish people. The Confessing Church opposed the *Deutsch Christen* (German Christian) faction, but that does not mean most of these believers were also opponents of Hitler and National Socialism, Gerlach points out. Gerlach's book, observes Ericksen, "helps us understand how the anti-Jewish policies of Nazi Germany could evoke so little opposition, so much acceptance, and, in many cases, such ready participation" by the German Protestant churches.<sup>54</sup> Despite a very few individual dissidents, the approval of the Protestant churches for the Nazi state was expressed openly and never officially recanted, as Ericksen explicates in another work, *Complicity in the Holocaust*.<sup>55</sup> Ericksen argues that enthusiasm for Hitler within

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<sup>54</sup> Robert P. Ericksen, preface to Wolfgang Gerlach's *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*. Ed. and trans. Victoria J. Barnett. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

churches and universities effectively gave German Christians permission to participate in the Nazi regime.

### Questions of Responsibility

In light of this research, Holocaust scholars and theologians suggest that contemporary Christians bear a responsibility not only to recognize the historical failures of German Christians under Nazism but also to acknowledge Christian involvement in a history of antisemitism. From the perspective of many Holocaust historians, this history begins with the *adversus Judaeos* anti-Jewish writings of the church fathers such as John Chrysostom, which resulted in a specifically Christian antisemitism, presenting Jews as the murderers of Christ. Some locate the source of this antisemitism even earlier, in the New Testament documents themselves.<sup>56</sup> Given this background, scholars argue that present-day Christians have a moral obligation to remove from their faith community antisemitic prejudices that promote hatred of Jews. There has been considerable debate about the extent to which Christian teaching fueled the flames of antisemitism. Most churches have acknowledged that Christians bear some responsibility for antisemitism. Notable Holocaust theologians and scholars, including mainline Protestants Franklin H. Littell and Roy and Alice Eckardt, have emphasized what they view as the culpability of the Christian church for historic anti-Judaism and its effects on Nazi antisemitism, as well as the role of New Testament texts perceived as antisemitic. Basic to this theology is the attempt to move away from supersessionism, the notion that Christianity has simply

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<sup>56</sup> See Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipac & Stock Publishers, 1997), and James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1961).

replaced Judaism. Most Holocaust theologians have recognized this teaching, also called replacement theology, as the root cause behind the damaging historical manifestations of antisemitism. Different types of supersessionism argue that Christianity is the replacement or fulfillment of Biblical Judaism; theologians identify five different types of supersessionism, which vary in their views of whether the “replacement” is temporary or permanent.<sup>57</sup> Jewish Studies professor Peter Ochs deftly summarizes the charges against supersessionism in his book *Christian Postliberalism and the Jews*:

The first charge is that while classical supersessionism is not itself an expression of racial anti-Semitism, the doctrine has in fact engendered anti-Semitism among Christian populations. In turn, that anti-Semitism has in fact stimulated or justified Christian persecution of the Jews. The second charge is that while Nazism was itself anti-Christian, it inherited the anti-Semitism that was a de facto consequence of Christian supersessionism. Thus, whatever its formal, theological justification or non-justification, supersessionism shows itself to be lethal as a public teaching.<sup>58</sup>

Ochs’ interpretation counters the idea that supersessionist Christian teaching is primarily or merely a point of doctrine over which theologians argue. He argues that supersessionist doctrine is not intrinsically racist but emphasizes that it has inevitably led to or caused an antisemitism among Christians, which has then been used to justify Christian persecution of Jews. Whatever scriptural or doctrinal basis claimed for supersessionism, the results of this point of theology have proved dangerous to Jews, says Ochs. Holocaust theologians such as Littell and the Eckardts likewise contend that

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<sup>57</sup> Gabriel J. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 147-67.

<sup>58</sup> Peter J. Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1-2.

supersessionism continues to provide the basis of Christian hostility towards Judaism and Jews; Christians must therefore reject it, they suggest.

### Repentance and Theological Reevaluation

From the perspective of some Holocaust theologians, the Holocaust stands as the definitive event that must capture and direct all theological reflection and thus should hold revelatory status for Christians. (This is based on the principle attributed to Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz: avoid any theology that could be the same before and after Auschwitz.)<sup>59</sup> In this light, a number of Christian Holocaust scholars have suggested that Christian theology itself must be revised: that the Holocaust calls into question traditional claims about God, salvation and human history. The reevaluation requested by Holocaust theologians can take different forms, and the degree of theological change suggested varies significantly. On one side of the spectrum, Roy and Alice Eckardt argue that a belief in the resurrection of Christ is inherently triumphalist and anti-Judaic. They maintain that this belief must be given up in order to affirm the validity of Judaism. Classical Christology is considered to be inseparable from supersessionism and therefore the choice is either/or: Christians can either affirm classical Christology or they can reject supersessionism. On the other side, an alternative approach suggests that through the resurrection of Jesus, God validated not just Jesus but also his religion, which was

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<sup>59</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, "Christians and Jews after Auschwitz," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238-250.

Judaism. From this perspective, the resurrection does not undermine Judaism but can be seen as confirming its “central insights.”<sup>60</sup>

Most Protestant Holocaust Christian theologians have embraced what is often termed “two covenant” or dual theology, which holds that God's covenant with Israel through Abraham establishes Jewish people in God's favor.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Christians should understand Judaism as a divinely guided religion that is parallel to Christianity, not superseded by it or fulfilled within it. Often linked with this belief is the assertion that Christianity is “infected” with radical anti-Judaism and antisemitism. Roy Eckardt, a pioneer in the field of Jewish-Christian relations, asserts that the foundations of antisemitism and responsibility for the Holocaust ultimately lie in the New Testament itself.<sup>62</sup>

Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* contends that the New Testament's own explanations of the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death are anti-Jewish at their core, especially the Gospel and epistles of John. Ruether asserts that “anti-Judaism is the left hand of Christology.”<sup>63</sup> According to

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Harries suggests that the concept of God dwelling with and in his people is a strand within Judaism, a sense in which God incarnates himself in the Torah. He argues that the incarnation of God in Jesus can be seen as the culmination of this process. However, Harries acknowledges that the problem remains of how the historic Christian belief that God incarnated himself in Jesus can be stated in a way that does not threaten Jewish self-understanding. Richard Harries, “Judaism and Christianity,” in *Blackwell*, 284.

<sup>61</sup> Not all mainstream Christian reflection on the Holocaust emerges from dual covenant theology; official Roman Catholic Holocaust theology in particular holds to a one-covenant view while also supporting a non-missionizing position regarding Judaism.

<sup>62</sup> Roy Eckardt, “Christians and Jews: Along a Theological Frontier,” in *A Holocaust Reader*, 138-157.

<sup>63</sup> Rosemary Ruether, “Anti-Semitism and Christian Theology,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: Ktav, 1977), 79.

this viewpoint, anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of Christianity to be rooted out without destroying the whole structure.<sup>64</sup>

Other theologians object to the radical nature of Ruether's proposals. Moving in a different direction are mainline theologians such as Paul van Buren and Jurgen Moltmann, who do not entirely reject pre-Holocaust theological traditions, attempting to address the problems of Christian anti-Judaism “without relinquishing the Scriptural and doctrinal resources of historical Christianity.”<sup>65</sup> Scholars such as van Buren have sought to establish God's covenant with the Jewish people as the basis for Christian revelation.<sup>66</sup>

Another response which does not require the rejection of basic tenets of Christian doctrine has been formulated by mainline and Catholic theologians who emphasize divine suffering in the Holocaust. They suggest that a solution to the theological problems posed by the Holocaust is to accept that God suffers with humanity (Protestants Paul Fiddes, Marcus Braybrooke and Franklin Sherman, and Catholic theologians David Tracy and Marcel Jacques Dubois). Braybrooke, for instance, says that only a suffering God can be credible as a solution to the theological problems posed by the Holocaust; he posits the image of Jesus dying on the cross as the basis for understanding God's presence in the concentration camps. The “suffering God” response to the Holocaust fits within the confines of traditional, orthodox Christian faith, in contrast to Ruether's more

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<sup>64</sup> Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 228.

<sup>65</sup> Haynes, “Prospects,” 26.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).



radical proposals which entail the rejection of normative Christian doctrines such as the resurrection of Christ.

### Conversionism after the Holocaust

As the logical outcome of two-covenant theology, many Holocaust theologians suggest that Christian missions must no longer seek to convert Jews but enter a period of dialogue and discussion. This concept has been developed by Roy and Alice Eckardt and other mainline Protestants who say that Christian credibility after the Holocaust has little to stand on in its claims to absolute truth. They, along with Catholic theologians such as Metz and Gregory Baum, argue that the church should divest itself of religious triumphalism and acknowledge the validity of Judaism. Catholic theologian Michael McGarry also stresses that the Christian community must formulate a Christology which recognizes the validity of other religions.<sup>67</sup>

### Questions of Causality

Scholars who analyze the links between Christianity and Jew-hatred vary in the degree to which they consider Christianity itself responsible for Nazi antisemitism. Several of the Holocaust theologians studied in this paper, such as Littell, attempt to draw a straight line between Christianity and the Holocaust, or between Christian ideas and Nazi deeds. They argue that centuries of the *adversus Judaeos*, also called the “Teaching

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<sup>67</sup> Michael McGarry, “The Holocaust” in *Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Michael Shermis and Arthur E. Zannoni (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 78-79, cited in *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, ed. Helen P. Fry (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1996), 68.

of Contempt,” passed on a mythic hatred for anything Jewish and that the Holocaust was an articulation and implementation of centuries of Christian anti-Judaism.

At the other end of the spectrum is a position expressed in a 1988 Catholic document called “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” The document asserts that “The Shoah was the work of a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity.”<sup>68</sup> Most historians in the field of Holocaust studies, aware of the influences of anti-Judaism on Nazi antisemitism but cautious about posing a direct causal connection between Christianity and the Holocaust, take a mediating position. A distinction articulated in Yosef Yerushalmi's response to Ruether is illustrative: even if “Christian teaching was a necessary cause leading to the Holocaust, it surely was not a sufficient one.”<sup>69</sup> This position affirms that Nazi genocide could not have occurred without Christian ideological contributions, but also asserts that Christianity alone cannot explain the Holocaust. Rather, it gives appropriate emphasis to other “necessary” conditions, including nationalism, anti-communism, class antagonism, economic deprivation and the context of world war.<sup>70</sup> Discussing this controversy, Marc Saperstein, Principal of the Leo Beck College Center in Jewish Education in London, likewise

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<sup>68</sup> Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, “The Vatican Document on the Holocaust: Reflections toward a New Millennium,” in *Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Christian and Jewish Perspectives*, eds. Judith H. Banki and John Pawlikowski (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001), 10.

<sup>69</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Response to Rosemary Ruether,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, ed. Eva Fleischner (York: Ktav, 1977), 102-103.

<sup>70</sup> Steven R. Haynes, “Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 622.

contends that those who support the idea of absolute continuity take medieval Christian anti-Jewish statements and policies out of context and have a tendency to generalize.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than drawing a straight line between patristic *adversus Judaeos* literature and the Holocaust, which implies a certain inevitability, some have tempered the image of the “line” by suggesting that Christian anti-Judaism “paved the way”, created “signposts” for, or in Catholic theologian John Pawlikowski's preferred expression, acted as the “seedbed” providing germination and sustenance for the Nazi Holocaust.<sup>72</sup>

Related to this discussion is the controversy over the distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, the former defined as anti-Jewish religious language and the other as contempt based on ethnic or racial prejudice.<sup>73</sup> There has been broad disagreement among scholars over how essential Christian anti-Judaism was to later racial antisemitism. The discussion further polarizes scholars who analyze the use of these terms in Christian history and also in the history of the Holocaust. The most recent scholarship has illuminated the extent to which medieval hostility to Jews was not specifically religious, but social, economic, cultural and in a few cases, ethnic.<sup>74</sup>

Kyle Jantzen, historian at Ambrose University and an evangelical, recently reviewed two journal articles which highlight the latest round of this longstanding debate. Evident

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<sup>71</sup> Marc Saperstein, “Christian Doctrine and the ‘Final Solution’: The State of the Question” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocides*, ed. John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 815-22.

<sup>72</sup> John Pawlikowski, “The Holocaust and Contemporary Christology,” in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, Concilium 175:5, ed. E. Schussler-Fiorenza and D. Tracy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), 44.

<sup>73</sup> The word anti-Semitism was coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr.

<sup>74</sup> Susannah Heschel, “Historiography of Antisemitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33/3 (March 1, 2011): 257-79.

in the debate are disciplinary differences in the approaches, with some scholars distinguishing between theological versus historical Jew-hatred (which attempts to separate historic Christian disagreements with Jews and Judaism from any type of antisemitism) and others focusing on the historical confluence of theological, cultural and racial attitudes towards Jews (viewing the two as ultimately inseparable). Jantzen analyzed an instructive exchange between New Testament scholar Robert Morgan and Jewish Studies scholar Susannah Heschel. In an article in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Heschel argues that the texts of pro-Nazi German Protestant theologians integrate race and religion “with a fluidity that obviates a sharp distinction between the two terms. Antisemitic propaganda produced by Christian theologians during World War II leaves the strictly theological realm in its use of Nazi language and concepts, even when framed in a Christian context, and demands a different kind of conceptualization by historians.”<sup>75</sup> For this reason, Heschel argues that a distinction between theological anti-Judaism and Nazi antisemitism is unhelpful and that scholars are now more interested in “slippages, similarities, influences and parallels” in different forms of hostility to Jews and to Judaism.<sup>76</sup>

In a response to Heschel in the same journal, Morgan distinguishes passive cultural antisemitism from Christian anti-Judaism. He criticizes her arguments for not properly demonstrating that Christianity is “not racist, nor a kind of anti-Judaism, nor

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<sup>75</sup> Heschel, “Historiography of Antisemitism versus Anti-Judaism,” 257.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 258.

antisemitic, though Christians themselves have acted in these ways.”<sup>77</sup> Morgan discusses pervasive antisemitism within Germany, which was fueled by nationalism, as well as a hostility to modernity, secularism, left-wing politics and a perceived disproportionate influence of assimilated Jews in professional and national life.<sup>78</sup>

Heschel, in responding to Morgan's comments, demonstrates the extent to which Christian and Nazi racial ideas were intertwined. She also questions Morgan's chronological differentiation between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, a commonly-held view that sees theological anti-Judaism as giving way to secular racism over time. Heschel says this view has been abandoned by many scholars in the field, who now view anti-Judaism as simply another kind of antisemitic discourse. Jantzen finds Heschel's argument to be the stronger one, saying that she “persuasively argues that the older distinction between theological anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism is increasingly difficult to sustain, given current scholarship on either historic Christianity or the churches in the Third Reich.”<sup>79</sup> Research has shown how much antisemitism (as opposed to merely religious competition) existed in the pre-modern era.

Countering Jantzen's stance as an evangelical who is also a Holocaust historian, evangelical theologians frequently tend to emphasize the differences between medieval Christian teaching about Jews (rooted in Augustine's preservationist teaching that God wills for the Jewish people to remain in existence) and modern racial antisemitism, which

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Morgan, “Susannah Heschel's Aryan Grundmann,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32/4 (June 1, 2010): 431-494.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>79</sup> Kyle Jantzen, “Article Note: On Christian Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism,” *Contemporary Church History Quarterly* 20/3 (September 2014), accessed May 20, 2015, <https://contemporarychurchhistory.org>

saw killing Jews as a potential and desirable outcome. David Neff, former editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*, published an essay on Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2009 which acknowledged the Christian teaching of contempt toward Jews but nuanced Christian responsibility by pointing out that the church historically tolerated the Jews' existence. Even within the teaching of contempt, there were “always open doors for Jews who wished to escape prejudice and oppression” through baptism and conversion.<sup>80</sup> Another *Christianity Today* editorial indicts a film displayed in the United States Holocaust Museum for suggesting that Nazi racial prejudice against Jews was in clear continuity with earlier Christian prejudices.<sup>81</sup>

Haynes points out that while the field of Holocaust studies finds the distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism a useful conceptual tool for assessing Christian responsibility in the Holocaust, the distinction can become apologetic when it implies that Christian expressions of hostility toward Jews are by definition discontinuous with modern forms of Jew-hatred.<sup>82</sup> The distinction can effect a “semantic denial” of Christian responsibility for modern antisemitism and the Holocaust, Haynes observes.<sup>83</sup> This ongoing discussion, of great significance to Holocaust theological discussions, seems likely to continue, and these disagreements will surface in this paper's analysis.

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<sup>80</sup> David Neff, “Holocaust Remembrance and Christian Responsibility,” *Christianity Today* (April 21, 2009), accessed June 26, 2014, [www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2009/april/holocaust-remembrance-and-christian-responsibility.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2009/april/holocaust-remembrance-and-christian-responsibility.html)

<sup>81</sup> Neff, “Did Christianity Cause the Holocaust?” *Christianity Today* (April 27, 1998), accessed March 10, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1998/april/28/t5012.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1998/april/28/t5012.html)

<sup>82</sup> Haynes, “Christianity” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, 622.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

### Four Mainline Protestant Holocaust Scholars and Theologians

The research of Holocaust historians and the questions raised by Holocaust theologians have often resulted in requests for repentance and theological evaluation on the part of Christians. Such discussions have also raised questions of causality. The extensive body of work provides a context for examining evangelical responses to these ongoing debates. For the purposes of comparison to the evangelical response to the Holocaust, I will first briefly examine the salient views regarding Christianity and the Holocaust posited by four prominent Holocaust scholars and theologians who emerged from Protestant mainline denominations in the United States. These mainline, mainstream Protestant positions will provide a baseline for comparison with evangelical responses. At issue are questions of Christian theological and actual complicity in the Holocaust and the related but distinct issue of what should constitute the appropriate moral and theological Christian responses to such questions.

#### Franklin Littell

Franklin H. Littell, a Methodist minister and scholar considered a father of Holocaust studies, was among the first to delve into the question of how baptized Christians living in the heart of Christian Europe could have either killed or ignored the killing of some six million Jews. A big part of the answer, Littell concluded, was that Christians from the earliest Christian generations had shown systematic contempt for Jews and Judaism. After spending nearly 10 years in post-war Germany as Chief Protestant Religious Adviser to the Allied High Command, assigned to the task of denazification during the occupation, Littell raised one of the first voices of Christian conscience in relation to

understanding the Holocaust in the post-war period. For years, he was the leading Christian theologian to argue that Christian anti-Judaism led directly to the Holocaust. In 1976, Littell published his first book, *Historical Atlas of Christianity*, in which he maintained that many German Christian churches failed to deal honestly with their complicity in the murder of European Jews.

Littell focused his attention on the body of Christian polemical texts written from the first century to at least the 18th century which was specifically directed against Jews, along with material in the New Testament that, whatever its original intention, subsequently came to be exploited for its perceived anti-Jewish context. He went on to suggest that New Testament Christology, soteriology and its ways of interpreting the Old Testament were infused with supersessionism, and he held this supersessionism and the accompanying teaching of contempt for Judaism as responsible for the Holocaust. Littell's comments on Christian antisemitism are frequently cited by Holocaust theologians:

The cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that 'the old Israel' was written off with the appearance of 'the new Israel.' To teach that a people's mission in God's providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbs of history, has murderous implications which murderers will in time spell out.<sup>84</sup>

Littell suggested that because the Holocaust was the consummation of centuries of false teaching and practice, the Christian church has lost its moral authority until it acknowledges its guilt. Further, he argued that Christian antisemitism is not mere racial

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<sup>84</sup> Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews: The Failure of Christians to Understand the Jewish Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 2.



prejudice but blasphemy and a sin against the Holy Spirit.<sup>85</sup> Antisemitism is blasphemy because it denies the biblical view of the Jews as God's chosen people and thus denies the essential Jewishness of Christianity.<sup>86</sup> The presence of Jews in the world signifies the presence of God's spirit, so sins committed against Jews are sins against God's spirit and God himself. The meaning of the Holocaust for Christians must be built into the church's confessions of faith and remembered in its hymns and prayers. Christians, Littell concluded, must "draw the knife" on their own antisemitism for the sake of truth.<sup>87</sup>

#### A. Roy Eckardt and Alice Lyons Eckardt

Methodists Roy Eckardt and his wife Alice Eckardt further developed Littell's suggestion that the foundations of antisemitism and roots of responsibility for the Holocaust ultimately lie in the New Testament itself. The Eckardts insisted that Christian repentance must include reevaluating basic theological attitudes toward Jews and the New Testament in order to deal effectively with antisemitism. The ethical character of the Christian life, including how Christians engage the Jewish people, reveals the adequacy of the churches' theological answers, Roy Eckardt wrote in a 1979 essay.<sup>88</sup> The Eckardts assumed central roles in re-thinking Protestant theology in light of the Shoah. Alice Eckardt wrote that facing the Holocaust requires "a recognition that a rupture in history

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<sup>85</sup> Franklin Littell, "Have Christians Taken on Board the Lessons of the Shoah?" in *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: A Reader*, ed. Helen P. Fry (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1996), 32.

<sup>86</sup> Littell, "An Interview with Prof. Rev. Franklin H. Littell," Yad Vashem Shoah Resource Center, Department of Religion, Temple University (July 23, 1998). [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

<sup>87</sup> Littell, in *Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Roy Eckardt, "Christians and Jews: Along a Theological Frontier," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 138-157.

occurred.”<sup>89</sup> She references Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz, who “is insistent that Christianity cannot do theology with its back toward Auschwitz; and once facing Auschwitz, it must realize that Christian theology in its entirety must be revised.”<sup>90</sup> In his essay, Roy Eckardt goes so far as to conclude that the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus might have to be dropped from the Christian creed, in order to correct what he characterizes as the classical Christian distortion of Judaism. The resurrection lies at the foundation of Christian hostility to Jews and Judaism because it confirms Christian triumphalism, he suggests.<sup>91</sup> The resurrection is a “divine validation of these various points at which Christianity stands in judgement upon the Jewish people and their faith.”<sup>92</sup> If God raised Jesus from the dead, then the Christian is shown to be right about Jesus' Messiahship and the Jewish people who do not accept that Messiahship to be wrong. “In the Resurrection God Himself confirms the Christian gospel, the Christian cause,” Eckardt says.<sup>93</sup> However, in view of the experience of Holocaust history, the gospel's claim to exclusive truth must be open to theological criticism since this claim has proved destructive to the Jewish people. Eckardt asks how or even whether it is possible for the Christian church to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus in a non-triumphalist way.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Alice L. Eckardt, “Suffering Theology, and the Shoah,” in *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 52.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Roy Eckardt, “Christians and Jews,” 151.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

### Franklin Sherman

Lutheran theologian Franklin Sherman, founding director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Muhlenberg College, served for many years as chair of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's consulting panel on Lutheran-Jewish relations. He is the editor of a collection of the most significant statements on Christian-Jewish relations issued by Christian, Jewish and interfaith bodies around the world since World War II. Sherman is representative of Christian theologians whose response to the Shoah has been to emphasize God as suffering with the Jews and also as a mainline theologian who has spearheaded church statements officially repenting of anti-Jewish and antisemitic expressions.

In a 1974 essay, "Speaking of God after Auschwitz," Sherman says that the problem of Auschwitz may be said to be "the problem of Job magnified six millionfold," or the problem of theodicy on a "cosmic" scale.<sup>95</sup> Sherman critiques the theory of "moral education" as a solution to the religious questions posed by the Holocaust. When a man's humanity begins to be destroyed, as in the concentration camps, says Sherman, "then it is fruitless to talk of the ennoblement of his character."<sup>96</sup> Such a view would result in the picture of a "monstrous God who tortures his creatures in order to perfect them," he comments.<sup>97</sup> Sherman mentions the portrayal of God in the book of Job as a God of mystery; Job receives no answer to his questions and is asked to acknowledge the

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<sup>95</sup> Franklin Sherman, "Speaking of God after Auschwitz," in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 198.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

inscrutability of God. In Lutheran theology, the will of God is not evident in the ordinary course of world events; God's will has only been made known when God chose to reveal it. Sherman continues that the Shoah forces one to ask in what sense God is all-powerful. He reviews the concepts of a finite God, a self-limiting God, and an embattled God, finding these insufficient as a response to the Holocaust. Rather, Sherman suggests, the way to speak of God in light of the Shoah and the even broader problem of evil is to emphasize that God participates in human suffering. For Christians, the “symbol of the agonizing God is the cross of Christ.”<sup>98</sup> For Sherman, viewing God's pain as being at the same time God's love is the religious solution to the problem: “God participates in the sufferings of men, and man is called to participate in the sufferings of God.”<sup>99</sup> He goes on to elaborate:

The further interpretations which Christians give to the cross of Christ are well-known, but what I wish to do is to point us back behind the interpretations to the reality of this man who suffered as a Jew, and on the basis of whose sufferings the Christian should be the first to identify with the sufferings of any Jews. The fact that this has not been the case, and that the cross has been the symbol not of identification but of inquisition, is a matter for the deepest shame on the part of Christianity. One thing is clear as to how we may speak of God after Auschwitz. We may not speak, and we cannot speak, in terms of any kind of triumphalism. We can speak only in repentance. A God who suffers is the opposite of a God of triumphalism.<sup>100</sup>

Here Sherman suggests that the only sort of God possible in a post-Holocaust world is a God who is in solidarity with human misery, experiencing human suffering in the Holocaust, a God who is affected by history and not removed from it. Triumphalism, or

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<sup>98</sup> Sherman, “Speaking of God after Auschwitz,” 206.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 206-7.

the concept that final truth has been given to one particular community, does not fit with a suffering God, from Sherman's perspective. Sherman also helped develop official statements by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In the late 70s, 80s and 90s, a series of statements by Protestant churches in Germany named their replacement theologies as a contributing cause of the Holocaust. Several mainline Protestant American denominations have issued similar statements. Within the ELCA, the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States, the "Declaration to the Jewish Community" of 1994 repudiated Luther's anti-Jewish views, expressed remorse for the harm they had done, and pledged "to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people."<sup>101</sup> The document called antisemitism "a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel" and said the anti-Judaism of Lutheran church history demands both a revision in the church's interpretation of scripture and a rejection of missions to Jews.

#### Summary of Mainline Views

As previously noted, Holocaust historians and theologians have called for Christians to accept historical responsibility for the Holocaust by acknowledging both theological and actual complicity--the role of Christian anti-Judaism in setting the stage for the persecution of Jews in the Holocaust and the failure of the European churches to defend Jewish people during the Nazi regime. Some Holocaust theologians have also demanded a revision of traditional Christian beliefs, including calls to re-examine and reject New Testament texts considered to contain antisemitic passages, to recognize Judaism as a

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<sup>101</sup> ELCA "Declaration to the Jewish Community," (1994), accessed April 8, 2014, [www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations](http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations).

valid spiritual path (often explained via the lens of “two-covenant” theology), and to discontinue attempts at seeking the conversion of Jews to Christianity.

Littell, the Eckardts and Sherman construct their arguments based on an awareness of the failures of professing Christians during the Holocaust. All four suggest that contemporary Christians are obligated to acknowledge Christian involvement in a history of antisemitism and should work to remove hatred of Jews from their midst. All four agree that Christian theology must be re-examined but differ significantly in their approaches. In keeping with most mainline Holocaust theologians, Littell and the Eckardts argue that Christians must reject supersessionist or replacement theology and embrace “two-covenant” theology, rejecting Christian attempts to convert Jews. Sherman, in a response consistent with orthodox Christian theology, emphasizes the suffering of God as a theological response to the Holocaust. In sharp contrast, the Eckardts' contention that the resurrection must be rejected falls definitively outside the bounds of historic Christian faith.

## CHAPTER V

### FIVE EVANGELICAL RESPONSES TO HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY

To facilitate a study of evangelical perspectives on the Holocaust, I have chosen to consider in this section essays or books by two theologians, one ethics professor, one art historian and one Holocaust historian. The writings of the two evangelical theologians I have selected span a time frame from 1981 to 2001. The ethics professor remains one of the few evangelicals to suggest that the Holocaust should hold some revelatory status for Christians. The art historian reflects variants of positions frequently expressed in established evangelical publications such as *Christianity Today*. All of these authors represent segments of American evangelicalism. The final individual whose work I treat in this section is an Australian historian; his perspective shares commonalities with the ethics professor but differs significantly from that of the other theologians and the art professor here examined, and may represent a new emphasis in evangelical thinking on the subject.

In examining the positions of each evangelical, I will look for responses to questions posed by Holocaust theologians. These questions fall into the related categories of responses to questions of responsibility and responses to requests for theological changes. In examining questions of responsibility, I will examine how each author responds to the following questions: (1) Does the Christian church bear responsibility for the anti-Judaism of its history? (2) What of the contention by most Holocaust historians that the German Protestant church failed to defend Jews and in many cases even aided the Nazis? Such questions comprise charges of both theological and actual complicity. Turning to

responses to requests for theological changes, I will examine how the authors respond to the requests by mainline Holocaust theologians that Christians should re-evaluate and even re-formulate Christian theology, including the suggestions that Christians ought to recognize the validity of Judaism, refrain from proselytizing and re-examine New Testament passages considered antisemitic by some scholars.

#### Stephen T. Davis

In one of the few journal articles on the implications of the Holocaust for theology written by a self-described evangelical Christian, Stephen T. Davis published “Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology” in *The American Journal of Philosophy and Theology* in 1981.<sup>102</sup> Davis is a philosophy professor at Claremont McKenna College. In his essay, Davis rejects some conclusions drawn by mainline Protestant Christian theologians about the Holocaust. These include the suggestion that the Holocaust serves as a theological absolute, a game-changer as it were, and also the idea that Christians must give up religious doctrines with which Jews disagree. Davis bases many of his arguments on his evangelical belief that the Bible is the Christian's chief religious authority.

#### Questions of Responsibility

Davis starts by defining antisemitism as “active prejudice against Jews just because they are Jews” (109). Should the Christian church accept responsibility for historic anti-Judaism and antisemitism? Here Davis gives two answers. There is absolutely no doubt that the church must plead guilty for being directly and indirectly responsible for much

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<sup>102</sup> Steven T. Davis, “Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology,” in *Christianity and Judaism: The Deepening Dialogue*, ed. Richard W. Rousseau S.J. (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1983) 107-115.



antisemitism, he admits. It “cannot be denied that the record of Christian treatment of Jews is at best very mixed indeed,” and Christians have “sinned grievously against Jews” (109). This sad record confirms the Christian theological belief that human beings are fallible and sinful, Davis says. What then, of the charge made by Holocaust theologians that the *adversus Judaeos* tradition in Christian theology, especially the anti-Jewish polemic of some church Fathers, bears responsibility in creating a culture of antisemitism that made the Holocaust possible? Davis notes that the church does bear some responsibility for its historic anti-Jewish teachings, but he conditions that responsibility: “Certainly there are statements made by the Fathers that are wrong-headed and mistaken—not to mention ill-advised in the light of later events. But while we cannot condone the excesses of the *Adversus Judeos* tradition, perhaps we can understand its existence,” Davis says (110). The anti-Jewish polemic of the New Testament, while at times excessive, can at least be understood in its historical context of a Jewish sect (early Christianity) breaking away from its parent. Although Christianity's early persecution by and competition with Judaism led certain Christians to “regrettable excesses of polemic and outright mistakes in theology,” he continues, “it is also perhaps understandable that the early Christians felt a strong need to establish the superiority of Christianity over its disapproving parent Judaism” (110). He continues, “There are things said by some of the Fathers and later theologians (Luther particularly) that can be considered Antisemitic,” but concludes that “we can hardly blame them for later acts of genocide” (110).

Davis here addresses the claim made by many Holocaust historians and theologians that a direct link exists between the Church's negative attitude towards Judaism and the

Nazi Holocaust, with the Church's "teaching of contempt" considered to contain the seeds of modern antisemitism. In framing his response, Davis says he is "far from denying that Christian Antisemitism helped make the Holocaust possible" (110).

However, he also claims that it is difficult to prove that historical events have hidden theological causes. Though Christian antisemitism was a contributing factor to the conditions that made the Holocaust possible, another, equally responsible factor was "nineteenth century liberal criticism" of the Old Testament (111). Old Testament literary criticism argued that the Old Testament could not be considered divinely inspired, removing its authority. "The Christian church was severed from its Jewish roots and the door was opened to the extermination of the Jews because biblical criticism convinced people it was no longer possible to believe in the divine authority of the Old Testament, the absolute nature of the Old Testament law, and the uniqueness of Jews as God's chosen people," Davis suggests (111).

Associating German higher criticism with antisemitic attitudes that contributed to the Holocaust is a common position expressed by evangelicals as well as some other historians such as Richard Steigmann-Gall.<sup>103</sup> So-called "higher" criticism, also known as literary or source criticism, arose from European rationalism and brought naturalistic presuppositions to bear on the analysis of the biblical text. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Protestant scholars such as Julius Wellhausen, who had a strong supersessionist bias and sought to show the superiority of the New Testament over the Hebrew Bible, offered a radical re-imaging of the origins of the Pentateuch. Much of

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<sup>103</sup> Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8, 33.

German biblical criticism was shot through with antisemitic conceptions of Jews and Judaism; scholars have noted the affinities between this scholarship and later Nazi biblical exegesis.<sup>104</sup>

Davis also expresses the desire of many evangelicals to distinguish between “cultural” Christians and genuine believing Christians. He defines a Christian as an “active and serious follower of Jesus Christ”, as opposed to merely a non-Jewish Caucasian: “not all Christians are Christian” (112). Davis continues:

Were Christians responsible for the Holocaust? In the first sense of the word “Christian”—what we might call a ‘cultural Christian’ as opposed to a ‘committed Christian’ – the answer is obviously yes. Does Christianity have anything to do with the fact that certain cultural Christians committed acts of murder and genocide? This is a complex question. The Hitler regime, as we know, was a pagan regime, strongly opposed to Christianity, and its leaders were not committed Christians. A good many Christians died in the Holocaust (112).

Davis correctly points out that Hitler was hostile to orthodox Christianity, despite borrowing Christian language when it suited him. Where Davis parts ways with both mainstream Holocaust historians and mainline Holocaust theologians is in distancing Christian faith from the failures of Christian moral behavior during the Holocaust. He does this by arguing that while it is true that the work of these “cultural Christians” found some support in the implicit Antisemitic attitudes of many other Christians, these were not genuine believing people of faith (112-113). It seems fair to conclude that historic attitudes toward Jews fostered by the church played a role in the Nazis’ grim success in

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<sup>104</sup> Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Note that evangelicals are not alone in observing this connection; in an address in 1902, Solomon Schechter, then principal of the Jewish Theological Seminary in America, famously called higher criticism “higher anti-semitism” (Solomon Schechter, “Higher Criticism--Higher Anti-Semitism,” in *Seminary Address and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing, 1915), 35-39).

achieving their ends, says Davis. While these attitudes distort “true Christian teachings,” the church must nevertheless plead guilty for having them (112). Davis reiterates that the church bears some guilt for the Holocaust but also that the teachings responsible for that guilt are not “true” Christianity. Those who did Hitler's work were “culturally Christian Antisemites” (112). Were any committed Christians murderers? Here Davis answers no—committed Christians may have been guilty of passivity and silence before the Holocaust but they were not connected with or responsible for a genocide which is totally contrary to basic Christian belief. He cites a New Testament passage in I John 4:20, which says anyone who claims to love God but hates his brother is a liar. “My own view, then,” continues Davis, “is that anybody who claims to be a committed Christian and commits murder has shown he is not a committed Christian” (113).

#### Response to requests for theological change

What of the requests by Holocaust theologians that Christians ought to re-examine or reformulate Christian theology, that they should recognize the validity of Judaism, refrain from proselytizing and re-examine New Testament passages considered antisemitic by some scholars? Davis acknowledges that Christians ought to seriously ponder the theological and religious implications of the Holocaust but finds the proposals of many Holocaust theologians too extreme. As an evangelical Christian, says Davis, he is unwilling to regard the Holocaust as a theological absolute on par with divine revelation. Nor does he believe that Christians should give up Christian doctrines just because they are offensive to Jews.

While conceding that some forms of the traditional Christian notion that Christianity succeeds or supersedes or fulfills Judaism are unacceptable, Davis goes on to say that as an evangelical, he is not prepared to give up the beliefs that (1) Jews were once God's sole elect people and that Christians are now chosen too, and (2) that all people should believe in Jesus. He cannot surrender these beliefs because they are based on a Bible that evangelicals consider to be infallible. Davis takes exception to Littell's suggestion that the cornerstone of Christian antisemitism is a superseding or displacement myth "with murderous implications" (108). Most evangelicals, says Davis, "would find these remarks by Littell not only false but outrageous" (108). Evangelicals do not think the notion that Christianity succeeded Judaism is a myth, says Davis. They also point out that there is no "necessary connection whatsoever between believing in successionism and being an Antisemite, let alone a condoner of genocide" (108). Davis goes on to argue that antisemitism and genocide are "about as clearly contrary to the Christian ethic as anything is. It just is not true that successionism has murderous implications" (108). Even if it were true that theological successions helped motivate Nazi murderers, "which certainly can be doubted," Davis contends that we cannot hold Paul and the other supersessionist biblical writers of the New Testament guilty of the later murder of Jews (108-9). Paul and other New Testament writers had no intention of supporting genocide, nor any reason to suspect their words might later be used to support genocide, Davis observes.

Just as it is not responsible for genocide, neither does replacement theology necessarily undermine the integrity of Judaism, according to Davis. In Romans 9-11,

Israel has a continued role in God's redemptive plan, which evangelicals affirm. Most Jews find it impossible to accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, he says; this being the case, Jewish people should continue to practice Judaism. What of the New Testament itself? The New Testament is not antisemitic, says Davis. He concedes that “there is material in the New Testament which Antisemites can twist in order to buttress their Antisemitism,” such as Jesus' attack, in the gospels, on the Scribes and Pharisees (109). However, Davis exegetes these verses as a conflict within Judaism. In similar fashion, the Gospel of John is ambiguous in its use of the term “Jews”; while it can seem to suggest that the entire Jewish nation was somehow responsible for Jesus's death, this was not John's intent at all, Davis says. Christianity should not be said to be inherently antisemitic, given that disagreeing with Jews is not itself antisemitic, he says.

Holocaust theologians should not expect Christians to surrender crucial Christian doctrines, even in their desire for good relations with Jews, Davis says. He challenges Ruether's claim that the real root of Christian antisemitism is Christology, or the Christian claim of the divinity of Jesus. Here Davis shifts from a theological argument to an appeal to history: There are far too many counterexamples in the history of Christian men and women who were not antisemitic to justify such a stand. “What is true probably, is that Antisemites used Christology as an ideological buttress for Antisemitism. But there appears to be no good reason to believe that Christians can only avoid Antisemitism by abandoning orthodox views of Christ,” Davis says (111). When it comes to the contentious issue of Christian evangelism, Davis acknowledges the grounds for Jewish suspicion and hostility toward attempts to convert Jews. Nonetheless, evangelicals

consider themselves biblically commanded to “Go and make disciples of all nations,” according to Matthew 28:19. Christians should not employ deceptive or coercive methods of evangelism, Davis says, nor should they single Jews out as a special target group. Evangelical Christians do claim the right to preach the gospel to anyone, including Jews. While affirming the freedom of Jews to believe and practice Judaism without any interference from Christians, evangelicals “believe that Jesus is the messiah and Son of God and that those who deny it are mistaken,” Davis says (109).

#### Analysis of Davis

Davis was one of the first evangelical theologians to take up various challenges posed by Holocaust theology. He acknowledges Christian complicity in the Holocaust but nuances this responsibility by assigning German Higher Criticism a prominent role in contributing to Nazi antisemitism. He acknowledges the adverse effects of the *adversus Judaeos* and the failures of the churches under Nazism, but defends Christian faith by distinguishing between cultural and genuine Christians.

This attempt to distinguish cultural from genuine Christians under Nazism may particularly resonate with evangelicals, who hold a deep-seated conviction that one can and should distinguish between false and authentic faith. Evangelicals generally reject the liberal (non-orthodox) theology of the mainline churches and emphasize the authority of Scripture, including belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Because evangelicals embrace the truths of historic Christian creeds as timeless, they have tended to consider

liberal Christians (many of whom doubt the bodily resurrection, the essential sinfulness of humanity and the importance of blood atonement) as Christians in name only.<sup>105</sup>

A conscious categorizing of who is and is not a genuine Christian and an emphasis on “real” Christianity is a response that has long characterized evangelicalism. In a 1794 book attempting to trace an evangelical presence within Christianity, Joseph Milner, a Church of England clergyman, wrote that “there have ever been persons whose dispositions and lives have been formed by the rules of the New Testament: men who have been *real*, not merely *nominal* Christians: who believed the doctrines of the Gospel” and “loved them because of their divine excellency.”<sup>106</sup> Church membership did not define their faith, Milner said. The same emphasis is reflected in David’s scrutiny of Nazi-era German Protestantism Davis when he argues that if some Nazi-era Protestants no longer adhered to the essential truths of the Christian faith, such as the prohibition against murder, they were effectively not Christian. A similar position will also be evident in the work of Richard Terrell, the next evangelical to be discussed.

In a related argument, Davis also reiterates another frequent evangelical response to the Holocaust, which argues that “real” Christianity is inherently not anti-Jewish. Marvin Olasky, editor-in-chief of *World*, a leading evangelical magazine, writes that “[s]ince Satan tries to fool people by twisting God's word . . . it's no surprise that anti-Semites have attempted at times to don Christian robes.”<sup>107</sup> Most Jews do not understand that

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<sup>105</sup> *Blackwell*, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Joseph Milner and Isaac Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1849), iii.

<sup>107</sup> Marvin Olasky, “Jewish Evangelism: How not to Pass by Passover opportunities,” *World* (April 11, 1998), accessed September 6, 2015, [www.worldmag.com/1998/04/Jewish\\_evangelism](http://www.worldmag.com/1998/04/Jewish_evangelism)



antisemitic crusades, pogroms and “other evils that arose in 'Christian' countries are not expressions of Christianity,” Olasky says.<sup>108</sup> French evangelical theologian Henri Bocher emphasizes the antisemitism present in the Christian tradition but questions whether such antisemitism is essentially bound to true Biblical Christianity. “One way to interpret the scheme of church history is to discern in the Patristic era and in the Middle Ages a gigantic compromise, an amalgamation of the biblical message and teaching with a mass of pagan ideas and practices,” he says.<sup>109</sup> Evangelicals such as Blocher take pains to note their perspective of the differences between medieval Catholic teaching about Jews and evangelical positions, sometimes viewing both historic Catholicism and the *adversus Judaeos* as a corruption of Christianity.

### The Discontinuity Fallacy

The view of Christian antisemitism as an aberration from authentic Christianity, commonly held by evangelicals but also other Christians, has led to disagreement over the role and effects of the *adversus Judas* strain in Christian theology. Holocaust scholar Steven R. Haynes would agree with Davis that those who claim Christianity is the reason for the Holocaust fall into the “continuity fallacy,” which ignores important dimensions of the Christian understanding of the Jew, including its reliance upon religion rather than race.<sup>110</sup> However, Davis makes arguments that tend towards a second fallacy Haynes sees as common to Holocaust discussion: the “discontinuity” fallacy. “Calculated to distance

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Henri Blocher, “Theological Reflections on Anti-Semitism,” The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (Krakow, April 2010), accessed April 13, 2015, [www.lcje.net](http://www.lcje.net).

<sup>110</sup> Steven R. Haynes, “Beware Good News: Faith and Fallacy in Post-Holocaust Christianity” in *“Good News” after Auschwitz? Christian Faith Within a Post-Holocaust World*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 4.

Christian faith from the horrors of the Holocaust, the discontinuity fallacy eschews Christian responsibility for the Shoah” by claiming that (1) Nazism was anti-Christian, that (2) true Christians do not participate in murder, and that (3) authentic Christianity is not anti-Jewish Haynes argues. “While these statements may be true in themselves,” Haynes says, “each can be used to sustain the fallacy of discontinuity in a way that falsifies history and evades moral responsibility.”<sup>111</sup> When Davis argues that “real Christians” do not commit murder, he falls into what he himself acknowledges is circular and unprovable argumentation.

The importance of distinguishing Christianity from Nazism can confuse the extent to which German Christians embraced National Socialism. Members of the Confessing Church, the group within German Protestantism that formed in opposition to government efforts to Nazify the Protestant church, considered Jews a lethal threat to German society and welcomed their reduction in numbers (if not the method of extermination).<sup>112</sup>

Haynes argues that even Christian leaders who had reservations about escalating violence against Jews “rendered unconscious assistance to the Nazis' anti-Jewish campaign by

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<sup>111</sup> Haynes, “Beware Good News”, 4.

<sup>112</sup> The extent of this hostility is demonstrated by the Freiburg Circle Memorandum. The clandestine group, formed after Kristallnacht, included Protestant Bishop Otto Dibelius, a representative from Confessing Church Bishop Wurm and several Catholic theologians. Bonhoeffer asked the group to draft a memo on issues facing the church as a guide for policy after the fall of Hitler. An appendix on “The Jewish Question,” written in Nov. 1942, reports that “hundreds of thousands of human beings have been killed systematically merely because of their Jewish ancestry.” (Gerlach, 212). The memo called for punishment of those engaged in these crimes but stressed that the Jewish question remained a problem. “The existence of a numerically significant body of Jews within a people simply constitutes a problem that must lead to difficulties, if it is not subjected to a fundamental and large-scale arrangement,” said the memo. As a solution the memo proposed a permanent resident alien status for all Jews (depriving them of their civil rights) and added, “There is also unanimity about the fact that every state must have the right to close its borders to the returning Jewish emigrants if it considers this necessary for the sake of the entire Volk.” See Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 214. Comments Barnes, “The fundamental reaction to the reduction in numbers of Jews can only be described as positive.” (Barnes, 299).

perpetuating religious anti-Judaism and by failing to oppose what they regarded as a lawful government. Thus, pagan though they may have been, “the Nazis received support from persons across the spectrum of Christian belief.”<sup>113</sup> Observes historian Colin Barnes:

Having vilified [the Jews]; desired nothing to do with them; having supported boycotts and exclusions; having called for them to be driven out of the country and incarcerated in ghettos; having not even protested when they were publicly beaten and murdered in the streets and their property destroyed, [the Christians’] actions or lack of them when the time of mass killings arrived would simply be an inevitable failure.<sup>114</sup>

Barnes contends that because the churches did not officially oppose Nazi actions against Jews in the earlier phases of the Holocaust, and in many cases supported such actions from their pulpits, they either lacked the desire or the will to intervene when persecution turned to mass murder. Both prejudice and fear were at work to create a guilty silence, Barnes says.

A handful of individual Christians in the Confessing Church (and from other Christian groups) risked their lives to help and rescue Jews. Most, even the majority of the most theologically orthodox, did not. In studies of anti-Nazi German Lutherans, Uriel Tal established that Christian opposition to National Socialism did not imply support of German Jews.<sup>115</sup> Despite opposition to Nazi encroachment in church affairs, Christian resisters to Nazism often affirmed views of Jews and Judaism that exacerbated their

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<sup>113</sup> Steven R. Haynes, *Holocaust Education and the Church-Related College* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>114</sup> Colin Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People: The European Churches and the Holocaust* (Broadstairs: King’s Divinity Press, 2014), 280. Barnes summarizes the reactions of Confessing Church conservatives to the deportations. “On one hand, large churches publicly welcomed the deportations. On the other, a few caring women met, prayed with and farewelled the deportees and two churchmen decided on secret revolt. Between these extremes, the vast majority did nothing at all.” (Barnes, 169).

<sup>115</sup> Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich*, trans. Noah Jonathan Jacobs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

antisemitic environment.<sup>116</sup> A legacy of anti-Jewish Christian teaching contributed to an endemic fear and hatred of Jewish people that prompted even “Bible-believing” Christians to support boycotts, ghettos and even public violence.

When persecution of Jews extended to genocide and Germany was at war, the “believing” Christians in the Confessing Church, like many of their countrymen, were also embedded in the Nazi machine.<sup>117</sup> Those who wish to argue that Nazi perpetrators did not number any “real” Christians in their midst ignore historical fact, says evangelical theologian David Gushee: “Most perpetrators officially belonged to a Christian body of one kind or another; some were even devout, and a few were ordained Christian ministers.”<sup>118</sup> Granting that the murderers were not acting on Christian theological grounds, Gushee continues: “But still, the church must do significant mental gymnastics not to count . . . the Holocaust as a Christian moral catastrophe.”<sup>119</sup>

### Requests for Theological Change

While Davis acknowledges but conditions his acceptance of Christian complicity in the Holocaust, he utterly rejects the requests of Holocaust theologians for theological change. His rejection is based on his view of the Bible. The underlying principle of biblicism is evident in the way Davis deals with the proposition that supersessionist theology nullifies Judaism. Part of the reasoning behind Davis's response is his

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<sup>116</sup> Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Legacy*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 158-176.

<sup>118</sup> David P. Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>119</sup> Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, 15.

evangelical belief that the authority of the Bible must be the chief religious authority for Christians. No matter how much some evangelicals seek to draw attention to anti-Judaism within the Christian tradition, most theologically conservative Christians are nevertheless not comfortable with the proposition that historical events after Jesus can force the church to reinterpret the foundational truths of the Christian faith such as belief in salvation through Jesus or the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the words of Mark Noll, “The most important conviction of evangelical scholars is that the Bible is true.”<sup>120</sup> Because of the foundational belief that the Bible is an objective revelation from God and the source of doctrine and Christian belief, most evangelicals would not agree that the Holocaust, or any other historical event, should affect Christian doctrine. In a *Christianity Today* article, Ken Myers argues, against the mainline Protestant position, that history should not change Christian theology. Myers is a former NPR producer and editor who since 1993 has produced *Mars Hill Audio Journal* which examines cultural issues through a Christian lens. In an essay titled “Adjusting Theology in the Shadow of Auschwitz,” Myers says that “the significance of the [biblical] text and its application may well differ from age to age, but the essential theological agenda, as embodied in creeds, confessions, and catechisms, is not altered by historical events, however momentous. Such events may cause the church to re-examine its theology but are not revelatory.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 143.

<sup>121</sup> Kenneth A. Myers, “Adjusting Theology in the Shadow of Auschwitz,” *Christianity Today* (Aug. 1, 2002), accessed September 9, 2014, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/augustweb-only/8-12.52.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/augustweb-only/8-12.52.html)

In keeping with this evangelical response to Holocaust theology, Davis reaffirms the legitimacy of Jewish evangelism. Davis's acknowledgement that most Jews will not consider Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah and therefore should remain Jewish is, however, atypical for an evangelical. The relevance of Christian evangelism to Jews for Holocaust theology is the assertion by some mainline Holocaust theologians that Christian soteriology, or redemptive messianic theology, is necessarily antisemitic. According to Christian belief, salvation is made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, called atonement. Christians by definition agree that salvation is made possible by the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dying on the cross.<sup>122</sup> The point of contention relevant to Holocaust theology is whether the sacrifice of Jesus is the only valid source of salvation, as traditional orthodox Christianity asserts, and whether this doctrine is intrinsically antisemitic. The complexity of this issue makes any serious analysis of it extend beyond the limits of this paper, but the question marks a point of critical divide between evangelicalism and much Holocaust theology.

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<sup>122</sup> Evangelical groups have issued several declarations which reaffirm belief in the need of all people to find salvation through Jesus. In 1989, the World Evangelical Fellowship issued the Willowbank Declaration, which asserted that as an act of love, Christians must continue to declare the need of salvation through Christ to Jewish people. ("The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People," Statement from the Consultation on the Gospel and the Jewish People conference, Willowbank, Bermuda: April 29, 1989, III.17.) The 2008 World Evangelical Alliance's Berlin Declaration states that "nothing has occurred since Jesus came that changes the need [of salvation] for Israel and the nations." "The Berlin Declaration on the Uniqueness of Christ and Jewish Evangelism in Europe Today," World Evangelical Alliance Conference, Berlin, August 2008. Myers, writing in *Christianity Today*, likewise concludes that the Holocaust does not change anything significant regarding Christian evangelization of Jews, since the evangelical rejection of two-covenant theology is based on an understanding of the nature of God's revelation in Scripture. These declarations notwithstanding, other evangelicals have called for greater sensitivity by Christians and an emphasis on Christian witness rather than proselytism. Richard J. Mouw, "The Chosen People Puzzle," *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2001, accessed July 3, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)

### Richard Terrell

Evangelical author Richard Terrell states in his *Christ, Faith and the Holocaust* that he wrote the book specifically to address questions of Christian responsibility regarding the Holocaust.<sup>123</sup> Terrell, Emeritus Professor of Art at Doane College, is both an artist and art historian and also a lay minister in the American Baptist churches. He published this fairly short book in 2011 as a work of “cultural apologetics,” taking up the accusation that Christianity itself was a major “cause” of Nazism's destructive path. I have included an analysis of Terrell because his positions are similar to those found in some popular evangelical publications. Terrell's book is one of the few by an evangelical which directly attempts to answer several of the questions posed by post-Holocaust theology.

### Questions of Responsibility

Terrell briefly discusses failures of German Protestantism under Hitler, but moves immediately to offer a defense of the Confessing Church.<sup>124</sup> He attributes Christian failure during the Holocaust to “confusion, complicity and cowardice,” but qualifies this acknowledgement in two ways. First, Terrell argues that German Protestantism was not really Christian, and also that those Christians who did oppose Nazism, the “real” Christians within the Confessing Church, held to the theologically conservative orthodox Christianity to which he subscribes. He writes: “That the Bible, taken as the authoritative

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<sup>123</sup> Richard Terrell, *Christ, Faith, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Indiana: Westbow Press, 2011).

<sup>124</sup> Considerable scholarship has examined the positions of the Confessing Church. The focus of the Confessing Church's opposition to the Nazified German Reich Church was ecclesiastical independence. The so-called “high point” of the Confessing Church was the Barman Declaration of 1934, when the group reaffirmed that the church was not an organ of the state. The declaration essentially declared the Reich church to be heretical. Some Confessing Church leaders attempted to persuade the church to oppose Hitler's Jewish policies, though the Confessing Church never adopted such a policy. The Barmen Declaration did not mention the state persecution of Jews.

Word of God, is a bulwark against such crimes as the Holocaust is clearly demonstrated in the premises upon which the Confessing Church took its stance. . . . When Christians in Germany retained their identity with the historic faith, they retained fuel for their ability to witness to the truth (152).

Terrell calls the accusation that antisemitism is part of Christian history and that German Protestants under Hitler failed to act righteously the “Christian guilt hypothesis” (xiii). He charges that “Promulgators of the Accusation [of Christian responsibility] typically ignore all evidences of Christian resistance to the Nazi regime (20). Terrell questions whether rescuers and resisters “were as rare or non-existent as suggested by . . . ignorant clergy playing with collective guilt?” (23). The real story of Christians in the Holocaust may actually be the opposite, he continues, of “that which is implied in the Accusation” (23). Later he appears to modify his position, briefly granting that most Christians under Nazism failed along with their institutions, but then makes some bolder claims:

Jesus said that the gates of Hell itself would not prevail against his church. We dishonor those who stood in their Christian integrity if we adopt nothing more than a chic and elite fashion of wallowing solely in Christian guilt. We may also insult the Holy Spirit of God. Do we really think that the Spirit that creates, sustains and binds together the church was asleep during the period of the Third Reich? (101)

To support his position, Terrell first emphasizes that Nazism was a spiritual movement hostile to both Christianity and Judaism. Those who argue that Christianity or Christians “caused” the Holocaust, says Terrell, ignore the nature of Nazism as a utopian spirituality. He says that many contemporary scholars are ignorant of the degree to which nineteenth century German spirituality “had embraced ideas that were blatantly anti-



Christian” and details what those ideas were—a blending of Christian elements with Teutonic mysticism and nature-centered romanticism. Terrell's next response to questions of Christian guilt is to assert that German Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was spiritually dead and theologically bankrupt. He argues that most of German Protestantism was in fact not Christian: “The real Germanic faith, then, or the 'German Religion' of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had nothing to do with Christianity other than some borrowings of traditional words like 'God,' 'Christ,' 'salvation,' etc. (15). Contemporary sources from the Nazi period paint a picture of a spiritually dead Christianity, especially within Protestantism, Terrell argues. “Given the condition of the churches in Germany,” he continues, “one might well ask if Christianity even existed there in the early twentieth century (16).

In addition to asserting that Nazism was anti-Christian, Terrell also argues that authentic Christianity is not anti-Jewish. Responding to requests that Christians re-examine New Testament texts some consider antisemitic, Terrell asserts that the pre-Reformation church had forsaken scriptural authority, and that persecution of Jews during the Middle Ages by the church reflected this. “The medieval church is hardly notable for a recognition of the centrality of scripture, and even if certain passages of the New Testament were quoted to support actions against the Jews, what does that prove?” asks Terrell (29). Referring to the scholarly disagreement about the differences between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, Terrell cites Amy Jill-Levine's distinction between the two concepts and contends that no basis for a “specifically racist posture” exists within the

New Testament (35). “This [Nazi] anti-Semitism,” he asserts, “was a new creature, never seen before, and was essentially unrelated to older forms of anti-Jewish attitudes (10).

### Requests for Theological Change

In line with these theological commitments and this historical understanding, Terrell rejects all requests for a re-examination of Christian faith, charging that the Holocaust is not a Christian phenomenon. Instead of viewing the Holocaust as connected to Christian faith, Christians should view it as an expression of modern 'post-Christian' consciousness and of the modern world's rejection of the Christian worldview, he suggests. Furthermore, he points to “a vital need today, as Holocaust memorials are observed, for Christians to think clearly about their faith in view of the Third Reich's shadow and to challenge the simplistic acceptance of Christian collective guilt (153).

One significant aspect of Terrell's work is the way in which he provides insight into the psychological underpinnings of some of his positions. If, he suggests, Christian faith played any genuine part in the Holocaust, such responsibility endangers the very faith itself. From Terrell's point of view, post-Holocaust theology invalidates his faith. If the accusations against Christianity in relation to the Shoah are true, the faith itself collapses: “If the Holocaust was in some way a logical outcome of the Christian faith itself . . . [is] not that faith false?” (xiii). From Terrell's position as an evangelical, charges of Christian antisemitism based on the Bible are more personal and incisive than most discussions of church history over the centuries. His deep concern is worth quoting at length:

The Christian Scriptures are seen as being at the core of a great historical crime that contributed eventually to the greatest crime ever committed against the Jews—the Nazi Holocaust. It is a serious issue for Christians, for we accept the New Testament as more than just another collection of

historical documents. Those documents are regarded as the inspired Word of God (at least among more theologically conservative groups). The Accusation implies that the Bible contains such a faulty view of humanity that the hatred of the Nazis for the Jews was somehow the outgrowth of biblical religion and theological orthodoxy (28).

Terrell sees the charges by some Holocaust theologians that the New Testament itself contains antisemitic passages and the suggestion that Christian doctrine must undergo radical revision collectively as an ongoing assault on the legitimacy and integrity of Christian witness, and beyond that, the entire Christian worldview (4-6). “Not only is Christian witness called to the prosecution’s stand, but the very basis of Christian faith, its very *legitimacy*, is called into question,” he says. (4). If, for instance, Holocaust theologians such as Ruether are correct when they say the traditional Christian doctrine of the resurrection must be rejected in order to correct anti-Judaism, a foundational pillar of Christian faith would be removed. *Christ, Faith and the Holocaust* is replete with statements that underscore Terrell’s sense that the legitimacy of the Christian faith is endangered by the challenges posed by Holocaust theology.

As discussed previously, some Holocaust theologians would agree with Terrell that this is indeed the case: that Christian theologians may need to repudiate fundamental tenets of the faith in order to excise anti-Judaism. As Alice Eckardt commented in her discussion of Metz: “Once facing Auschwitz, [Christianity] must realize that Christian theology in its entirety must be revised.”<sup>125</sup> In attempting to formulate a Christian faith that does not negate Jewish existence, Holocaust theologians such as Ruether have emphasized unfulfilled messianism, contending that saying Jesus is already the Messiah

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<sup>125</sup> Alice Eckardt, ““Suffering, Theology and the Shoah,” in *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 52.

implies condemnation of Jews. Evangelicals such as Terrell consider Ruether to have abandoned the central event of Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>126</sup>

### Analysis of Terrell

Terrell's work is noteworthy as one of the few by an evangelical which directly attempts to answer several of the questions posed by post-Holocaust theology. However, Terrell unfortunately misstates the contention of most Holocaust historians that Christian anti-Judaism was a contributing factor to the Holocaust; he frames the argument as an assertion that Christianity "caused" the Holocaust. Causality is too simple, as Terrell correctly observes. Overstating the question under discussion, however, simply adds confusion rather than clarification.

In accordance with some of Davis's arguments, Terrell also makes several points which together create a form of Haynes' discontinuity fallacy. He argues that Nazism was anti-Christian, that real Christians did not participate in murder and that authentic Christianity is not anti-Jewish. He then uses these arguments to nuance and shift responsibility away from Christian complicity in the Holocaust. While most Holocaust scholars acknowledge a pagan aspect to Nazi fascism and also recognize Nazi hostility to much traditional Christian doctrine, some Christian theologians assert without qualification that Nazism was anti-Christian. Terrell uses this line of thought to shift the focus from blaming Christians for antisemitism to blaming Nazis for pagan ideology. He

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<sup>126</sup> Writes Ken Myers: "A new day in redemptive history dawned with the Resurrection, just as it did on Sinai. To reject it is to be cut off from the community of the prophesied new covenant. There is no other name by which we are saved." Meyers, "Adjusting Theology."

sidesteps the failure of the Christian churches under Nazism by shifting emphasis to Nazi hostility to Christianity.

Terrell also lays the groundwork for the second premise of Haynes' discontinuity fallacy: the assertion that real Christians do not commit murder. He does this by emphasizing the theological heresy of German Protestantism during the Nazi era; if German Protestants had broken with orthodox Christian faith, they were not really Christian, Terrell asserts, echoing Davis's argument. As with the assertion that Nazism was anti-Christian, scholars of the Holocaust concede the initial point of Terrell's argument. Historians such as Heschel have researched the degree to which theological heresy had influenced or completely overcome significant portions of German Protestantism, including an attempt to remove Jewish elements from Christian Scriptures and a redefinition of Christianity as a Germanic, Aryan religion.<sup>127</sup>

Several difficulties arise as Terrell's argument progresses, however. Not all German Protestants under Hitler could be considered heretical even by Terrell's definition. Nor was the least heretical segment, the German Confessing Church, significantly better at defending Jews than the thoroughly theologically Nazified German Christian movement. Contrary to the images presented in Terrell's work and in evangelical Holocaust literature, the Confessing Church was not a resistance movement against Nazism.<sup>128</sup> Despite the voices of a very few courageous exceptions, the record of the Confessing

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<sup>127</sup> Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>128</sup> Victoria J. Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Church to defend or rescue Jews remains one of near universal failure.<sup>129</sup> As an official body, its record is one of utter failure in this regard.<sup>130</sup>

The most recent scholarship examining the relationship between the Confessing Church and the Nazified German Christian Church reinforces the inaccuracy of viewing the Confessing Church as an anti-Nazi movement. Neither religious group should be understood as a uniform or unified camp. The blurred lines and gradations within the church-political spectrum defy attempts to pigeonhole them into neat categories, as Kyle Janzten's research has demonstrated.<sup>131</sup> Jantzen, a Canadian historian at Ambrose University and an evangelical, examined parish life during the Nazi era in three Lutheran regions of Germany and concluded that many theologically orthodox German Protestants did not see a conflict between their faith and much Nazi ideology. Janzten's research contradicts Terrell's contention that "real Christians" did the right thing when confronted with Nazi evil. While holding antisemitic attitudes and ideas that fail to conform to orthodox Christianity, the pastors and parishioners Janzten examined identified

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<sup>129</sup> Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses Were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, trans. and ed. Victoria J. Barnett (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>130</sup> Gerlach observes that the last three confessional synods of the Confessing Church, one held in 1942 and two in 1943, expressed concern for "non-Aryan Christians" (Gerlach, 205). The October 1943 synod expression opposition to the extermination of human beings on the basis of race, but the direct phrase "the liquidation of the Jews" was deleted from the final version. (Barnes, 296). Kyle Janzten found no evidence from the correspondence, publications or actions of Protestant clergy in three Lutheran regions of Germany to suggest that they were significantly affected by or preoccupied by the plight of Jews. He found, for instance, no evidence that any pastor in his research area refused to fill out Proof of Aryan Ancestry for anyone who needed to assure authorities of their Aryan identity (Janzten, 93-101).

<sup>131</sup> Janzten's micro-level analysis of three Lutheran regions of German pastors and parishioners establishes that the relationship between the German Christian and Confessing Church factions was more complex than first assumed by historians of the German Church struggle. Additionally, Andrea Kersting has criticized scholars for failing to differentiate sufficiently between the members of the Confessing Church who denied the legitimacy of the regional church governments, and the supporters of the Confessing Church who refused to make a complete break with regional and national church authorities (cited in Janzten, 215).

themselves as Christians, were baptized, confirmed, and regular worshippers in church. Their words and actions “suggest that many of them believed that supporting Nazism was consistent with their practice of Christianity and raise the possibility that they too believed that Hitler and the Nazis were engaged in a movement that complemented, if not flowed out of, their faith,” Janzten writes.<sup>132</sup> Thus Janzten says he cannot dismiss these German clergy as non-Christians, even though most of them failed to oppose Nazi actions against Jews. Barnett and Ericksen also discuss the disinclination of Confessing Church leaders to publicly criticize the Nazi government, especially once the war had begun and many of their members joined the Wehrmacht or were drafted into service.

These factors call into question Terrell’s assertion that the distance from theological orthodoxy which characterized much of German Protestantism under Hitler disconnects all genuine Christianity from Nazi antisemitism. Terrell’s position that “real Christians” who behaved righteously were motivated by theological orthodoxy also contradicts the Holocaust rescuer research of Gushee and others, which found that a minority of rescuers (who themselves constitute fewer than 1 percent of non-Jewish Europeans<sup>133</sup> claim to have been motivated by religious faith of any kind.<sup>134</sup>

Terrell initially supports the requests of Holocaust theologians that Christians should accept responsibility for the failures of the churches but then invalidates this responsibility through the use of a variety of excuses and conditioning statements. In

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<sup>132</sup> Janzten, *Faith and Fatherland*, 13.

<sup>133</sup> David P. Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation*, (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2003), 11.

<sup>134</sup> Gushee, “Why They Helped the Jews” (Oct. 24, 1994), accessed Oct. 10, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct2994/october-4/4te032.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct2994/october-4/4te032.html).

contrast to Davis, Terrell denies that genuine Christianity has anything to do with the *adversus Judaeos* strain in Christian tradition. Like Davis, he does not accept the Holocaust as revelatory. Therefore he does not feel the need to respond to requests for theological re-examination of Christian doctrine.

Terrell's views are perhaps more representative of his position as an art historian and lay minister and an apologist for evangelical Christianity rather than of his expertise as either a theologian or as a scholar of the Holocaust. Terrell candidly states that he is not a Holocaust historian, and he exhibits a lack of familiarity with historical detail significant to the discussion, including the extent of Christian failure and of the German churches' support of the Nazi policies of boycotts and deportation, as well as the general silence by Confessing Church leaders in publicly condemning mass murder. However, Terrell's book provides a doorway into some widespread evangelical thinking on the subject. A more sophisticated evangelical treatment of several of the issues Terrell raises is found in the work of French evangelical theologian Henri Blocher.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, Janzten's book on German Lutherans provides a different evangelical perspective on the historical issues raised, although as a historian he does not take up the post-Holocaust theological challenges Terrell discusses. It should be noted that some evangelicals are not alone within the Christian world in their attempts to downplay the significance and extent of Christian anti-Judaism during the Nazi era. The influential Catholic priest and writer Richard John Neuhaus, founder and editor of *First Things*, in a 1996 essay argues that only a few Protestants within the pro-Hitler German Christian movement welcomed the

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<sup>135</sup> Henri Blocher, "Theological Reflections on Anti-Semitism," and "Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology, The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (Krakow, April 2010); [www.lcje.net](http://www.lcje.net)



ascendancy of the Nazis.<sup>136</sup> Neuhaus neglects to acknowledge the enthusiasm with which so many German Christians, outside the pro-Hitler German Christian movement, embraced and promulgated Hitler's beliefs about Jews.

John J. Johnson

John J. Johnson is an evangelical theologian who has taught at New York University and Caldwell College and authored the 2008 book *Currents in Twenty-First-Century Christian Apologetics*. Two chapters from his book are relevant for this study. "A New Testament Understanding of the Jewish Rejection of Jesus: Four Theologians on the Salvation of Israel," first published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in 2000, asks whether the Holocaust should force Christians to rethink the matter of Jewish salvation.<sup>137</sup> Another chapter, "Should the Holocaust force us to rethink our view of God and evil?" was first published in the *Tyndale Bulletin* in 2001.<sup>138</sup>

#### Questions of Responsibility and Responses to Requests for Theological Change

Johnson's emphasis in responding to the demands of Holocaust theology is clear from the opening paragraph of his first journal article, which he begins with a series of questions:

Is Christian theology inherently anti-Semitic? Are the fundamental teachings of the NT blatantly anti-Jewish? Is the church's historical oppression of Judaism responsible (at least in part) for the Holocaust? More important

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<sup>136</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, "Daniel Goldhagen's Holocaust," *First Things*, August, 1996, accessed Sept. 10, 2014, [www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/004](http://www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/004).

<sup>137</sup> John J. Johnson, "A New Testament Understanding of the Jewish Rejection of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43:2 (June 2000) 229-246.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, "Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of God and Evil?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 52.1 (2001) 118-128.

[emphasis mine], does the Holocaust force Christians to re-think the matter of Jewish salvation? (229).

Johnson focuses most of his discussion on the last question, which he engages by reference to four Christian theologians. (By contrast, he does not spend any time analyzing the first three questions, other than to briefly acknowledge Christian complicity in the suffering of the Holocaust). His goal, he says, is to demonstrate that the traditional Christian claim that Jesus is the Savior of the Jews is not antisemitic. Johnson begins by first arguing that Christian theology must be based on revelation, not on human experience, “however tragic and far-reaching that experience may be” (230). He continues: “To assume that Christian theology must change as a result of the Holocaust is to base our theological thought on the tragedy of human evil rather than on the revelation of God” (230). The Holocaust, although particularly obscene, says Johnson, is different only in degree, not in kind, from all the sins of mankind through the centuries. Great evil has plagued mankind throughout history, but Christians did not radically change their theology as a result, says Johnson. “Why should the Holocaust be treated differently?” he asks.

Johnson says that what the Holocaust should do “and largely has done, is to make Christians realize that their old anti-Semitic prejudices must go” and that vilifying Jews as Christ-killers must be repudiated as sin (230). “But this is far different from altering the central message of the NT: the gospel of salvation through Christ for all, Gentile and Jew alike.” He continues by examining the views of two pre-Holocaust and two post-Holocaust theologians for their views on this question.

In his reading of Romans 9-11, the most comprehensive Biblical treatment of the relationship between Jesus and Jews in the New Testament, Johnson notes that the text treats the matter of Jewish salvation in terms of both divine election and personal choice. He examines the arguments of Holocaust theologian Clark Williamson, a Disciples of Christ minister, who asserts that any Christian theological statement which suggests that Judaism is inferior to Christianity must be unacceptable, since, in Williamson's view this stance helped pave the way for the Holocaust in the first place. The anti-Judaism in Christian tradition, including parts considered canonical, must be replaced with an interpretation that is more acceptable in a post-Holocaust situation, Williamson asserts. Moreover, he suggests that the traditional Protestant reliance upon *sola scriptura* cannot be maintained in light of the Holocaust, since the Holocaust was in part caused by anti-Jewish statements contained in the scriptures. Johnson carefully expresses his agreement with Williamson's assertion that Christian antisemitism played a role in the Holocaust. However, he takes issue with Williamson's conclusion that the sins of the Christian past necessitate abandoning "the central message of the New Testament, namely the doctrine that salvation comes through Christ alone" (234).

Johnson briefly discusses two other Christian theologians' views of the salvation of Israel and then analyzes the position of Jacob Jocz, a Messianic Jew whose books were published in the 1950s and 1960s. Jocz rejects the idea that Christians have replaced Jews as God's chosen but does not interpret that chosenness to include salvation. Johnson quotes Jocz on this point: "...for the Church to reduce her high christology in order to accommodate the Synagogue would spell dissolution. She stands or falls with the

confession that Jesus is Lord” (239). Dual covenant theology, Johnson continues, is not acceptable if the New Testament is to be taken seriously. The Christian scriptures do not recognize two Messiahs or separate ways of salvation, he says.

Johnson goes on to address the assertion made by many Holocaust theologians that “a church that did not do all it could to prevent the Holocaust has no moral credibility” and thus should not attempt to convert Jewish people (240). Together with Jocz, Johnson avers that the opposite is actually true: “...the nature of the gospel demands that just such a sick, unworthy church must present the message of sin and forgiveness to the Jews” (240). Christian complicity in the Holocaust, far from disqualifying Christians from presenting the gospel to the Jews, “better qualifies them for the task, for it makes them realize that they dwell in sinful solidarity with those whom they know so desperately need to hear the gospel,” he says (240).

Johnson then turns to Romans 9-11 to make his case that viewing Christ as Savior for both Gentiles and Jews “is in no way anti-Semitic” (242). He makes this case through an exegesis which finds no support for dual covenant theology in this passage. In his two-part conclusion, Johnson urges Christians to repudiate the sin of antisemitism and affirm that Jews are God's chosen people. However, “Christians must also insist, along with Jocz, that Jesus Christ is Messiah for all, Gentile and Jew, and that personal response to him is essential for receiving the mercy God intends for his elect. Even the demonic evil of the Holocaust does not alter this” (246).

In Johnson's second article under consideration, he argues that the problem of evil is an age-old dilemma for biblical theists and does not take on special meaning in light of

the Holocaust.<sup>139</sup> The Holocaust, Johnson says, raises the same theodicy issues found in the Book of Job. The proper response is not a radical rethinking of Christian theology but a “humble, biblical acceptance of the limits of human understanding when faced with apparently pointless suffering” (118). Holocaust-inspired revisionist theology is not only unfaithful to scripture, says Johnson, but fails to address adequately the “real problem” at the heart of the Holocaust. This, for Johnson, is seemingly random evil occurring in a world that, according to the Bible, was created by an all-loving omnipotent God. Redefining who God is and how he operates do nothing to solve the problem.

Johnson acknowledges “a certain amount of Christian complicity in the Holocaust” that “certainly helped pave the way for that tragic event” (123). He lauds the desire to combat antisemitism and recognize Christian complicity. What he does not agree with is the willingness to “sacrifice the essentials of the Christian faith in response to the evil which occurred in Nazi death camps” (124). For evangelicals, Christian faith is not based upon experience but upon divine revelation in history. This echoes the positions expressed by Davis, Terrell and Myers. Johnson adds that he does not wish to understate the horrors of the Holocaust or bypass the reality that the Nazis perpetrated their crimes “in 'Christian' Germany, and that the rest of the 'Christian' world basically ignored what was happening” (124). He allows that the problem of evil is “more baffling” when encountered in the Holocaust since the victims were God's chosen people. Also baffling is the fact that “the perpetrators were devilish madmen who committed their crimes under the aegis of a perverted Christian cross, the Nazi swastika,” he says (122). However, he

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<sup>139</sup> Johnson, “Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink?”

suggests that the Holocaust is no different, in terms of human suffering, from many other great tragedies which have befallen humanity, citing the Black Death and Stalin's purges. Suffering and persecution have always been at the core of Jewish existence as well; the Holocaust is not an aberration in Jewish history.

#### Analysis of Johnson

In these two essays, Johnson mentions but does not focus on Christianity's anti-Jewish history; his chief concern is whether Christians can still assert that Jesus is the savior of the Jewish people. While Johnson explicitly acknowledges Christian complicity in the Holocaust, his phrasing and emphases serve to downplay that guilt. His assertion that the failure of Christians to defend Jewish people in the Holocaust better qualifies today's Christians for sharing their faith with Jews (since Christian failure demonstrates Christians' own sinfulness) suggests his lack of a deep appreciation for the effects and implications of this complicity.

While Johnson grants the assertion by Holocaust historians that Christian antisemitism played a role in the Holocaust, his language understates Christian moral failure by referring to “a church that did not do all it could to prevent the Holocaust.”<sup>140</sup> Such language implies that Christians were guilty only of failure to act, and not of contributing to the evils of the Holocaust, either deliberately or inadvertently. This position ignores the research demonstrating that many believing Christians did not view Nazi vilification, boycotting, deportation and even violence against Jews as actions in opposition to their faith. The assertion that genuine Christians under Nazism were guilty

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<sup>140</sup> Johnson, “A New Testament Understanding,” 240.

at worst of passivity or complacency and not actual supporters of Nazi government actions against Jews is a position frequently held by evangelicals (and, often, other Christians) and will be further discussed later in this paper.<sup>141</sup>

Johnson also de-emphasizes the role of Christians in the Holocaust by asserting that “the Nazis perpetrated their crimes in 'Christian' Germany.”<sup>142</sup> Putting the word Christian in quotations may only imply, correctly, that the country as a whole was not Christian, but its effect also distances Christians from responsibility. Language is again an issue in Johnson's description of the perpetrators of the Holocaust as “devilish madmen” who committed their crimes under a perverted Christian cross.<sup>143</sup> This phrasing minimizes the role of the average German churchgoer under Nazism, driving an artificial moral wedge between Nazi leaders and their followers. As Henri Blocher observes, drawing on Jarrell J. Fasching, the lesson of Auschwitz is that ordinary people can commit “demonic” acts.<sup>144</sup>

Johnson differs from Holocaust historians in the way in which he acknowledges but also appears to de-emphasize Christian complicity. He also differs from Holocaust theologians such as Little, the Ekhardts and Williamson in his response to requests to recognize the validity of Judaism and refrain from proselytizing. For Johnson, the Holocaust does not have revelatory status, and such requests must be denied on the basis of the evangelical adherence to the primacy of Scripture. Here Johnson's position on the

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<sup>141</sup> Blocher, “Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology.”

<sup>142</sup> Johnson, “Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink,” 124.

<sup>143</sup> Johnson, *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>144</sup> Blocher, “Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology.”

theological significance of the Holocaust echoes that of Davis, but emerges as even more emphatic. He asserts that the Holocaust, while horrific, should not force us to rethink our view of God and evil because the problem of theodicy was an intractable problem before the Holocaust occurred and would be “just as vexing had the Holocaust never happened.”<sup>145</sup>

Johnson’s approach of minimizing the uniqueness of the Holocaust is also not specifically evangelical but represents a somewhat traditional response in Jewish and Christian theology. Some theologians suggest that since every event in history may be said to be unique, the Holocaust cannot be isolated from the long series of persecutions and massacres that preceded it. David Wolf Silverman points out that “the Jews of the fifteenth century experienced the Spanish Expulsion as unique and in the words of one of their leaders and thinkers--Don Isaac Abravanel--as equivalent to the departure of the first human pair from the Garden of Eden.”<sup>146</sup> Like Johnson, Michael Wyschogrod and Jacob Neusner contend that there is no uniqueness to the Holocaust that modifies our view of God or humanity.<sup>147</sup>

Johnson’s position is in agreement with mainline Holocaust theologian Franklin Sherman that evil is an impenetrable mystery and that the message of the book of Job is that the “ways of God are beyond the understanding of men.”<sup>148</sup> He differs from Sherman

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<sup>145</sup> Johnson, “Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink,” 129.

<sup>146</sup> “The Holocaust and the Reality of Evil,” in *Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson & A. James Rudin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 272.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Wyschogrod, “Faith and the Holocaust,” *Judaism* 29/3 (Summer 1979): 299 and Jacob Neusner, “The Implications of the Holocaust,” *The Journal of Religion* 53/3 (July 1973), 293-308.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, “Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink,” 126.



in his acceptance of the inscrutability of God as an acceptable response to the Holocaust. Sherman seeks to condition the definition of God's all-powerfulness in an attempt to reconcile the concept of an all-powerful God with the Holocaust. Johnson, however, views the Holocaust as merely an extreme example of the problem of theodicy, not one requiring more explanation than this philosophical and moral problem merited previously. (A mediating evangelical position on the question of uniqueness is posited by French theologian Henri Blocher, who rejects the Holocaust as an absolute or revelatory reference point but nuances this position by noting three features which mark it as unprecedented.)<sup>149</sup>

One can appreciate the fact that Johnson strives for philosophically logical rather than emotional discussion of questions of theodicy in relation to the Holocaust. Even if one were to concede Johnson's position that the suffering of the Holocaust does not render the Jewish-Christian concept of a loving God null and void, most troubling is Johnson's failure to consider the Holocaust as an event of moral imperative to Christians as Christians. Johnson acknowledges that the church's historical oppression of Judaism is responsible (at least in part) for the Holocaust but does not view the effects of Christian teaching or Christian failure as in any way revelatory. If Johnson views the Holocaust as representing a significant moral or theological challenge to the contemporary Christian church, he does not discuss it in the two essays under consideration, other than to observe

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<sup>149</sup> Blocher contends in "Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology" that even the "bottomless" evil of the Holocaust does not warrant referring to it in absolute terms. "Many contemporaries, who have given in under relativistic propaganda and desperately lack bench marks to live by, do keep the Shoah as a substitute Reference, an *Ersatz* absolute; but this reflects the disorientation of our late modernity; Christian theology should know better." Blocher argues that a similar abyss of evil is present in "ordinary" every-day human evil. However, he calls the Holocaust unprecedented in magnitude, method and de-humanization.

that the sins of the Christian past should not cause Christians to abandon the doctrine of salvation through Christ. While intellectually provocative as a discussion of theodicy, Johnson's work neglects to address the significance of either theological or actual Christian complicity in the Holocaust.

#### David P. Gushee

A fourth evangelical author and recognized Holocaust scholar, David P. Gushee, published his seminal work, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* in 1994 (rev. 2003).<sup>150</sup> In this book, Gushee analyzes Christian rescuer behavior during the Holocaust, attempting to answer the question of why so few Christians tried to protect the Jews, as well as analyzing the motivations of those Christians who did. In 2001, Gushee authored a chapter in the book *Good News after Auschwitz? Christian Faith within a post-Holocaust World*, edited by Carol Rittner and John K. Roth.<sup>151</sup> Gushee is the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Executive Director of the Center for Faith and Public Life at Mercer University. He was appointed in 2008 by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to serve as a member of the Church Relations and the Holocaust Committee. A self-described "evangelical centrist," Gushee's responses to the issues raised by Holocaust theologians differ significantly from that of most evangelicals; his positions also diverge from mainstream Holocaust theology in ways that reflect his evangelical view of the Bible.

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<sup>150</sup> David P. Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994; *Righteous Gentiles*. 2nd ed.: St. Paul: Paragon House, 2003.

<sup>151</sup> Gushee, "The Good News after Auschwitz: A Biblical Reflection," in *"Good News" after Auschwitz? Christian Faith within a Post-Holocaust World*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 157-172.

These differences define Gushee's position as unusual within both evangelicalism and mainstream Holocaust theology. The question of why Gushee's perspective differs so dramatically from that of many evangelicals will be addressed in the conclusion of this paper.

### Questions of Responsibility

Does the church bear responsibility for anti-Judaism? And can the church defend the record of German Protestants during World War II? Addressing these questions in both the introduction to his book and in the essay in Ritter and Roth's book, Gushee emerges as one of the most vocal critics of Christian anti-Judaism from within the evangelical academic community. Gushee says that no responsible Christian thinker today would argue that the behavior of self-professed Christians during the Holocaust was anything other than a failure. There were, of course, scattered exceptions, and a few who even risked their lives to rescue Jews. In general, however, the Holocaust constituted a "devastating failure of Christianity and the church."<sup>152</sup> Why this was the case is harder to evaluate. The Nazi regime was certainly not led by pious Christian people, nor was the mass murder of Jews incited or organized by the church, says Gushee. Christian responsibility for, and failure during, the Holocaust was more subtle. Together with many Holocaust scholars and theologians, Gushee directly blames the role of historic Christian anti-Judaism, which led to "profoundly antisemitic behavior at both the individual and the social levels." Writes Gushee:

Eighteen centuries of this Christian anti-Judaism laid the groundwork for the nationalist/racist antisemitism that emerged in the nineteenth century—

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<sup>152</sup> Gushee, "The Good News," 160.

though there was real discontinuity between these two forms of anti-Jewish sentiment as well. What is less frequently noted is that the older, religiously based anti-Judaism was also visible in Europe during the Holocaust, especially at the grassroots level in eastern Europe. Jews looking for succor under persecution frequently found themselves the objects of religiously incited scorn, rejection, assault, and murder. Thus theological anti-Judaism bore bitter fruit during the Holocaust both as ideological legacy and in some cases as grassroots motivation for deeply misguided Christians embedded in deeply distorted local expressions of the faith.<sup>153</sup>

Theological anti-Judaism, which Gushee characterizes as a distortion of Christianity, provided both context and motivation for the Holocaust, he argues. Gushee also identifies Christian failure during the Holocaust in the partial nazification of the German church under National Socialism. The admirable resistance of some church leaders is well documented, he says. “But as many have noted, most resistance, where it was offered, was not focused on the plight of Germany's Jews. Even those with the most acute theological sensitivity to the paganization of the church did not see that an assault on the Jews must be met by the church's determined resistance.”<sup>154</sup>

Although Gushee's book about ‘righteous Gentiles’ examines the religious philosemitism behind some notable cases of Gentile rescue, he emphasizes how few these rescuers were and denounces the evangelical tendency to portray their religious counterparts during the Holocaust as defenders of Jewish people. Some of the few rescuers were Christians whose activities on behalf of Jews were, at least in part, religiously inspired. Yet the perception that most genuine believers in Jesus helped to save Jewish lives is inaccurate, says Gushee. As noted earlier, Gushee estimates that

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 162.

fewer than 1 percent of non-Jewish Europeans took any action to help or save Jewish people.<sup>155</sup> By statistical definition, most believing Christians were either perpetrators or bystanders, he says; Christian faith did not equate virtuous behavior under Nazism. “How encouraging it would be if it could be reported that rescuers were Christians, or committed Christians, or evangelicals, and nonrescuers not. But research shows that rescuers do not appear to have differences from nonrescuers on any test of religiosity, including self-identification as a Christian and level of religious commitment,” writes Gushee in an essay in *Christianity Today* magazine.<sup>156</sup>

#### Response to Requests for Theological Change

Gushee clearly points out the historical results of the *adversus Judaeos* tradition, but he does not really address specific questions of doctrine. Like many evangelical counterparts, he suggests that from the evangelical perspective, Christians are not free to abandon or radically revise the Christian faith “in ways that transgress the boundaries of scriptural revelation.”<sup>157</sup> Gushee parts ways with most evangelicals, however, in his assertion that the Holocaust must hold some revelatory status for Christians. While Gushee believes Christians may not assume that the problem lies with the Christian faith itself, he contends that the faith must be understood in light of a truthful encounter with the Holocaust. Evangelicals have rarely seriously considered the ramifications of the Holocaust, he says: “It is a mistake, I believe, when my [evangelical] coreligionists

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<sup>155</sup> Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2003), 11.

<sup>156</sup> David Gushee, “Why They Helped the Jews,” *Christianity Today* (Oct. 24, 1994), accessed January 14, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)

<sup>157</sup> Gushee, “Good News,” 162.

assume that historical events have nothing to teach the church. It is particularly erroneous . . . to assume that the Holocaust is not a significant event for Christians as Christians.”<sup>158</sup>

Is the New Testament itself antisemitic? Like Davis, Gushee references Romans 9-11 in arguing that no grounds exist for hatred in this seminal New Testament passage. He quotes Paul's affirmation that God continues to love the Jewish people (Rom 11:28) and that “by no means” has God rejected his people (Rom 11:1). He also references Paul's vision of an ultimate consummation when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), suggesting that some theological issues are better left to the realm of mystery. Gush calls it “presumptuous in the extreme for grafted-in Gentile Christians to attempt to pass judgment on the eternal status of Jews,” referencing Paul’s discussion of the question in Romans 9-11.<sup>159</sup> “In the end, Paul’s conclusion that God is not finished with the Jewish people and that Gentile Christians should be humble and grateful for the invitation into covenant with the God of Israel, strikes me as sufficient,” Gushee says.<sup>160</sup>

In his essay, Gushee does not specify precisely how an encounter with the Holocaust should challenge or change Christian doctrine regarding the Jewish people. He suggests that Christian failures during the Holocaust were due not only to antisemitic distortions of faith but also to “privatized, tribalistic and establishment Christianity.”<sup>161</sup> “What died at Auschwitz . . . was not the Gospel but a corrupt version of 'Christianity' and 'church' that

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>159</sup> Gushee, interview with the author, Aug. 7, 2015.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Gushee, “Good News,” 165.

helped pave the way for mass murder,” Gushee writes.<sup>162</sup> What must be specifically renounced is a Christian version of salvation history that fomented theologically inspired hatred. By contrast, Gushee calls Christians to retain and retrieve the kind of Christianity that motivated the few Christian rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, a Christianity “of deeds that conform to God's revealed moral will.”<sup>163</sup> In this regard, Gushee cites Jewish philosopher Irving Greenberg, who once wrote that “religion is as religion does; all the rest is talk.”<sup>164</sup> Gushee references both the Old Testament’s emphasis on doing deeds of justice and mercy as well as Jesus’ summary of the law as love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). “After the Holocaust, as we are driven back to the biblical texts,” says Gushee, “we cannot fail to see that the major note struck by biblical faith conforms to the Greenberg formula; religion is as religion does.”<sup>165</sup> There are many versions of Christianity, Gushee concludes, and many differ so far from the faith taught by Jesus as to bring more harm than good. The correct reaction to the Holocaust, he prescribes, is for Christians to reject such corruptions of their faith and be persuaded to practice “the religion taught by their Savior.”<sup>166</sup>

#### Analysis of Gushee

Gushee's call to reclaim a genuine faith is common to many Christians who attempt to come to terms with Christian failures during the Holocaust. The position emphasizes

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 172.

that Christians contributed to the presence of antisemitism and to the annihilation of Jews but suggests that the remedy lies in the recovery of “authentic” faith. In agreement with most evangelicals (as well as some Catholics and mainline Protestants), Gushee posits the reclamation of genuine Christian faith as an appropriate response by Christians to the Holocaust. Some Holocaust theologians have in turn raised the question of whether any historical version of Christian faith has existed that is free of anti-Judaism and thus whether an emphasis on “authentic” faith resolves questions of Christian anti-Judaism, historic or current.<sup>167</sup>

Gushee’s responses to the challenges of Holocaust theology position him between mainline Holocaust theologians and most evangelicals engaged in Holocaust discussion. Gushee concurs with Holocaust historians and mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians in his direct acceptance of Christian guilt for the *adversus Judaeos*. He acknowledges without defensive qualifying statements the failure of the majority of Christians to defend or rescue Jews. He also agrees with mainline theologians that Christians ought to view the Holocaust as in some way revelatory, and that the Christian gospel must be understood in light of a truthful encounter with the Holocaust and with the magnitude of Christian failure under Nazism. He acknowledges theological complicity by the church for its historic anti-Jewish teaching as well as actual complicity in the behavior of Christians under Nazism.

As an evangelical, however, Gushee parts ways with mainline theologians over the lengths to which the Christian theologian can go in re-examining historic Christian faith.

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<sup>167</sup> Haynes, *Holocaust Education*, 79, 83.



He takes exception to the proposition of some mainline Holocaust theologians that Christians must question essential truths of their religion. Christians are not free, he suggests, “to assume that the problem lies with the Christian faith itself, which must thus be abandoned or radically revised in ways that transgress the boundaries of scriptural revelation,” considering this a path to “Christian theological suicide.”<sup>168</sup> From the perspective of an evangelical, the re-examination of faith is limited by a commitment to biblical authority, Gushee notes. However, respect for the Bible’s authority requires Christians to “cut through inherited patterns of interpretation and hermeneutical grids in order to see the Scripture afresh.”<sup>169</sup>

Gushee cites as an example the process that Southern Baptist and evangelical leaders have followed on the issue of racism. “If the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, and if the content of the Christian faith is established by the Bible, and if it can be shown that racism is clearly ruled out for the Christian believer when Scripture is rightly understood, then there can be no place for racism in the Christian life,” Gushee notes.<sup>170</sup> Progress, where it has occurred, has not required the abandonment of core understandings of the sources and norms for Christian convictions. Instead “a fresh reading of Scripture has provided potent evidence for acknowledging prior heresy (doctrine) and sin (practice). In my context then, the revision of Christian practices and beliefs always involves a contest over the meaning and interpretation of Scripture, says Gushee.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Gushee, interview with the author, Aug. 6, 2015.

<sup>169</sup> Gushee, “Good News,” 171.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 159.

Gushee therefore calls evangelicals to work within the parameters of their beliefs about the authority of the Bible while remaining open to demands for the change or transformation of beliefs and behaviors. As church leaders have worked to combat antisemitism, Biblical passages that had contributed to anti-Judaism and that “everyone” had interpreted in a certain way have been interpreted in new ways, or contextualized more seriously, or treated as secondary to more important texts and theses, he says.<sup>172</sup> No Christian group can claim an infallible interpretation of scripture due to the self-interest, experience and social setting that affect Christian perception of the Bible, he suggests. That being the case, all interpretations of scripture must in principle be seen as always open to correction and revision, Gushee concludes.

Gushee does not elucidate precisely where the boundaries of scriptural revelation lie although he indicates that those types of Holocaust theology which evangelicals would say abandon or revise core Christian doctrines exceed such boundaries. Other branches of the Christian family construe the process of theological reflection and revision quite differently than do evangelicals, he observes. “Some are far more open to radical revision of Christian convictions based on, for example, a very different understanding of the nature and authority of Scripture.”<sup>173</sup> Limited by orthodox Protestant theology, Gushee does not call for not a rejection of biblical texts or of cardinal doctrines such as a traditional Christian understanding of the resurrection. Instead, he suggests a process that involves “fresh research on the background and meaning of the texts, broader

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<sup>172</sup> Gushee, “Ending the Teaching of Contempt against the Church’s Sexual Minorities,” The Reformation Project (Washington, D.C: Nov 8, 2014); [www.reformationproject.com](http://www.reformationproject.com)

<sup>173</sup> Gushee, “Good News,” 159.

contextualization of the circumstances in which they were written, and constructive reinterpretation in the spirit of Christ.”<sup>174</sup>

Gushee’s insistence that the Holocaust is a revelatory event for Christians marks him as unique among American evangelicals. Christians are not free to ignore the “tragic gap between Christianity as taught by Jesus and lived by those who carry his name. Not responding to that gap is to sin further. We are not free to ignore it,” Gushee asserts.<sup>175</sup> Gushee’s position that Christians should not pass judgement on the “eternal status” of Jewish people also runs counter to that of most evangelicals.<sup>176</sup>

Nonetheless, he retains his belief that such change involves working within the limits created by evangelical convictions about the inspiration, authority and truthfulness of the Bible. In contrast to those mainline Holocaust theologians who advocate drastic reshaping of Christian theology, Gushee insists that Christians are not permitted to tinker with core Christian doctrine. Based on openness to re-examining Scripture, Gushee parts ways with many evangelicals. Based on his adherence to the authority of Scripture, he parts ways with many Holocaust theologians. This no-man’s-land position makes Gushee’s views unusual, if not unique, from a variety of perspectives.

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<sup>174</sup> Gushee, “Ending the Teaching of Contempt against the Church’s Sexual Minorities,” The Reformation Project (Washington, D.C: Nov. 8, 2014), accessed June 13, 2015, [www.reformationproject.com](http://www.reformationproject.com)

<sup>175</sup> Gushee, “Good News,” 162.

<sup>176</sup> A few other evangelicals assert that Gentile Christians have no right to evangelize Jews. Willem J.J. Glashouwer, in *Why Israel?* suggests that Gentiles should leave Jewish evangelism to God and to Messianic Jews who feel called to witness to Jews. “We Gentiles . . . stand at a distance, often with the heavy load of church history hanging around our necks . . .” Willem J.J. Glashouwer, *Why Israel?* trans. Mineke Spencer, 2nd ed. (Nijkerk, The Netherlands: Christians for Israel International, 2005): 141-2.

## Colin Barnes

Colin Barnes, a theologian and historian on the faculty of King's Evangelical Divinity School in Broadstairs, Kent, in the United Kingdom, is the author of *They Conspire Against Your People: The European Churches and the Holocaust*, published in 2014.<sup>177</sup> The book is an expansion of Barnes' thesis at Morling College, Sydney, and the Australian College of Theology conducted under the supervision of Konrad Kwiet, a professor of Jewish and Holocaust Studies at the University of Sydney and resident historian at the Sydney Jewish Museum. Barnes is Australian and currently associated with a British evangelical college; this places him somewhat outside the mainstream of American evangelicalism. Nevertheless, I have included a discussion of his book because he writes as both a Holocaust historian and an evangelical theologian who directs his conclusions to the evangelical community. Furthermore, his writing represents some of the most recent evangelical attention to the subject. Barnes is an evangelical in his view of the Bible as divinely inspired and the sole source of faith and practice, and in his adherence to traditional Christian soteriology. His distinctiveness as an evangelical lies in his willingness to fully acknowledge the failure of the German churches under Nazism and the role of punitive Christian supersessionism in that failure. He echoes several of Gushee's positions but discusses the historical details of church failure at much greater length.

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<sup>177</sup> Colin Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People: The European Churches and the Holocaust* (Broadstairs, Kent: King's Divinity Press, 2014).

### Questions of Responsibility

In his book, Barnes unabashedly contends that German Christians during the Holocaust were guilty, acted from their own theological understanding about Jews based on replacement theology, and that the Holocaust itself condemns that theology. (Barnes opposes a particular type of replacement theology which claims Israel as a nation and a people has been permanently replaced in God's covenant.) His findings support those of Holocaust historians such as Barnett, Heschel, Gerlach and Ericksen, concluding that European Christianity was surprisingly united across time, region and sectarian divides in its negative view of the Jewish people. Barnes argues that the stages of vilification, boycotts, deportation and ghettoization of Jews repeated the pattern of the European churches' own Jewish policy in the centuries leading up to the Holocaust. This pre-existing pattern, based on the theological view of punitive supersessionism (that God had punished the Jews and replaced them with Christianity), proved decisive in molding the European churches' responses to the unfolding Nazi program, he says.

Especially significant is his study's treatment of Protestant perceptions of the Jewish people. German Protestants disagreed with Nazi policy only on questions of definition (whether Jews were defined by race or by religion) and on whether the final solution should be conversion or genocide. This distinction proved largely irrelevant, Barnes contends: The churches never viewed their converts as a bridge to aiding the wider Jewish community, while the cumulative effect of support for all earlier Nazi Jewish policies left the churches morally incapable of opposing genocide. Instead, says Barnes, they opted for a guilty, deliberate silence. Some members of the Confessing Church

risked their safety and their lives by hiding or assisting Christians of Jewish descent, and some were imprisoned or executed as a result. Despite this heroism on the part of a small percentage of Confessing Church members, the church itself refused to attack or even publicly criticize the Nazi state for its actions against Jews. A few Confessing Church clergy expressed opposition to the mass murder of Jews in private letters to government ministers, but even these accounts demonstrate how deeply affected they were by their own cultural and religious antisemitism.<sup>178</sup>

Barnes' systematic investigation of the responses of the churches to the unfolding progression of the Holocaust across Europe, in country after country, concludes that the presence and theology of the Christian churches in Europe actively aided the Holocaust:

In fact, the most pervasive interaction of the churches with the Holocaust was the deadening of the consciences of their congregations across Europe. Their public support of boycotts and deportations, and their ongoing vilification of the Jews, as well as their general silence over the actual killings, meant that they deprived their congregations, who looked to them for moral guidance, of the ability to discern evil and reject it (352).

As do most Holocaust historians and mainline theologians, Barnes directly and without equivocation or qualification acknowledges both theological and actual complicity in the essential role played by Christian anti-Judaism and the failure of the German churches. In the extent of his detailed and sweeping condemnation of the churches, including the Confessing Church, he diverges from most evangelical approaches to questions of Christian guilt. As noted earlier, there is a general tendency among evangelicals and other Christians to see the Holocaust as perpetrated by non-

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<sup>178</sup> See also Robert P. Ericksen, "Consent and Collaboration: The Churches Through 1945," in *Complicity in the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94-138.

Christians, and to laud the Confessing Church as a group of heroic rescuers. In strong contrast, Barnes concludes that the Confessing Church responses to the Holocaust, with a few notable exceptions, failed as miserably as most other German Christians.

Commenting on Barnes' book, Calvin L. Smith, principal of King's Evangelical Divinity School, comments that:

We sometimes hear about the pre-war Roman Catholic Church's attitudes towards the Jews which not only reflected European deep-rooted anti-Semitism at the time but also contributed to a milieu which allowed the Holocaust to happen. Yet we read far less about Protestant attitudes (Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, even Pentecostal) towards the Jews in Germany and across pre-war Europe, which [according to Barnes] likewise permitted the architects of the Holocaust to go about their genocidal task . . . . Evangelicals take note.<sup>179</sup>

For more than 1,800 years, the Christian Church persecuted Jews to prove that they were under God's punishment, and that the Church was in possession of their blessings, says Barnes. He details the failure of Confessing Church leaders to openly recant their praise for Nazi ideas or seriously challenge Nazi policies as the brutality escalated. He observes that his material did not come from fringe or unrepresentative sections of the churches but from among the leading voices of German Protestantism, including Confessing Church clergymen Theophil Wurm and Martin Niemöller. Christians who looked to their churches for practical moral guidance were encouraged to support antisemitism, concludes Barnes. Far from merely a failure to help Jews, “the historical consequence of the churches' behavior during the Holocaust was their complicity in mass murder,” he asserts.<sup>180</sup> These responses of church leaders were the fruits of

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<sup>179</sup> Calvin L. Smith, Principal of King's Evangelical Divinity School, review of Barnes (June 13, 2013); [www.calvinlsmith.com](http://www.calvinlsmith.com)

<sup>180</sup> Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People*, 385.

supersessionism, Barnes says. “Anti-Jewish legislation is approved of by these churches, based on 2,000 years of Church history, the 'accursed' nature of the Jews, the 'divine plan' for them and 'God's word.' Jewish suffering was officially promoted by these churches based on their own doctrines,” says Barnes.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, such church doctrines must be re-examined, he argues.

Like other evangelical authors, Barnes sees the actions of the churches in Europe during the Holocaust as proof that whatever the churches were, they were not Christian. However, unlike Johnson and Terrell, but in agreement with the mainline Holocaust theologians we have examined, Barnes directly links the Church's failure to its supersessionist history: “If the Church had originally delegitimized the Jews to defend their own self-understanding, the fruits of that original sin now returned to delegitimize the Church.”<sup>182</sup> Comments Barnes, “That the near unanimous voice of mainstream church history as it related to a significant area of church life is now revealed to be the source of profound and massive sin is not something any church can be comfortable with.”<sup>183</sup>

#### Response to requests for theological change

How should Christians after the Holocaust react to what Barnes terms the “utter failure of Christendom?” How should this culpability affect Christian theology? Barnes does not discuss the alleged antisemitism of the New Testament or his specific view of the validity of Judaism but he does directly link “punitive” supersessionist theology with

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<sup>181</sup> Barnes, “Denouement of Supersessionist Triumphalism,” in *The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism*, ed. Calvin L. Smith (Broadstairs, Kent: King’s Divinity Press, 2009, 20013), 76.

<sup>182</sup> Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People*, 397.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.



the failures of the German churches and insists that this type of supersessionism must be rejected.<sup>184</sup> Barnes comments in an interview that replacement theology is “simple theft. It takes God’s promises to Israel and states that they do not apply to Israel but only to an overwhelmingly Gentile church. It has always seemed to me a shoddy thing.”<sup>185</sup> He concludes his book by quoting mainline Holocaust theologian Alice Eckardt:

“Christianity has [still] failed to grasp the crucial nature of the questions raised by the Holocaust for its own theology and future, just as it generally has refused to admit any responsibility for the death camps . . . [those who have] see a church in vast apostasy, involved not only in the murder of Jews but also of God through his people, still linked to a supersessionist theology that bears the genocidal germ . . . .”<sup>186</sup>

#### Analysis of Barnes

Barnes' book primarily confines itself to a presentation of the history of the German churches under Hitler. It is first and foremost a historical work, but he is clear about this history's implications for contemporary Christian thought. He calls for Christian churches

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<sup>184</sup> Gabriel Fackre lists five types of supersessionism, which vary in their views of the ultimate savioric fate of Jewish people (i.e, whether the “replacement” is temporary or permanent). These include (1) retributive (God has permanently judged Israel and replaced it with the church) (2) non-retributive (God has replaced Israel with Christ but Israel’s future is unspecified) (3) modified (Christ brings salvation but Jews have the right to live securely as Jews) (4) messianic (Jews must convert to Christ but should retain their Jewish customs and (5) Christological election (Israel’s eternal election cannot be separated from Christ, referencing Karl Barth). Fackre also describes eight types of antisupersessionism, at least three of which are embraced by some evangelicals: (1) dispensationalism (prophecies to a literal people require a literal fulfillment, so Christ will eventually reign over a converted Jewish nation in Palestine) (2) paradoxical (Israel’s covenant remains in force but the church is still called to invite everyone to Christ, including Jews and (3) eschatological (Faithful Jews will encounter Jesus in the end and be saved). Messianic Jew Mark Kinzer suggests that Jesus is present with the Jewish people without being recognized. Some dispensationalists as well as some *Sonderweg* or “special way” evangelicals hold to a view that other evangelicals consider a form of dual covenant theology, asserting that Israel cannot be converted by the church and that missionary enterprises to Jews are a questionable enterprise. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 147-67, also discussed in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 178-179.

<sup>185</sup> Barnes, interview with the author, Aug. 6, 2015.

<sup>186</sup> Alice Eckardt, “The Shoah-Road to a Revise/Revived Christianity” in *From the Unthinkable to the Unavoidable: American Christian and Jewish Scholars Encounter the Holocaust*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 140, cited in Barnes, *They Conspire*, 403.

to re-examine not only their history, but also their doctrines and self-understanding in light of the Holocaust, urging Christians to act, confess and repent.

Barnes marshals an enormous amount of unusually detailed support for his scathing indictment of the Christian churches in Germany during the Nazi regime. Perhaps reflecting his position as both a historian and a pastor addressing the evangelical community, Barnes exhibits a propensity for strong rhetoric and a tendency to overly disparage the examples of some Confessing Church clergy who acted privately, if not publicly, to help Jews. Nonetheless, the scope of Barnes' analysis makes an important contribution to the debate over the role of the German churches under Nazism. Because Barnes does not attempt to explain away or ignore the churches' failures and entrenched anti-Judaism, his is an important voice for theological conservatives. The intensity of Barnes' emphasis on Christian guilt and failure in relation to the Holocaust and the detailed history he has written indicting the churches under Nazism mark his work as unprecedented within evangelicalism.

Like Gushee, Barnes's conclusions position him between many evangelicals and many mainline Holocaust theologians. In opposition to many evangelical theologians, Barnes calls the Holocaust the "denouement of supersessionist triumphalism."<sup>187</sup> As noted, he here refers to a type of supersessionism which states that the covenants God made with the Jewish people were invalidated by Jewish refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Barnes, who calls replacement theology "blasphemy," acknowledges the Jews

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<sup>187</sup> Barnes, "Denouement of Supersessionist Triumphalism," 65-89.

as a covenant people while remaining supportive of Christian outreach to Jews.<sup>188</sup> His support of Jewish evangelism by Christians places him in opposition to most mainline Holocaust theologians. Mainline Holocaust theologians generally deem any belief that Jesus is the savior of Jews as well as Gentiles to be supersessionist. Barnes, who asserts that God's covenant with the Jews remains in effect but also that Christians "who love them with the love of God" should "witness" to them about Jesus, takes a different approach.<sup>189</sup>

It is undoubtedly significant that over a four-year period, none of the many Christian publishers in the United States whom Barnes approached about publishing his research would even view the manuscript.<sup>190</sup> Ultimately, a center for Jewish-Christian Studies at a British divinity school ended up publishing Barnes' book. Barnes sought an evangelical publisher as his goal was to encourage American evangelicals to take the sins of the church seriously and repent; his motivation, he says, was not simply to attack the church. "As to why none of these [American] publishers showed any interest," he comments, "my conclusion is that they did not think that a book which convicted the churches of sin would be a profitable proposition."<sup>191</sup>

#### Summary of evangelical responses

The introduction to this paper reviewed the requests of Holocaust historians and theologians that Christians both acknowledge the role of Christian anti-Judaism in

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<sup>188</sup> Barnes, interview with the author, Aug. 6, 2015.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., March 4, 2015.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., Jan. 25, 2015.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

facilitating the Holocaust and also acknowledge the failures of the churches to oppose the Holocaust. Building upon this general historical foundation, other mainline Holocaust theologians move to request specific theological or doctrinal changes from contemporary Christianity.

In response to the first set of requests, the five evangelicals surveyed in this paper show considerable variation in their degree of emphasis on the historical failure of Christians as well as the role played by the “Teaching of Contempt” and thus the guilt of the historic Christian church. However, these evangelical writers display unity in disavowing any changes that impinge on the evangelical view of the authority of the Bible, although some disagree on the line between reinterpretation of biblical texts and Christian doctrines and actual rejection of such texts and doctrine.

Of these writers surveyed, Gushee and Barnes acknowledge with anguish the enormity of Christian failure and the role of Christian anti-Judaism in that failure. Both call for a re-examination of Christian doctrine and practice. In sharp contrast, Davis and Terrell do affirm that Christians for the most part failed miserably to defend Jewish people under Nazism, but they downplay these failures by qualifying them and pointing to sources of antisemitism apart from the churches. Both attempt to separate Christianity from Nazi antisemitism by arguing that “real” Christians do not commit murder. Johnson acknowledges a certain amount of Christian complicity in the Holocaust but argues that the problem of evil illuminated in the Holocaust is no different for Christians than any other evil in history. He does not seem to engage with either the level of Christian failure

or the significance of Christian anti-Judaism as a source of evil. For Johnson, the Holocaust is not an event in Christian history.

In response to requests for theological re-evaluation, Davis, Terrell and Johnson share a common insistence that, whatever failures Christians exhibited during the Nazi era, the problem is not fundamentally with Christian doctrine itself. In comparison to the mainline theologians examined, Davis and Terrell demonstrate less willingness to accept responsibility as Christians for the role of anti-Judaism during the Holocaust. Unlike Littell and the Eckardts, these evangelicals do not accept the demand of Holocaust theology that Christian doctrine itself must be re-examined and possibly discarded.

While they sharply disagree on the severity of the moral challenge under consideration, all five evangelicals are unified in their belief that the solution to Christian failures during the Holocaust lies in the reclamation of genuine Christian faith. Gushee and Barnes counterbalance the reclamation argument significantly, however, by also calling for repentance and a re-examination of Christian theology. Barnes suggests that punitive replacement theology must be re-examined and rejected. The Church's history and identity are both fundamentally called into question by its actions during the Holocaust, he argues, and Christian churches “must be prepared to re-examine their history, doctrines and self-understanding in the light of the Holocaust.”<sup>192</sup> What such a re-examination would entail beyond a repudiation of punitive replacement theology is not something Barnes specifically addresses. His support of Christian evangelism towards

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<sup>192</sup> Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People*, 402-3.

Jewish people would be identified by many Holocaust theologians as a form of supersessionism.

In agreement with Barnes, Gushee says that the context of the Christian gospel must be understood in light of a truthful encounter with the Holocaust, especially with the attendant Christian failure. Theological anti-Judaism created an ideological legacy that prompts “sustained Christian attention with an eye to a reconsideration of scriptural interpretations,” says Gushee, adding that this is something evangelical Christians “have rarely considered seriously.”<sup>193</sup> Christians must re-examine their theological roots to find reasons for the tragic gap between Christianity as taught by Jesus and the religious practice lived in the Holocaust, says Gushee.

The range of positions expressed among the five authors do not reflect significant generational shifts. Davis, writing in 1981, Terrell in 2011, and Johnson in 2001-2008 share a number of positions. Gushee, whose primary work on the Holocaust was first published in 1994, expresses positions more in common with Barnes, who published in 2014, than with Davis, Terrell or Johnson. The important differences observed among evangelicals appear to mirror the breadth of the evangelical movement as a whole. These differences also seem to reflect the backgrounds of individual scholars rather than any theological or sociological changes over time, as will be discussed in the conclusion. However, the growth of Messianic Jewish theology which examines post-Holocaust questions (noted at the beginning of the paper) clearly follows the evolution of the Messianic Jewish movement.

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<sup>193</sup> Gushee, “The Good News After Auschwitz,” 160.

### Sociological and Theological Factors

If changing attitudes towards the Holocaust do not explain the differences observed in evangelical positions, what factors may be involved? What lenses, theological or otherwise, prompt some within the evangelical faith community to respond differently to one another and also differently than mainline Protestant Holocaust theologians? What attributes of American evangelicalism undergird the evangelical responses this paper has examined?

### Philosemitism

Several of the attributes of American evangelicalism discussed in the introduction are evident in evangelical responses to Holocaust theology. One such factor affecting evangelical Holocaust responses is the strength of evangelical philosemitism. Paradoxically, the evangelical affinity for and self-identification with Jews appears to exert a limiting effect on evangelical attention to the challenges of Holocaust theology. American Evangelicals celebrate a form of philosemitism demonstrated by their strong support of Israel. When confronted with suggestions of Christian failure during the Holocaust, one evangelical response has been to reiterate the importance of the evangelical community in the establishment of the State of Israel. In an essay which seeks to nuance the Christian track record with Jews (“Holocaust Remembrance and Christian Responsibility”), David Neff discusses the history of British Christians who supported the 1917 Balfour Declaration and comments that “without Christian activism,

there would not be a Jewish homeland today.”<sup>194</sup> Evangelical philosemitism, especially as expressed in support for the state of Israel, runs deep within evangelicalism. By the 2000s, the funds evangelicals had raised for [non-missionizing] welfare projects in Israel had reached tens of millions of dollar as year.<sup>195</sup> Such philosemitism is based on belief that God's covenant with Israel is eternal; evangelicals and fundamentalists take seriously God's promises in Genesis to bless those who bless God's people (cf. Gen 12:1-3).

Because of these religious and political commitments, evangelicals display a tendency to genuinely believe they are doing whatever they can and should be doing as Christians to support Jewish people, whether or not they actually have any interaction with actual Jewish people. Ariel has observed that evangelical writers also have tied the birth of the state of Israel to the Holocaust, viewing the national rebirth as proof that God has not abandoned his “chosen people.”<sup>196</sup>

(The fact that most Jews do not view supporting Israel as an adequate substitute for recognizing the validity of Judaism is an idea generally unrecognized within the evangelical framework.)

### Rescuer Hagiography

Since evangelicals as a community consider themselves strongly philosemitic, the suggestion that genuine Christians supported the Jewish people during the Nazi era finds wide resonance with them. Gushee and Neff observe that many evangelical Christians are

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<sup>194</sup> Neff, “Holocaust Remembrance.” The Balfour Declaration in 1917 conferred support from the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour for the establishment in Palestine of a national homeland for Jewish people.

<sup>195</sup> Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship*, 188.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.



largely unaware of the ancient and medieval developments of Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>197</sup> Says Gushee: “Some live in philo-semitic or at least pro-Israel subcultures within evangelicalism, and so the idea that Christians were once grossly anti-Jewish would come as a huge surprise [to them].”<sup>198</sup> An ignorance of Christian antisemitic history joins with the message of much evangelical Holocaust literature: genuine Christians did the right thing when confronted with Nazi evil. Evangelicals are confirmed in this view by the hagiography surrounding a few Holocaust heroes with whom their community is especially familiar. The stories of select individuals are formative. The accounts of anti-Nazi dissent Dietrich Bonhoeffer, along with rescuers such as the ten Booms, and the French village of le Chambon which provided refuge for Jews, have become almost mythic in evangelical circles. The ten Booms were Reformed Dutch Protestants, while le Chambon was led by a Protestant pastor of Huguenot descent; both shared significant religious emphases that resonate with evangelicals, including a deeply respectful view of the Jews as God's chosen people.<sup>199</sup> In the evangelical mind, Bonhoeffer is lauded as representative of the Confessing Church, that segment within German Protestantism that resisted nazification and embraced orthodox faith more than did the *Deutsche Christen*/German Church.<sup>200</sup> For many evangelicals, inspiring stories of these Christian rescuers or resisters comprise the bulk of their knowledge about Christian behavior during the

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<sup>197</sup> Neff, “From an Evangelical Perch,” *Sh'ma Journal: A Journal of Jewish Ideas* (May 2007), accessed Jan. 9, 2014, [www.shma.com/2007/05/from-an-evangelical-perch](http://www.shma.com/2007/05/from-an-evangelical-perch)

<sup>198</sup> David Gushee, interview with the author, May 6, 2015.

<sup>199</sup> Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles*, 152-159. Gushee notes concerns raised by some Jewish and Christian theologians about the belief in Jewish “chosenness”, such as in Richard Rubenstein’s *After Auschwitz*.

<sup>200</sup> Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*.

Holocaust. This influence is heightened in the evangelical religious setting, where little focus is typically given to the failures of the Confessing Church. When evangelicals such as Davis and Terrell do discuss the failures of the Christian churches under Nazism, they tend to place blame on the Catholic Church or on the *Deutsche* Church which historians have shown had essentially discarded Christian orthodoxy.<sup>201</sup>

The notion that many or most of the members of the Confessing Church defended or rescued Jews fits the evangelical perception that the Holocaust was perpetrated by non-Christians; “real” (orthodox, Bible-believing) Christians could not have taken part in Nazi atrocities. This perspective is particularly evident in Terrell’s work, although Davis also makes a similar argument about “real” Christians. Haynes suggests the emphasis on a few rescuers contributes to the tendency of some evangelicals to minimize or even evade Christian responsibility. It is easy for the authenticity fallacy to enter Christian discourse when stories of rescue and resistance are told, he says.<sup>202</sup> Evangelical Christians are not the only Christians committing the authenticity fallacy; Haynes observes that this blame-shifting tendency can be found throughout the contemporary church. Church groups that study the Holocaust, he says, “almost instinctively deflect the moral burden of Christian complicity in the Shoah upon someone else. If they are theological liberals, responsibility for the faith's corruption falls upon theological

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<sup>201</sup> Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* describes how the *Deutsche* church redefined Christianity as an anti-Jewish Germanic religion, removing parts of the Old Testament deemed “too Jewish” and formulating new, heretical biblical interpretations and liturgical materials. See also Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1996).

<sup>202</sup> Haynes, “Beware Good News,” 5.

'conservatives'; if they are conservatives, 'liberals' were to blame."<sup>203</sup> Certainly for the evangelical laity, a disproportionate emphasis on rescuers also stems from learning about the Holocaust primarily through positive Christian books such as the Corrie ten Boom story, *The Hiding Place*. Gushee asserts that "few evangelicals know the history of what actually went on in the churches in Germany or elsewhere. The Confessing Church narrative is largely unknown or over-heroized or over-identified with Bonhoeffer, the best of the group."<sup>204</sup>

Evangelical popular writing often focuses on reading any event as a source of inspiration; this tendency nurtures the curious role the Holocaust plays as the subject of inspirational literature in Christian biography and historical fiction. Evangelical biographies and novels about the Holocaust do not emphasize antisemitism as a primary factor in the suffering of Jews during the Nazi regime, observes Ariel. Rather, they are the outcome of a rebellion against God in which some people went astray "while true Christians carried on with their values intact," Ariel says.<sup>205</sup> Adds Barnes, "For the overwhelming majority of evangelicals, the Holocaust was a crime committed by the Nazis against the Jews, the churches were the lesser victims, and their only exposure to it is via Bonhoeffer and Corrie ten Boom, and for those who went to Bible college, the Confessing Church Struggle (taught as a success). Laziness, complacency and a failure to take Jewish agony seriously are all to blame."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Gushee interview with the author, April 28, 2015.

<sup>205</sup> Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship*, 169.

<sup>206</sup> Barnes, interview with the author, Jan. 26, 2015.

### Distance

For a great many evangelicals, the Holocaust is not relevant to them as Christians. Bolstered by the evangelical track record in supporting Israel and by Christian literature that portrays evangelicals during the Holocaust as heroic, evangelicals are confident in their past and present philosemitism. For many evangelicals, the idea that the Holocaust should hold relevance for them as Christians is something they have never heard or considered. Janzten, a Canadian historian and an evangelical who teaches university courses on the Holocaust, observes that the evangelicals he encounters generally do not grapple with the concept of Christian culpability. “Most evangelicals I know have little to no contact with Jews. I haven’t encountered a lot of strong reaction among evangelicals against taking responsibility for the Holocaust--it’s more that the question would just never enter most of their heads,” he says.<sup>207</sup>

When Janzten teaches about the history of Christian antisemitism in a course on Antisemitism and the Holocaust, he says students at his evangelical Protestant university are challenged by the information. “I don’t know that too many are closed to [pondering questions posed by Holocaust theologians] in principle, although most aren’t willing to see Christian soteriology as intrinsically antisemitic. But there’s no place where Christian anti-Jewish history comes up as a living issue, so after a sobering discussion, I’m not sure there’s much ongoing impact,” Janzten says.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Janzten, interview with the author, March 31, 2015.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

Evangelicalism is often somewhat isolated from mainstream scholarly approaches and in general lacking deep historical awareness, Mark Noll contends, although he suggests that considerable progress has been made in the last 50 years.<sup>209</sup> American evangelicals, especially those in non-liturgical churches, are often cut off from a sense of being part of the wider Christian church and thus have no background for taking seriously the historic church failures, especially failures they perceive as unique to the European churches. The average evangelical may not be any less historically informed or concerned about the Holocaust than the average American, but the fact remains that few evangelical historians have focused their attention on the Holocaust, and few evangelical theologians outside dispensationalist circles have discussed the Holocaust as a matter that should concern Christians as Christians. Lacking such voices, the evangelical community remains confident in their own philosemitism, and the Holocaust is rarely viewed as a theological challenge.

Whether European evangelicals other than the Messianic community have produced a greater body of work responsive to Holocaust theology is a question this project does not address.

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<sup>209</sup> Noll points out “commendable and very serious improvement,” noting significant work by Christian philosophers and more professors willing to identify as evangelical or orthodox Christians in the broader academic world. Other historians of Christianity have also observed the influence of evangelicals in the discipline of metaphysics, including Alvin Plantinga’s Center for Philosophy of Religion at Notre Dame. Evangelical academicians such as James Davison Hunter, whose Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia publishes *The Hedgehog Review*, are among those improving evangelical scholarship in a few key topics, such as the sociological and political impact of Christianity and the consequences of Christianity in the non-Western world. David Neff, “Mark Noll on the Foundation of the Evangelical Mind,” *Christianity Today* (August 2011), accessed Aug. 27, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com). See also Michael S. Hamilton and Johanna G. Yngvason, “Patrons of the Evangelical Mind,” *Christianity Today* (July 8, 2002), accessed Sept. 23, 2015, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/july8/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/july8/)

### Biblicism

A fourth and arguably the primary theological factor affecting the evangelical responses to Holocaust theology examined in this project is biblicism, the belief that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. If one believes that the Bible represents God's word to humanity, then the tendency of non-evangelical/mainstream Holocaust theologians to express concern over New Testament texts they consider antisemitic is problematic. Holding fast to the words of the sacred text is not merely an academic exercise for an evangelical. Mainline liberal theologians such as Littell and Eckardt consider themselves devout Christians yet have concluded they may be forced to excise or radically reinterpret portions of the biblical text as part of their response to the Holocaust. Evangelical theological orthodoxy precludes such options.

Directly tied to this foundational issue, a second of Bebbington's pillars of evangelicalism comes into conflict with some Holocaust theology. Based on their view of the biblical text, evangelicals stress conversion to Jesus Christ, specifically the death and resurrection of Christ as the key, central Christian teaching. Holocaust theology which evangelicals perceive as undermining or destroying this belief (or any other foundational statement within historic Christian creeds) is not an option. Thus the suggestions of some Holocaust theologians that cardinal doctrines such as the resurrection must be revised makes such theology automatically suspect. In short, evangelicals believe they have a commitment to uphold traditional creedal orthodoxy. Whatever particular view of the Bible an evangelical holds, biblicism places this entire religious group in a different position from mainline Protestantism.

Based on the evangelical view of scripture, most evangelicals reject the idea that the Holocaust demands Christian theological changes. While evangelicals oppose antisemitism and generally agree that the *adversus Judaeos* was damaging, Davis, Johnson and Terrell exclude the possibility that the Holocaust should hold revelatory status for Christians. Gushee and Barnes take a differing view, though neither author explicates the specific theological consequences of his position.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is beyond the scope of this project to examine the ongoing evangelical scholarly conversations on questions of New Testament antisemitism, on two covenant theology or on the role of Jews as the people of God. However, the parameters created by evangelical views of the Bible limit openness to considering the New Testament as intrinsically antisemitic or to acceptance of Judaism as a valid path to God apart from belief in Jesus.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> The extremely rare exceptions to the common evangelical perspective that Judaism is an invalid or incomplete religious faith would include a few Messianic Jewish scholars such as Kinzer.

## CHAPTER VI DISCUSSION

Marvin Wilson observed that in general, evangelicals score quite high on their knowledge of the first two thousand years of Jewish history (i.e. before Jesus), and quite low on the last two thousand years.<sup>211</sup> The mainstream evangelical response to the Holocaust may confirm the truth of this statement. Genuine evangelical reflection on questions of Christian theological and actual complicity in the Holocaust, an event of incomparable importance to Jews, has been distinctly limited. Only a few evangelicals address the historical influence of Christian anti-Judaism in Europe and Christian moral failure during the Holocaust as an issue concerning their own community.<sup>212</sup> Among those who do, the tendency among evangelical theologians is to condemn the Holocaust but emphasize the supposed discontinuity between religious anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism, seeking refuge from the burden of responsibility for Nazi racism. Other approaches evade responsibility, either deliberately or inadvertently, by emphasizing the role of rescuers and by claiming that “true Christians” acted righteously when confronted with evil and did not participate in or facilitate murder. With such arguments, evangelicals embrace aspects of the discontinuity fallacy as examined in this paper. The cumulative effect is to de-emphasize the weight of historical fact regarding both the role of Christian anti-Judaism and the behavior of Christians under Nazism, including that

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<sup>211</sup> Marvin R. Wilson, *A Time to Speak*, ed. A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 172.

<sup>212</sup> Premillennial dispensationalists, while they do not grapple with post-Holocaust theology, are consistent in drawing attention to historic Christian antisemitism. At the same time, their belief that Jews need Jesus for salvation would be considered antisemitic by many Jews.



slice of German Christianity with whom American evangelicals most closely identify, the Confessing Church.

### Questions of Historical Complicity

Based on the positions expressed by evangelicals such as Terrell and in editorials in mainstream evangelical lay publications, many evangelicals are either misinformed or uninformed about the extent of Christian support of anti-Jewish Nazi legislation and Christian failure to defend Jews, or they are resistant to the conclusions of non-evangelical historical scholarship and of the few evangelicals such as Janzten engaged in Holocaust research. With the exceptions of Gushee, Barnes and as more briefly mentioned, Janzten, evangelicals overwhelmingly see the Holocaust as perpetrated by non-Christians. They tend to cite the Confessing Church as proof that many “real” Christians opposed Nazi actions against Jews. Such a position remains in direct opposition to the conclusions of Holocaust scholarship, and detailed exposure to the history of the churches under Nazism, notably the history of the Confessing Church, makes it difficult to sustain. Evangelical theologians who acknowledge Christian complicity but then make excuses for it seem unaware of the extent of Christian failure or have deliberately bypassed knowledge of it.

Evangelicals find moral comfort in this context by defining Christianity in two opposing ways. A characteristic of evangelical theology is the emphasis on defining a Christian by a person’s acceptance of cardinal Christian doctrines (as defined in the Scriptures and expressed in creeds such as The Apostle’s Creed). Most evangelical theologians involved in Holocaust discussion thus define Christianity by its theology:

“Real Christians” uphold orthodox, “Bible-believing” Christian faith. German Protestants who embraced the theological heterodoxy of Nazism and of the *Deutsche Christen* church were not actually Christians. At the same time, and somewhat uncharacteristically for traditional orthodox Protestants, some evangelicals involved in Holocaust discussion also define Christianity primarily by its deeds: “Real Christians” do not commit murder. Anyone who murdered or helped to murder Jews during the Third Reich was by definition not a Christian. The Christian Bible arguably supports the importance of both creed and deed, but the circularity of the “real Christians” position allows evangelicals to use the argument as a comprehensive defensive measure and evade responsibility. Employment of the “real Christians” argument also gravely undercuts the strong evangelical belief in human depravity; evangelicals do not typically suggest that the status of being a Christian provides a depravity exemption.

Evangelical theologians also tend to evade Holocaust guilt by seeking to narrow the sphere of responsibility of these “genuine” Christians, echoing Blocher’s position: “The ideological underpinnings of Hitler’s *Endlösung* of the *Judenfrage* were overtly anti-Christian, and as regards the Shoah itself, Christians, whether nominal or authentic, can only be charged with insufficient reactions, culpable apathy, and not with initiative and active involvement.”<sup>213</sup> The conclusions of Holocaust historians, including evangelicals such as Gushee, emphasize the level of support for the Nazi party and its actions against

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<sup>213</sup> Blocher, “Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology.”

Jews among the average Christian in the Confessing Church.<sup>214</sup> Some Confessing Church leaders opposed the extermination of Jews, but none were willing to object officially and publicly. Ericksen concludes that the killers “were given a license to kill by their churches and universities.”<sup>215</sup> Ordinary Germans who paid attention in church, listened during the religious education classes and read church newspapers heard nothing that would have prevented them from killing Jews, Ericksen says. As Barnes and others emphasize, nearly all Confessing Church leaders accepted the antisemitic stereotypes by which Jews could be seen as a problem, even an enemy, and showed almost no willingness to protect Jews from the state. Many leaders of the Confessing Church praised Hitler in 1933, and never openly recanted this praise for Nazi ideas or seriously challenged Nazi policies as the brutality escalated. Barnett discusses Confessing Church parishes where nearly every male was a member of a Nazi organization, and also the willingness with which many Confessing Church members joined the Wehrmacht.<sup>216</sup> After the war, Confessing Church leaders, along with other Protestants, made a concerted

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<sup>214</sup> Attempting to take refuge in bystander status (even if it were true that Christians were not perpetrators and only bystanders) would not solve the moral issues the Holocaust raises. Paul A. Levine contends that now that historians have demonstrated the degree to which the persecution, plunder, deportation and murder of the Jews was knowable, in many respects public, the term “on-looker” seems more precise than “by-stander.” “On-looker underscores the act and proximity of witnessing and suggests greater responsibility for outcomes, including a greater implicit reinforcement to the perpetrators,” he says. Paul A. Levine, “Onlookers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 158.

<sup>215</sup> Ericksen, “Complicity,” 230.

<sup>216</sup> Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 165, 174.

effort to explain away or excuse or whitewash the record of those with clear culpability in Nazi crimes.<sup>217</sup>

### Questions of Theological Complicity

In general, and not without cause, evangelicals perceive much of Holocaust theology to be theologically liberal and in opposition to historic orthodox Christianity. Clark Williamson argues that the traditional Protestant reliance upon the *sola scriptura* principle cannot be maintained since the Holocaust was caused at least in part by anti-Jewish statements in the Scriptures.<sup>218</sup> The linkage of Holocaust theology and theological liberalism lends itself to something of an immediate defensive reaction by evangelicals to attacks upon what they consider to be truth. The tendency then is to ignore Holocaust challenges completely, rather than accepting exposure to hard historical realities about the failures of the churches under Nazism.

Questions of theological complicity address the effects of the *adversus Judaeos*, the cluster of Christian anti-Jewish theological beliefs about Jews and Judaism (such as the deicide charge, collective blood guilt, and displacement theology). Complicity questions also ask whether Christian Scripture (and the doctrine that emerges from it) is

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<sup>217</sup> Ericksen provides detailed accounts of Confessing Church leaders such as Otto Fricke who argued post-war that Otmar Freiherr von Verschuer, a professor who was director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology and Genetics in Berlin and who received regular reports from Joseph Mengele of his research on twins at Auschwitz, as well as shipments of body parts, should not lose his job. Von Verschuer had supported the Confessing Church and had the sort of character suitable to guide the German academic world onto a Christian foundation, Fricke said. Ernst Klee, *Persilscheine und falsche Pässe: Wie die Kirchen den Nazis halfen* (Frankfurt Fischer, 1991), 128, cited in Ericksen, 174-175. Bishop Wurm argued that an SS officer from the office that organized financing of the Holocaust must have committed crimes under pressure and that as a believing Christian who read his Bible in prison, he should be shown mercy. Ibid., 101, cited in Ericksen, 175.

<sup>218</sup> Clark Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* (Louisville: Westminster: 1993), 18-20.

intrinsically and essentially antisemitic. From the evangelical perspective, these are categorically different questions. While evangelicals such as Terrell dismiss or downplay the role of the *adversus Judaeos*, many others such as Davis and Johnson fully acknowledge historical Christian anti-Judaism and agree that Christians must oppose antisemitism (while in some cases attempting to downplay the effects of that anti-Judaism during the Nazi era).

What Davis, Johnson, and most evangelicals are not willing to do is agree that the Christian Bible itself sows the seeds of antisemitism. Nor are they willing to concede that a Christian theological statement is unacceptable if it in any way suggests that Judaism is inferior to Christianity. Here evangelicals, based on their orthodox creedal theology, reject Ruether's assertion that believing Jesus is the Messiah is inherently antisemitic because it implies condemnation of Jewish people. In 1981, Davis clearly stated the evangelical position towards Ruether's claim:

While evangelicals are sensitive to the evils of Antisemitism and determined to do their part in preventing future holocausts, they are not willing to make theological discussions on the basis of Jewish approval or disapproval. Most evangelicals will continue to believe in some form of successionism and in the messiahship of Jesus whether Jews like it or not, and Jews ought to recognize the fact. (Most do in fact recognize it, I believe--better than many Holocaust theologians do.)<sup>219</sup>

Davis here suggests that Jews, being outside the Christian tradition, may understand the desire of Christians to uphold the theological boundaries that they believe define their faith—in this case, the belief most Christians would consider the essential doctrine of their religion which identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and saviour of the world.

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<sup>219</sup> Davis, "Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology," 114.

Some Christian Holocaust theologians feel more comfortable moving those theological boundaries, Davis says.

In the several decades since Davis wrote the journal article, the basic evangelical view of Christian soteriology has not altered. But does belief in the Messiahship of Jesus mean that Jews who remain unpersuaded of such a claim are outside of God's covenant blessing? Evangelicals assert what they see as the central message of the New Testament, the doctrine that salvation comes through Christ alone. This implies the need of all people, including Jews, to accept Jesus in order to obtain eternal salvation.<sup>220</sup> A very few evangelicals, such as Gushee, conclude that it is inappropriate for grafted-in Gentile Christians to attempt to pass judgement on the eternal status of Jews.

Significantly, for Gushee and Barnes, their evangelical theology does not preclude the re-examination of biblical texts to ascertain whether they have been accurately interpreted throughout church history. The force which demands re-examination is historical data, specifically their conviction that the history of Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism facilitated the Holocaust as well as their characterization of Christian behavior during the Holocaust as one of near-universal moral failure. The question is then raised of why Gushee and Barnes are willing to recognize this history and also willing to contemplate the re-evaluation of biblical texts when Davis, Terrell and Johnson are not?

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<sup>220</sup> Exceptions might include some dispensationalists who hold to a form of two-covenant theology and some Messianic Jews such as Mark Kinzer and Michael Rydelnik. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) and Rydelnik, cited in "The Gospel and the Jewish People," The Borough Park Symposium I, New York, Oct. 8-10, 2007, accessed November 3, 2015, [www.boroughparksymposium.com](http://www.boroughparksymposium.com).

### Recognizing and Reacting to Historical Fact

Why do Gushee and Barnes react to Christian guilt and complicity in the Holocaust with great seriousness and grief, rather than attempt to qualify or justify that guilt? One factor may be that concentrated historical study of the Holocaust, in particular the record of the German Protestant churches, provides critical exposure to the enormity of Christian theological and actual complicity. Gushee speculates that because he studied the Holocaust in non-evangelical settings (specifically Union Theological Seminary in New York City), he was immersed in mainstream rather than evangelical approaches.<sup>221</sup>

Barnes earned his degree from a Christian college but as noted earlier, conducted his Holocaust thesis research under the supervision of Konrad Kwiet, a Holocaust professor at the University of Sydney. Like Noll and Gush, Barnes observes that American evangelicals tend to feel disconnected from European Christianity and focus their international religious concerns on mission work in Africa, Asia and South America. “So, an Evangelical might feel, the Holocaust is something we abhor and have no point of contact with--why should I feel responsibility or guilt over it?” says Barnes.<sup>222</sup> Barnes however grew up feeling connected to Europe through extensive travel with his family, including three years lived in Germany. The family attended Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Pentecostal churches. “While very strongly Evangelical, I also feel a shared identity with the wider church,” observes Barnes. This sense of identification with historic European church failures “has forced my views regarding the

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<sup>221</sup> Gushee, interview with the author, June 6, 2015.

<sup>222</sup> Barnes, interview with the author, June 14, 2015.

Holocaust,” he says.<sup>223</sup> Barnes also grew up within a philosemitic environment and is a strong supporter of the nation of Israel.

Janzten’s work as an evangelical and historian has been briefly mentioned but not examined in detail in this project since as a historian he does not address theological responses to the Holocaust. Like Gushee and Barnes’ conclusions, Janzten’s research supports that of mainstream Holocaust historians. Janzten completed a doctorate in history at McGill University in Montreal under the guidance of Dr. Peter Hoffmann, a leading authority on the German Resistance to Hitler. His dissertation examined the relationship between religion and nationalism in Nazi Germany by analyzing Lutheran pastors and parishioners in several German regions. Janzten says he does not know of any other evangelical historians working on questions of religion and nationalism in Nazi Germany and on North American religious responses to the Holocaust. “I tend to be the token evangelical at the conferences I attend,” he observes.<sup>224</sup> The generalization that can be made about the evangelical “outliers” in this project is that they are historians or theologians who studied Holocaust history at or in association with non-evangelical universities. Each developed an intense personal interest in examining Christian behavior during the Holocaust which motivated their continued study in the field.

#### The Holocaust as a stimulus to future evangelical theological discussion

Evangelicals such as Gushee and Barnes have described in detail the overwhelming moral failures of the churches under Nazism and called for a re-evaluation of whether

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Janzten, interview with the author, March 31, 2015.



certain Christian doctrines accurately reflect Scripture. Evangelical theologians have an opportunity to engage with these challenges emerging from within their own tradition.

The rare evangelicals who agree that the Holocaust must hold some revelatory status for Christians have condemned the effects of historic anti-Judaism and punitive replacement theology. However, as historians, they have not discussed in what other ways the Holocaust should affect the interpretation of Christian texts and doctrines. Here evangelical theologians have an opportunity to take up such questions as evangelicals. It is true that many of the doctrinal changes endorsed by Holocaust theologians remain out of bounds for evangelicals due to their view of the Bible. However, while evangelicals by definition are reluctant to reconsider their belief in the Bible's authority, they may, and constantly do, question their interpretation of the Bible. Christian failure and the degree to which Christian anti-Judaism supported Nazi antisemitism during the Holocaust, arguably provide sufficient grounds to reexamine biblical texts and question the interpretation of certain doctrines based on the Christian Bible.

An evangelical scholar does not have to argue that historical experiences should prompt changes in scripture, only that historical experiences may cause Christians to reconsider long-held interpretations of scripture, Gushee suggests. He argues:

We must be willing to acknowledge the revisability of Christian convictions, sometimes under the impact of historical events and sometimes simply due to fresh revisiting of the sources of Christian thought, both because of a sober awareness of our sinfulness and fallibility and because our radical commitment to the Word of God rather than to any particular interpretation of that Word.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Gushee, "Good News," 160.

An essential question regarding the work of Gushee and Barnes remains the limitation of theological boundaries in the re-examination of faith. For Protestants, church teachings can be re-thought and reformulated. The central doctrines which comprise Christianity, however, cannot be so reformulated for an evangelical or orthodox Protestant Christian. Where, precisely, do such boundaries lie in relation to the Holocaust? Who holds the authority within evangelicalism to make the distinction between a Christian doctrine based on a passage of scripture that has been misinterpreted, perhaps for centuries, and a Christian doctrine that is essential to the very nature of Christianity and cannot be altered or rejected without destroying the very faith itself?

Gushee, in a book about Christian ethics, pointedly observes that some Christians during the Holocaust were guided by Christian sources of moral authority, such as Scripture and prayer, but “mangled them due to the power of anti-Semitism, nationalism and other ‘powers and authorities.’”<sup>226</sup> Reliance on Scripture as it had been interpreted provided motivation for supporting anti-Jewish measures, he observes. “For example, Scripture was interpreted by some Christians to mean that God was punishing the Jews for ‘killing Christ’ and should be aided in doing so.”<sup>227</sup> The Church’s teaching about the Jews was drawn from across the canon of Biblical texts, as these texts had been interpreted by Christian leaders, and reinforced by centuries of Christian tradition. Because of the Holocaust, Christians can never again relate uncritically to their own

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<sup>226</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 83.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

sources of authority, Gushee suggests. Evangelicals must be prepared to reject traditions for the sake of the Word of God, he adds.<sup>228</sup>

Discussion of Biblical sources of authority and interpretation lends itself to enormous complexity for any Christian, including evangelicals who hold fierce loyalty to the Biblical text and have strong (and sometimes sharply differing) opinions on how to interpret it. Interest in addressing such questions can only come from a genuine sense of responsibility for the influence of Christian teaching about Jews before and during the Holocaust. As has been observed, this sense of responsibility has been lacking in many evangelical circles; few evangelicals other than dispensationalists have discussed the Holocaust as an issue of theological or moral imperative to their community. Any sense of responsibility has been distanced both by geography and time (the events of the Holocaust are seen as another place and time, completely unrelated to the American evangelical context) and by way of appeal to American evangelicalism's strong philosemitic history. From the common evangelical perspective, Christian anti-Judaism was not Nazi antisemitism, and Christians should not be blamed for Nazi antisemitism. Genuine Christians acted righteously when confronted with evil. The Holocaust, in short, is not the church's responsibility. As one evangelical scholar disapprovingly observes, "The attitude is: The Holocaust was a terrible thing. *We* would never have done that."<sup>229</sup> In contrast, the late evangelical theologian Carl F. Henry commented that the Holocaust allows none of us intellectual or moral composure. While the Holocaust did not rupture

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>229</sup> Gerald McDermott, interview with the author, Dec. 2, 2013.

Christian faith irremediably, it certainly impinged upon it, he added.<sup>230</sup> Henry did not elaborate on this intriguing perspective, and other evangelical theologians have not yet taken it upon themselves to do so.

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<sup>230</sup> Carl F. Henry, "Auschwitz as a Suspension of Providence," in *God, Revelation and Authority: God Who Stands and Stays*, Vol. II (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1999), 486- 491.

### For Further Consideration

The varied opinions of evangelicals in this project suggest several areas for further consideration:

1. To what extent has the perceived “outsider” status of evangelicals within American academia affected their participation in Jewish-Christian dialogue such as Holocaust theological discussion?
2. To what extent has the divide between evangelical orthodoxy and the liberalism of mainline Holocaust theology affected how some evangelicals evaluate the evidence of Christian failure and the effects of Christian anti-Judaism?
3. Is this divide increased by the diffuse structure of evangelicalism, with its emphasis on individuality and its lack of any official body which speaks for all evangelicals?
4. A few historians who happen to be evangelicals (Barnes, Jantzen) are seriously engaging with the Holocaust, but their work does not seem to inform the average evangelical churchgoer as reflected in lay publications. Is the paucity of evangelical theological response to the Holocaust in part a reflection of the common divide between academia and society (a general phenomenon, not limited to evangelicalism)?
5. A divide also appears visible between evangelical historians, such as Barnes and Jantzen, and evangelical theologians, such as Davis and Johnson. Has the historical information detailing the extent of the effects

of Christian anti-Judaism and the extent of the failure of the Confessing Church failed to span the academic chasm between history and theology? Do American evangelical theologians (or, indeed, theologians of any sort) devote much time to examining any period of history?

6. What could be done to bridge these various gaps to increase knowledge and interest among evangelical Christians, America's largest religious grouping, in seriously probing and confronting the implications of the Christian response to the Holocaust?

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