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*Hitler, the Germans, and
the Final Solution*

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117. GK Warsaw, Process Artura Greisera (36 files); ZSL, Prozeß Greiser (transl. of Anklageschrift); Polen-365h, Bl. 677–828, Anklageschrift; Polen-365o, Bl. 88–136, Greiser's final plea. The appeal for papal intercession was reported in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22–3 July 1946. (I owe this information to the kindness of Dr. Gerald Fleming.) According to Dr. Marian Olszewski of the Instytut Zachodni in Poznań, currently working on a life of Greiser (letter to me from Prof. Nawrocki, Poznań, dated 15 May 1991), Greiser's defence lawyer, Heymowski, wrote intercession letters not only to the Pope, but also to President Truman. No response from either has come to light.

118. NS-Vernichtungslager, 251; ZSL, Prozeß Koppe. On Koppe's arrest, trial, and release on grounds of being unfit to stand: *Quick*, 15 July 1960; *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 21 Jan. 1965; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 May 1965; *Allgemeine Unabhängige jüdische Wochenzeitung*, 17 Feb. 1967 (copies in IfZ, Munich).

119. Date of Koppe's death according to information from ZSL (see n. 116 above).

120. NS-Vernichtungslager, 288–93. While these figures provide a minimum estimate, they are far more accurate than the figure of 300,000 given at Greiser's trial (ZSL, Prozeß Greiser, Bl. 58).

121. NS-Vernichtungslager, 293 n. 96.

Hitler's Role in the 'Final Solution'

Hitler's Mentality: The "Removal" of the Jews as Germany's Salvation

Hitler's very first and last recorded political statements concerned the "Jewish Question." In a letter written as early as September 1919, using biological terminology he would frequently deploy, he spoke of the activities of Jews producing "a racial tuberculosis among nations." He stated emphatically that Jews were a race, not a religion. Antisemitism as a political movement, he declared, should be based on "reason," not emotion, and must lead to the systematic removal of the rights of Jews. However, he concluded, the "final aim," which could only be attained in a "government of national strength," had to be the "removal of the Jews altogether."¹

In his "Political Testament," dictated on the eve of his suicide, with the Red Army at his gates, Hitler declared: "I left no doubt that if the nations of Europe are again to be regarded as mere blocks of shares of these international money and finance conspirators, then that race, too, which is really guilty of this murderous struggle, will be called to account: Jewry! I further left no one in doubt that this time millions of children of Europe's Aryan peoples would not die of hunger, millions of grown men would not suffer death, and hundreds of thousands of women and children not be burnt and bombed to death in the

towns, without the real culprit having to atone for his guilt, even if by more humane means."²

Almost twenty-six momentous years separate the two statements. These were no propaganda ploys. There can be no doubt that they represent fervently held core beliefs. At their heart was the link in Hitler's mind between war and the Jews — there from beginning to end of his political "career". In a terrible passage in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler expressed his belief that "the sacrifice of millions at the front" would not have been necessary if "twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas."³ It was not a prescription for future action. But the thought never left him.

Hitler's writings and speeches illustrate the striking continuity of a small number of basic, unchanging ideas that provided his inner driving-force. Whatever the vagaries of opportunistic policy and the necessary adjustments of propaganda over the years, these ideas remained a constant from his entry into politics down to his death in the bunker. It is seldom that a politician holds with such tenacity to a core body of ideas over such a lengthy period of time. And, however repulsive, and whatever their irrational basis, they did constitute a circular, self-reinforcing argument, impenetrable by rational critique, something which we can genuinely call a *Weltanschauung*, or ideology.⁴ This ideology was formed in full no later than 1925. There were really no more than three core elements, each of them a long-term goal rather than a pragmatic middle-range political aim, resting on an underlying premise of human existence as racial struggle: 1) securing Germany's hegemony in Europe; 2) attainment of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) to ensure the material basis for Germany's long-term future; and 3) removal of the Jews. It amounted to a vision of Germany's salvation — a glorious future in waiting. It could be achieved, Hitler repeatedly stated, only by heroic leadership that, by 1924, he had come to see as represented by himself. And all three strands of the vision could be attained at one fell swoop with the destruction of the Soviet Union — and with it the eradication of "Jewish Bolshevism". The war in the east that would eventually begin in June 1941 was, therefore, intrinsic to this vision.

The *Weltanschauung*, was, however, itself a rationalization of a deeper, more profound, feeling within Hitler: a burning thirst for revenge against those who had destroyed all that he held good. The war of 1914–18, when he had experienced the immense carnage as a committed and courageous soldier, fanatical about the German cause, had given him a purpose for the first time in his life. In one of the few letters he wrote from the front, in 1915, he spoke of the huge sacrifice in human life being worthwhile to produce a postwar homeland "purer and cleansed of alien influence."⁵ This was how he saw the co-

lossal slaughter — not in terms of human suffering, but as worthwhile for the making of a better Germany. This was why the news, unexpected for him as for so many others, of Germany's capitulation in November 1918, which reached him while he was hospitalized at Pasewalk in Pomerania recovering from mustard gas poisoning, was so utterly traumatizing. He had identified his personal fate wholly with that of the German Reich. An acute sense of national humiliation now merged with his own misery. His searing bitterness and visceral hatred, of a rare intensity, reflected this identification, and was now directed at perceived enemies he had begun to identify years before, scapegoats first for his own ills, now responsible for those of the nation. He could not accept the failure of the army in which he himself had fought. Dark forces of sedition at home had to be responsible. Revenge, even though he was in no position to bring it about, gripped him with the power of an obsession. Those who had undermined Germany's national prestige, had reduced her to this shame, would have to pay for it. This was the personal fire within him that was never extinguished.

It was wholly consistent, then, that from the beginning of his "career" in 1919, Hitler fanatically pursued two interlinked goals: to restore Germany's greatness; and in so doing to avenge and make good the disgrace of the capitulation in 1918, punishing those responsible for the revolution that followed and the national humiliation that was fully revealed in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. The goals could only be attained, as he repeatedly said, "by the sword"; that is, by war. Since in his eyes the Jews were responsible for these most terrible crimes of all time — for the "stab in the back" of 1918, the capitulation, the revolution, for Germany's misfortune, since in his perverted perception they were the main carriers of capitalism in Wall St. and the City of London as they were of Bolshevism in Moscow; and since in his belief in the legend of the "Jewish World Conspiracy" they would always block his path and pose the most dangerous enemy to his plans, it followed logically that war for him had to be a war against the Jews. Moreover, it was equally logical, in Hitler's mind, that, when that war was recognized as irredeemably lost, continuation of the struggle to the point of self-destruction, with the exhortation to future generations to continue the fight against international Jewry, would be needed as the final demonstration of Germany's defiance, the last act of sacrifice necessary to expiate the shame and infamy inflicted by the Jews in 1918.

The tenacity with which he held to his dogmatic belief that the Jews had caused the First World War but that, in the event of them plunging the world once more into war, they would perish, is truly striking. He repeated the

sentiment over and again, publicly and privately. He saw himself as the agent of Germany's national salvation. And that salvation would only be achieved through destroying the power of the Jews.

The consistency of Hitler's aim "to remove" Jews, and the fact that, during the years of his dictatorship, the Jews were indeed "removed," first from Germany, then from the whole of German-occupied Europe, through ruthless persecution and ultimately physical annihilation, seems to offer a straightforward answer to the question of Hitler's role in the "Final Solution". However, this role is less obvious than it might at first sight appear. While his continued personal hatred of Jews can be plainly demonstrated, how that translated into policies of persecution, then extermination, is not always easy to discern. Hitler himself remarked in one of his wartime monologues that "even regarding the Jews, I had for long to remain inactive" — for tactical reasons, of course.⁶ Yet even without Hitler's close involvement in the direction of policy, continual radicalization of anti-Jewish policy took place. And as one seminal study pointed out long ago, "the figure of Adolf Hitler is a shadowy one."⁷ This in itself has given rise to differing interpretations among historians. How far Hitler had to intervene directly in order to steer policy, and whether the "Final Solution" followed a long-term, ideologically driven plan of annihilation or arose as the end of a process of "cumulative radicalization" out of unplanned, *ad hoc* improvisation and local barbaric initiatives in attempts to cope with the self-inflicted logistical problems arising from Nazi anti-Jewish policy, have been longstanding issues of legitimate disagreement. The nature and timing of any Führer order, or even whether it was necessary for one to be given, have been a central component of the debate.

Interpreting the Decision for the "Final Solution"

With few exceptions, notably the early study by Gerald Reitlinger⁸ and the monumental work of Raul Hilberg,⁹ detailed research on the decisions and policies of genocide began as late as the 1970s, expanding greatly over subsequent decades, especially once the archival repositories in the former eastern bloc were opened. Only in the light of such research has it become possible to evaluate more precisely the role Hitler played in the emergence of the "Final Solution". Yet even now, after exhaustive analysis, much remains obscure or contentious. The problems of interpretation arise from the complexities and deficiencies of the surviving fragmentary evidence, reflecting in good measure the obfuscatory language of the Nazi leadership as well as the extreme un-bureaucratic leadership style of Hitler, who, especially once the war had be-

gun, placed a high premium upon secrecy and concealment, with orders on sensitive issues usually passed on verbally, and on a "need-to-know" basis.¹⁰

Until the 1970s it was generally taken for granted that a single, direct Hitler order launched the "Final Solution". The presumption emanated from a Hitler-centric approach to the Third Reich, which placed heavy emphasis upon the will, intentions, and policy-directives of the dictator. This sometimes went hand in hand with the claim, as voiced in Lucy Dawidowicz's influential book, that Hitler had followed a "grand design" or "program of annihilation" dating back to his traumatic experience of the end of the First World War, and that, though there had on occasion been necessary tactical adjustments, the implementation of the plan merely awaited the right opportunity, which then came in 1941.¹¹ Gerald Fleming, one of the first historians to investigate systematically the evidence for Hitler's involvement in the implementation of the "Final Solution," concurred in seeing "a strategic plan" for the realization of Hitler's aim, dating back to his experience of the German revolution of 1918.¹² Early biographers of Hitler followed a similar line.¹³ A "psycho-historical" explanation for this pathological aim was offered by Rudolph Binion, who saw Hitler entering politics in order to kill the Jews as revenge for Germany's defeat, in subliminal association with the death of his mother in 1907 under treatment from a Jewish doctor.¹⁴

A reaction to this pronounced Hitler-centrism gained ground in the 1970s. It formed a general alternative approach to interpreting the Third Reich — what came to be known as the "structuralist," or sometimes "functionalist," in distinction from the "intentionalist," approach. Rather than looking to Hitler's personal direction of policy, the fragmentation of policy-making in a "polycratic" system of government with confused and chaotic lines of administration, led by a "weak dictator"¹⁵ concerned primarily with propaganda and upholding his prestige, came to be emphasized. As regards anti-Jewish policy, too, "structuralist" approaches looked away from the role of the individual — not that Hitler's paranoid antisemitism, indispensability to the barbaric persecution that led to genocide, or moral responsibility were doubted — to the "structures" of rule in the Third Reich, and the "functions" of competing agencies as they strived to implement hateful, but vaguely couched "guidelines" for action. In a seminal article published in 1977, stirring a debate that has rumbled on ever since, Martin Broszat argued that Hitler had given no "comprehensive general extermination order" at all. Rather, problems in undertaking deportation plans, arising from the unexpected failure swiftly to defeat the Soviet Union during the summer and autumn of 1941, had prompted Nazi satraps in the occupied territories of the east to start taking the initiative

in killing the Jews in their regions. The killing gained retrospective sanction from above, but only gradually, by 1942, turned into a comprehensive extermination program. There had been, therefore, no long-term design for the physical annihilation of Europe's Jews. And there had been no specific Hitler order.¹⁶

In an influential essay published in 1983, Hans Mommsen presented a forceful argument pushing in much the same direction. Mommsen accepted without question Hitler's knowledge and approval of what was taking place. But he saw a direct Hitler order as incompatible with the dictator's endeavors to distance himself from direct personal responsibility and reluctance to speak of the "Final Solution," even among his close entourage, except in oblique terms or propaganda statements. For Mommsen, the key to the emergence of the "Final Solution" was not to be found in the implementation of Hitler's will to exterminate the Jews but in improvised bureaucratic initiatives whose dynamic prompted a process of "cumulative radicalization" in the fragmented structures of decision-making in the Third Reich.¹⁷

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, at the time that these programmatic essays by Broszat and Mommsen appeared, detailed research into the decisions that launched the "Final Solution" was still little developed. Important works, beyond Hilberg, had in the meantime, of course, appeared, damaging beyond repair the notion of a "grand design" for extermination, a plan reaching back to 1918. Yehuda Bauer, one of the foremost Israeli experts on the Holocaust, summed up the general revision by pointing to a number of stages of development in anti-Jewish policy, all of them rooted in the unchanging notion of removing the Jews from Germany, though not following any long-term extermination program.¹⁸ This verdict followed two penetrating analyses of anti-Jewish policy by Karl Schleunes and Uwe Dietrich Adam which pursued the vagaries and cul-de-sacs of Nazi persecution, ruling out the notion of a simple strategy of implementing a longstanding extermination plan determined by Hitler. Far from being a straight path, the road to Auschwitz, according to Schleunes, was a "twisted" one.¹⁹

Directly prompted by Broszat's hypotheses, one of the first researchers to explore the intractable and highly complex source material for the crucial months in 1941 which saw the emergence of the "Final Solution" (meaning not just the mass killing of Jews in the Soviet Union in the wake of "Operation Barbarossa," but a program to exterminate all the Jews of Europe in Nazi occupied areas) was Christopher Browning—in the early stages of a career which saw him advance to become one of the world's leading experts on the Holocaust. Rejecting Broszat's emphasis upon local initiatives only gradually

congealing into a program, Browning insisted upon central direction and returned to an emphasis upon a decision by Hitler, which, like Hilberg and others, he placed in summer 1941. He saw this decision crucially reflected in the mandate given by Göring to Heydrich on July 31, 1941, ordering him to prepare a "total solution of the Jewish question."²⁰ The novelty of Browning's interpretation, however, was that he envisaged Hitler commissioning Göring to work out a plan for the "Final Solution" to be confirmed at a later date—in effect the first part of a two-staged order. The next months witnessed radicalization at various levels, during which the killing of Jews escalated greatly. There was confusion, contradiction at times, and much improvisation. But none of this was incompatible, in Browning's view, with a mandate to work for the extermination of the Jews dating back to the previous July. Browning concluded that in late October or November 1941, with the attack on the Soviet Union stalled, Hitler approved "the extermination plan he had solicited the previous summer."²¹ In numerous impressive detailed studies that he has published on the topic since this early essay, Browning has never substantially revised this interpretation.²²

The timing, as well as the nature, of any Führer decision for the "Final Solution" had by now become a central issue of interpretation. It was extensively debated at an important conference in Stuttgart in 1984.²³ Most—though not all—of the experts participating accepted that there must have been a Führer order. However, on the date of such an order (which all agreed was at some point in 1941) interpretation varied considerably. The dominant view was that the crucial decision—mainly seen as linked to the Göring mandate—for the extension to the whole of Europe of the physical annihilation of the Jews already raging in the Soviet Union took place in summer, while the end of the war seemed imminent. Some, however, placed a Hitler decision not in the "euphoric" phase of the summer, but in the autumn, when it was realized that the war in the Soviet Union would drag on, and when the possibility of deporting Jews into Soviet territory, as earlier envisaged, had evaporated. The question of the timing of any Hitler decision had acquired wider significance. The "euphoria" interpretation had him planning to destroy the Jews from a position of strength, when ultimate triumph seemed within his grasp. It pointed in the direction of a determining intention to kill the Jews when the opportunity arose. The alternative, a decision taken from effective weakness, when the prospect of victory had receded and the problems of a protracted and bitter war were mounting, was more suggestive of a reaction to circumstances that had spiraled out of control, a response to the inability to bring about the desired territorial solution of the "Jewish question" by deporting

Jews to the arctic wastes of the Soviet Union, and a vengeful determination to succeed in the "war against the Jews" even should ultimate victory in the military war prove impossible to attain.

The case for placing a Hitler decision not in the euphoria of high summer expectations of imminent victory, but some two months later, when pessimism over a long war in the east was starting to grip the dictator, was most cogently advanced by Philippe Burrin, writing in the late 1980s. In contrast to Brownling and others, Burrin argued—a point meanwhile more widely accepted—that it would be mistaken to see in the Göring mandate of 31 July 1941 a reflection of a fundamental order by Hitler for the "Final Solution", that is, to extend the genocide already taking place in the Soviet Union into a program for the physical extermination of the whole of European Jewry. Rather, according to Burrin, the Göring mandate still fell within the remit of attaining a territorial settlement in the east once the war was over. The mandate, which had been drafted in Heydrich's own office for Göring's signature, was aimed at establishing the authority—in an issue where there were many competing instances—of the head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* in all matters pertaining to the solution of the "Jewish Question". The lack of clarity that evidently still prevailed among Nazi authorities in the late summer and early autumn of 1941 meant, for Burrin, that no decision for the "Final Solution" had yet been made. He argued that such an order in September 1941 was synonymous with the decision to deport the Jews to the east—one unquestionably made by Hitler, and at a time when he was gloomy about the slowing advance in the Soviet Union and the growing prospect of a long conflict.²⁴

Soon after Burrin's study appeared, the archives of the former eastern bloc started to divulge their secrets. Predictably, a written order by Hitler for the "Final Solution" was not found. The presumption that a single, explicit written order had ever been given had long been dismissed by most historians. Nothing now changed that supposition. In fact, little was discovered in Moscow or other east-European archives that cast new light directly on Hitler's role in the "Final Solution." Indirectly, nevertheless, new perspectives on the emergence of a genocidal program did provide fresh insights into Hitler's own role.

One outstanding work which profited from the new research opportunities was Götz Aly's study, published in 1995, of the interconnection of Nazi plans to resettle hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans in the occupied territories of Poland and the twists and turns of policy to deport the Jews. In his detailed reconstruction of racial policy-making in the eastern territories between 1939 and early 1942, Aly was able to show how increasingly radical anti-Jewish measures resulted from blockages produced by the brutally unrealistic reset-

tlement plans of the Nazi authorities. Aly concluded that there was no single, specific decision to kill the Jews of Europe. Rather, analogous to Mommsen's notion of a system of "cumulative radicalization," he posited a "long and complex *process* of decision-making," with notable spurts in March, July, and October 1941, but continuing still as a series of "experiments" down to May 1942. Hitler's role, according to this interpretation, was confined to decisions as an arbiter between competing Nazi leaders whose own schemes to deal with the "Jewish question" had created insoluble problems.²⁵

Aly's argument that there had been no precise point at which Hitler had given a single decision for the "Final Solution" has gained backing from a number of detailed regional studies into the emergence of genocide in the occupied territories. One outcome has been a clearer understanding of how, in the critical months of autumn 1941, regional Nazi authorities resorted to increasingly radical "self-help" and local initiatives to free their areas of Jews. While there were evidently signals from Berlin indicating an approaching comprehensive "solution" to the "Jewish problem" and prompting regional Nazi leaders to adopt drastic measures to resolve their own difficulties, the conflicting interpretations of the aims of anti-Jewish policy in this phase seem to imply that a fundamental decision had not yet been taken. Some local extermination programs, set in motion by local Nazi satraps in coordination with Berlin, did commence. In November 1941 construction began of a small extermination camp at Belzec, in the Lublin District of the *Generalgouvernement*, instigated by the SS Police Chief of the area, Odilo Globocnik, with the aim of liquidating Jews in that area incapable of working.²⁶ In the "Warthegau", the annexed part of western Poland, the regional police chief, Wilhelm Koppe and the Gauleiter, Arthur Greiser, liaised with Berlin about locating gas-vans at Chełmno. These began operations in early December to kill Jews from the overcrowded Łódź ghetto and elsewhere in the region as part of a deal to compensate for the influx of yet more Jews sent eastwards as part of the first wave of deportations from the Reich.²⁷ But localized "solutions", including the shooting of Jews on arrival from Germany in the Baltic in autumn 1941, did not yet form part of a fully-devised, comprehensive program. A "Final Solution" was still evolving, still in an "experimental" phase.

Research had, in certain ways, then, moved away from the differing hypotheses about the date of Hitler's decision for the "Final Solution" by implying—or explicitly stating—that no such decision had been made. By a different route, and on the basis of more profound research findings, this was returning to the broad thrust of the programmatic "structuralist" hypotheses of Broszat and Mommsen from the late 1970s and early 1980s. But the conclusions were far from universally accepted. The emphasis upon local initiatives, improvised

measures, unsteered "processes" unfolding until they metamorphosed into an "unauthored" program of extermination was not convincing to many historians. Some experts — prominent among them Christopher Browning — felt that, for all the undoubted advances that detailed regional studies of emerging genocide had brought, the central direction of policy had been underplayed. The role of Hitler, too, seemed scarcely to figure in the new explanations. Was it likely, or plausible, that the most radical of radical antisemites had played no direct part in shaping the policies aimed at destroying his perceived arch-enemy?

As David Bankier then, in a magisterial survey, Saul Friedländer had demonstrated, even in the 1930s Hitler had been more active in anti-Jewish policy, down to points of detail, than the earlier work by Karl Schleunes, in particular, had implied.²⁸ It was not easy, therefore, to accept that he had remained detached from decision-making at precisely the time when his long-professed aim of "removing" the Jews was turning into practical reality. Browning continued in an array of important publications also to maintain the importance of a Führer order, and to date this (as he always had done) to summer 1941 — the time of "euphoria." He remained unmoved by the objections raised to this dating, though he emphasized that he was not posing a single decision, but envisaging "the point at which Hitler inaugurated the decision-making process," the first move in developments that would stretch over the subsequent months.²⁹

Other historians, equally anxious to emphasize Hitler's direct role in steering policy towards an intended and planned "Final Solution," reached different conclusions about the timing of a Führer order. Richard Breitman dated "a fundamental decision to exterminate the Jews" by the dictator to as early as January 1941, adding, however, that "if the goal and basic policies were now clear, the specific plans were not," and followed only after some time, with the first operational decisions in July.³⁰ In other words, Breitman was not posing an incisive policy-decision, rather a statement of intent. But Hitler had long held the view that another war would bring about the destruction of the Jews. And at this point, in early 1941, in the context of planning "Operation Barbarossa," deportation of the Jews to the arctic wastes of the Soviet Union was opening up as a realistic prospect. There, over time, the presumption was that they would perish. It is difficult to see a Hitler decision in January 1941 stretching beyond that ultimate, though still vague, notion of a territorial solution. Though this was itself implicitly genocidal, the vagaries of policy over the following months speak against seeing January 1941 as the date when Hitler took *the* decision for the "Final Solution."

An entirely different suggestion for the date of a Hitler order came from

Tobias Jersak. In Jersak's view, the declaration of the Atlantic Charter by Roosevelt and Churchill on August 14, 1941 (meaning that Germany would soon be at war with the USA) was the trigger for Hitler, suffering at that point from a nervous collapse and reeling from the recognition of the failure of his strategy to defeat the Soviet Union, to take the fundamental decision that the Jews of Europe should be physically destroyed.³¹ However, Jersak probably exaggerates the impact of the Atlantic Charter on Hitler. It is doubtful that this in itself was sufficient to provide the vital spur for such a momentous decision — one in Jersak's interpretation, taken swiftly and without any consultation. Jersak is left, in fact, with little but speculation to support his claim that Hitler had already taken the decision when he met Goebbels on August 19, to agree to proposals put to him by the Propaganda Minister to force Jews in Germany to wear the Star of David.

Another interpretation of a fundamental decision by Hitler to launch the "Final Solution" was proposed by Christian Gerlach. For him, the disparities in implementing anti-Jewish measures ruled out a specific central order by Hitler in summer or early autumn. Despite the evident escalation of genocidal actions, there was still a lack of clarity about the treatment of the deported Reich Jews, and the various regional liquidation measures were not yet coordinated. The need to provide precisely this clarification and coordination lay, he claimed, behind Heydrich's invitation to significant figures in those agencies concerned to a meeting at the Wannsee on December 9, 1941. Pearl Harbor then intervened and the meeting was postponed. According to Gerlach's interpretation, by the time the meeting eventually took place, on January 20, 1942, Hitler's "basic decision" to kill all the Jews of Europe had taken place. In the context of a war that had now become global, Gerlach sees a speech made by Hitler to Reichsleiter and Gauleiter on December 12, and an accompanying series of private meetings with Nazi leaders during the following days, as tantamount to Hitler's "basic decision" for the "Final Solution."³² Gerlach certainly makes a good case for a further radicalization of extermination policy in December 1941.³³ But it is difficult to imagine Hitler, who refrained from speaking on the extermination of the Jews in other than vague generalizations even to his intimate entourage, choosing to announce a "basic decision" to instigate the "Final Solution" to a meeting of around fifty Nazi leaders. None of those present later referred to this meeting as of any particular significance with regard to the "Final Solution." And Goebbels, whose diary notes form the source for Hitler's reported comments, summarized the remarks on the Jews in a few lines of an otherwise extensive diary entry without highlighting them as of special importance.³⁴

A recent, meticulous examination of the complex evidence of decision-

making on anti-Jewish policy between 1939 and 1942 offers yet another variant. Florent Brayard places the date of Hitler's order to commence the "Final Solution" as a comprehensive program later than any other historian had done, to June 1942, immediately following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in Prague.³⁵ At Heydrich's funeral, June 9, Himmler told SS leaders that they would have completed the "migration" (*Volkerwanderung*) of the Jews within a year.³⁶ This is the point, infers Brayard, linking Himmler's comments to reported draconian remarks about the Jews by Hitler around that time, that the "Final Solution" — meaning the program for the complete and rapid eradication of all Europe's Jews — was initiated. It perhaps seems more plausible, however, to see it as the last major escalatory push in establishing a Europe-wide killing program. Peter Longerich's magisterial study of the "politics of annihilation" had, in fact, already established — something by now widely accepted, also by Brayard — that a comprehensive program of extermination of European Jewry developed as an incremental process, with a number of acceleratory spurts, between summer 1941 and summer 1942.³⁷ Already by March and April 1942, as Longerich shows, plans were being elaborated to deport the Jews from western Europe to the east, and to extend the killing in Poland and central Europe. Probably Heydrich's assassination provided the impetus to draw the threads together.

It seems certain, given the fragmentary and unsatisfactory evidence, that all attempts to establish a precise moment when Hitler decided to launch the "Final Solution" will meet with objections. And, of course, much depends upon what is envisaged as a Führer order. Was it a precise and clear directive, or merely a "green light" or "nod of the head"? Interpretation rests additionally upon whether decision-making on the "Final Solution" is regarded as a continuum, with adjustments and acceleratory phases over the period of a year or so, or whether a point is sought where one precise quantum leap can be distinguished as forming *the* decision.

And yet, structuralist or functionalist accounts in which Hitler's role is minimized or marginalized also seem unsatisfactory. Aly's emphasis, for instance, on the link between blockages in the Nazi plans for population transfer and resettlement of ethnic Germans and the radicalization of anti-Jewish policy, though valid, do not explain why the failure of deportation plans led to genocide solely in the case of the Jews.³⁸ This leads directly back to the role of ideology, often underplayed in structuralist accounts. Building on long antisemitic tradition, the Jews occupied a quite singular place in Nazi demology, and in plans for racial "cleansing." The Jews had been the number one ideological enemy of the Nazis from the beginning, and their murderous treatment in 1941 followed not only years of spiraling persecution but also re-

peated statements by Nazi leaders, most prominently Hitler himself, advocating their "removal." So we are back to Hitler, and to his role in the way the Nazi system of rule operated.

It seems impossible to isolate a single, specific Führer order for the "Final Solution" in an extermination policy that took full shape in a process of radicalization lasting over a period of about a year. At the same time, much indicates that the extermination program did not develop without a decisive role being played by Hitler himself. To reconcile these two statements, we should look *both* for a series of secret authorizations for particular radicalizing steps, which can only be deduced from indirect or secondary evidence, *and* for a *number* of public signals or "green lights" for action. We should also recognize that Hitler was the supreme and radical spokesman of an ideological imperative that, by 1941, had become a priority for the *entire* regime leadership. Within that framework, we now need to consider how Hitler shaped the path to genocide.

The Dialectic of Radicalisation in Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy Before the War

With Hitler's takeover of power on 30 January 1933, a proto-genocidal elite, backed by huge mass movement — the Nazi Party and its multifarious sub-organizations — held together by the utopian vision of national salvation, to be achieved through racial cleansing at the core of which was the "removal" of the Jews, gained control over the instruments of a modern, sophisticated, state system. The vision, both in its "positive" aspects (creation of a unified "people's community"; rebuilding of national pride, grandeur, and prosperity) and its "negative" elements (destruction, not just defeat, of political opponents; "elimination" of those whose physical or mental weakness or disability were seen to threaten the health and strength of the population; exclusion of Jews from public life, and their physical removal from Germany) was embodied in the figure of the Leader. Hitler's *Weltanschauung* — a set of visionary aims rather than precise policy objectives — now served, therefore, to integrate the centrifugal forces of the Nazi Movement, to mobilize the activists, and to legitimate policy initiatives undertaken to implement his expressed or implied will. The very looseness of the ideological imperatives encouraged functionalities of the regime, in myriad ways, to "work towards the Führer"³⁹ to contribute to the accomplishment of the visionary goals which Hitler represented. Among these goals, the "removal" of the Jews was a tangible objective, and one in which the pathological fixation of Hitler himself accorded with the central conviction of the ruling Nazi elite and also fuelled the widespread and

often bitter antisemitism at the Party's grass roots—a seething pot of hatred into which a poisonous concoction of socio-economic grievances, anger, and resentments was poured. And among the antisemitic elite now running the German state, no one took a more radical stance on the “removal” of the Jews than Hitler himself. Countless speeches during the 1920s had demanded that the Jews, whom he often associated with vermin or bacilli, should be “removed,” sometimes likening the removal to that of a parasite, or a germ, excised in order to leave a healthy organ. Such imagery implied that “removal” meant destruction or “annihilation” (*Vernichtung*), a term Hitler used in his bacteriological similes. The language is not just extreme but points also to a proto-genocidal mentality. The man with this mentality was now in charge of the German state. And countless Germans were seeking at every turn to implement what they interpreted to be his wishes.

Hitler was a shrewd enough politician to know when to tone down his violent antisemitism. In the early 1930s as the Nazi Party exploited conditions of economic depression and political collapse to soar towards power, his speeches focused less on antisemitism. The huge electoral gatherings, as he knew, were scarcely to be won over to the NSDAP solely by verbal assaults on the Jews. So Hitler adjusted to circumstances. His inner convictions—most notably the central place of the “removal” of the Jews in his ideological vision—had, however, not altered one jot. Once in power, Hitler knew he had to be tactically alert, particularly to the international pressures on Germany's still weak economic and military position, to press ahead with measures against the Jews—measures which he personally wanted, and which the Nazi Movement was demanding. When necessary, he could, and did, keep the Party radicals in check. At other times, it was useful to unleash their pent-up violence on the Jews. This produced a characteristic process of radicalization during the 1930s: in accordance with Hitler's expressed or presumed wishes, a “green light” to step up measures against Jews would be given to Party radicals; pressure for action would build from below, which Hitler, though remaining aloof, would approve; when, for domestic or external reasons, violent forms of persecution became counter-productive, Hitler would intervene to channel the attacks into highly discriminatory anti-Jewish legislation, at each stage placating the radicals by ratcheting up the radicalization of the measures adopted. There was, therefore, a continuing “dialectic” between “wild” actions from below and orchestrated discrimination from above. Each phase of radicalization was more intense than its predecessor. The momentum in this way was never allowed to die.

It is well to keep in mind Hitler's pre-war role in the “Jewish Question” when considering the part he played in the emergence of the “Final Solution.” It is plain that between 1933 and 1939 the decisive steps in the increasingly

radical persecution of the Jews were taken with his approval and authorization—even where, for tactical reasons, he remained publicly detached or concealed the nature of his own interventions. Letting it be known that he favored action (invariably signaled through vicious public statements) and verbal approval of the most radical measures in confidential, unminuted discussions formed the usual pattern. Hitler was certainly involved when vital decisions (with regard, for example, to the boycott in 1933, the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, and the pogrom of 1938) were needed. Crucial shifts in policy required his approval. It is hard to imagine that this was not the case during the months in 1941–1942 when extermination of the Jews began to take shape as a concrete policy option.

As German expansionism led to acute tension in foreign affairs and the threat of war grew ever closer, Hitler evidently began to dwell upon the consequences for the Jews. His obsession with what he saw as the guilt of the Jews for the immense but futile “blood-sacrifice” of Germany during the war of 1914–1918, and for the calamitous defeat and revolution that had ensued, had never left him. He was already blaming “Jewish war-mongers” in Great Britain and the USA, as well as the pernicious “Jewish-Bolshevik” Soviet Union, for any new conflagration that might ensue. And the growth and spread of German might now meant that notions of “removing” the Jews no longer had to be confined to the Reich itself. “The Jews must get out of Germany, yes out of the whole of Europe,” he told Goebbels at the end of November 1937. “That will take some time yet, but will and must happen.”⁴⁰

In the anti-Jewish climate in Germany around the time of the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom of November 9–10, 1938—a climate more menacing than ever before—“marks of a genocidal mentality” were in clear evidence in the Nazi leadership. Threats to the existence of the Jews were specifically linked to the outbreak of another war.⁴¹ Hitler himself still connected this with revenge for 1918. Speaking to the Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister František Chvalkovský on January 21, 1939, he stated: “The Jews here will be destroyed. The Jews did not bring about November 9, 1918 for nothing. This day will be avenged.”⁴² He was not, of course, announcing to a foreign diplomat a pre-conceived extermination plan or program. But the sentiments were not merely rhetoric or propaganda. There was substance behind them.

In his long Reichstag speech on January 30, 1939, in the main a defiant tirade against what he portrayed as Jewish-inspired western war-mongers, Hitler declared:

In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet, and have usually been ridiculed for it. . . . Today I will once more be a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the

nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!⁴³

This was not "the decision to proceed with [the] irreversible mission" — effectively a prior announcement of the "Final Solution."⁴⁴ Nor was it simply "a rhetorical gesture designed to put pressure on the international community."⁴⁵ The speech, though not inaugurating an extermination program which would only fully materialize over three years later, can nevertheless be seen to hold a key to Hitler's role in the "Final Solution". The frequency of his later repetition of the "prophecy" (which, significantly, he consistently misdated to September 1, 1939, the day that war began), and at decisive junctures in the unfolding of genocide, shows how it was etched on his mind. Between 1941 and 1945, in the years when the "Final Solution" engulfed the Jews of Europe, Hitler referred publicly and privately to his "prophecy" of 1939 on more than a dozen occasions. No Nazi leader was left unaware in these years of the "prophecy" the Führer had made about the Jews. Joseph Goebbels, Hans Frank, and Alfred Rosenberg were among his underlings who alluded to it at different times. The German public, too, heard Hitler openly speak of it in major public addresses broadcast to the nation on no fewer than four occasions in 1942 alone, at the very time that the grisly operations in the death-mills in Poland were going ahead at full tilt. For Hitler, the "prophecy" denoted the indelible link in his mind between war and revenge against the Jews. Its repetition also served a wider purpose. Without ever having to use explicit language, the "prophecy," beyond its propaganda effect to condition the general population against humanitarian sympathy for the Jews, signaled key escalatory shifts, acted as a spur to radical action by conveying the "wish of the Führer," and indicated to "insiders" Hitler's knowledge and approval of the genocide.

Hitler's "Prophecy" and the Implementation of the "Final Solution"

Hitler returned to his "prophecy" on January 30, 1941, as his war against the "Jewish-Bolshevik" archenemy was taking concrete shape in his mind. In the very weeks prior to the speech, he had agreed to Heydrich developing a new plan to deport the Jews from the German sphere of domination to replace the short-lived and now defunct notion of deporting them to Madagascar. Ideas of deporting the Jews of Europe to a conquered Soviet Union after an anticipated quick victory over Bolshevism were already being aired by the SS leadership.⁴⁶ The repeat of the "prophecy" at this juncture, then, was a veiled hint that the hour of the showdown with the Jews was approaching.

By the time Hitler's "prophecy" next leaves a mark in the records, in the summer, genocide was already raging in the Soviet Union. The slaughter, initially confined in the main to male Jews, which had begun with the German march into the USSR on June 22, 1941, had been widened massively from August onwards to include Jewish women and children. This crucial extension of the killing followed a series of one-to-one discussions in mid-July between Hitler and Himmler. No record of the talks was kept. But the outcome, we can reasonably infer, was that Hitler gave Himmler authorization to extend greatly the number of killing units in the east.⁴⁷ Hitler wanted to be kept informed on the progress of the killing. According to a message from the head of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller, on August 1: "Continual reports from here on the work of the Einsatzgruppen in the east are to be presented to the Führer."⁴⁸

By mid-summer 1941, Party fanatics and police leaders were vehemently pressing for Jews, portrayed as dangerous agitators on the home front, to be removed from German cities. A step on the way was to compel them to wear some form of identification on their clothing. Hitler alone, it was accepted, could take the decision. Goebbels undertook to present the case. He found the dictator, on visiting the *Führerhauptquartier* on August 18, recovering from illness. Despite the astonishing successes of the Wehrmacht in the first weeks of the attack on the Soviet Union, there were ominous signs already in August that victory would not be attained before winter set in. After the first major dispute with his army leaders, Hitler was in a state of nervous tension. Goebbels had come at a good moment to put his case for permission to compel Jews to wear the "Yellow Star." Hitler granted the Propaganda Minister what he requested. In so doing, he once more had recourse to his Reichstag "prophecy," voicing his conviction that this was coming true with uncanny certainty. "The Jews will not have much cause to laugh in future," Hitler said.⁴⁹ A key moment of radicalization of anti-Jewish policy within Germany was plainly interpreted by Hitler as a step towards the fulfillment of his "prophecy."

The decision — which again all Nazi leaders acknowledged could only come from Hitler — to deport Reich Jews to the east, taken in September 1941, constituted a major step in the direction of total genocide. Hitler had until this point insisted on awaiting final victory in the east. Now, aware that the war would drag on and conscious that the USA would probably soon be involved, he agreed to demands from a number of Nazi leaders — exploiting Stalin's deportation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans from the Volga region to the wastes of western Siberia and Kazakhstan to press for retaliatory measures — to deport German, Austrian, and Czech Jews to the east even though the war was not over. It was a vital shift in policy. And the decision,

indicated by Himmler on September 18, 1941, was taken by Hitler himself.⁵⁰ At precisely this point the Nazi Party's Propaganda Department distributed posters to all Party branches containing the words of Hitler's "prophecy."⁵¹ Evidently, the "prophecy" had by now acquired symbolic status, serving as a weapon of propaganda in preparing the German population for the deportation of the Jews through hardening the climate of opinion.

The self-created logistical problems following from the deportation decision gave the genocidal impulses in Poland, the Baltic, and other conquered eastern territories a strong and irreversible push. In the autumn, the steps into all-out genocide began to follow quickly, one after the other, as the German advance faltered and plans for full-scale deportation to the Russian wastes had to be postponed, then abandoned.

A month or so after giving the order to deport Jews from the Reich, with Himmler and Heydrich as his dinner-table guests in his field headquarters, and in the context of comments betraying his knowledge of the SS's attempts to drown Jewish women in the Pripet marshes, Hitler reminded his entourage of his "prophecy" of destruction for the "criminal race" which had been responsible for the dead of the First World War and "now again hundreds of thousands" in the current war.⁵²

Genocide was by now in the air. As preparations were under way to deport the first batches of Jews from Berlin and other German cities, Goebbels, who continued to be one of the most vehement advocates of the deportation, sustained the poisonous atmosphere with a menacing article on November 16, 1941, in his newspaper *Das Reich*, headed "The Jews are Guilty." Here, too, in an article widely circulated among the troops on the eastern front as well as within Germany, Goebbels directly invoked Hitler's "prophecy" of the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe," commenting that "we are experiencing right now the fulfillment of this prophecy." Probably, given the centrality of the issue, the article had been discussed with Hitler. An added remark by Goebbels, that any sympathy with the Jews was misplaced, certainly mirrored a sentiment forcibly voiced by Hitler on more than one occasion, as the "Final Solution" became reality.⁵³

On December 11, 1941, following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor four days earlier, Hitler announced Germany's declaration of war on the United States. By then, as we have noted, the killing of Jews in the Warthegau in western Poland was beginning and the construction of a small extermination camp at Belzec in eastern Poland was under way, while deported Reich Jews had already been shot on arrival in Kowno and Riga. But these were as yet local, rather than general, solutions. The changed situation after December 11 now provided new impetus towards a comprehensive solution.

The following day, Hitler addressed his Party leaders in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin in a speech which, as we have noted, Christian Gerlach took to be the announcement of his "basic decision" to exterminate the Jews. We have seen reason to doubt this interpretation. Even so, the speech was important. Goebbels summarized next day in his diary what Hitler had said. His brief report indicates how, in the fundamental issue of anti-Jewish policy, crucial phases of radicalization could be initiated. "With regard to the Jewish Question," Goebbels noted, "the Führer is determined to make a clean sweep. He prophesied that if they brought about another world war, they would experience their annihilation. This was no empty talk. The world war is here. The annihilation of the Jews must be the necessary consequence. This question is to be viewed without sentimentality" — a repeat of the point expressed in his newspaper article a month earlier. "We're not to have sympathy with the Jews, but only sympathy with our German people. If the German people has again now sacrificed around 160,000 dead in the eastern campaign, the instigators of this bloody conflict will have to pay for it with their own lives."⁵⁴

In the atmosphere immediately following such a decisive moment as the entry of the USA into the war, Hitler's repetition of his "prophecy" was, to go from Goebbels' account of it, more menacing than ever. Four days later, on December 16, Hans Frank, Governor General of Poland, speaking to his own minions in Krakow, repeated Hitler's "prophecy" in almost the identical words that Hitler himself had used in Berlin. "What is to happen to the Jews?" he then asked, rhetorically. "Do you believe they'll be accommodated in village settlements in the *Ostland*? They said to us in Berlin: why are you giving us all this trouble? . . . Liquidate them yourselves!" He concluded: "We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them." But he did not know how this would come about. Obviously a comprehensive extermination program still had to be developed. He reckoned there were 3.5 million Jews in his domain. "We can't shoot these 3.5 million Jews," he declared, "we can't poison them, but we must be able to take steps leading somehow to a success in extermination."⁵⁵

Over the following weeks, the steps were taken. Hans Frank and his underlings did not need any specific Hitler order. They understood perfectly well what the repetition of his "prophecy" had meant: the time for the final reckoning with the Jews had arrived. The "prophecy" had served as the transmission belt between Hitler's own inner conviction that the war would bring about the final destruction of European Jewry and the actions of his underlings, determined to do all they could to "work towards the Führer," in turning Hitler's presumed wishes into reality.

Little over a month later, at the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, to discuss the organization of what Heydrich called "the coming final solution of

the Jewish question," Hans Frank's right-hand man, Josef Bühler, State Secretary in the *Generalgouvernement*, asked directly if a start could be made in his area. He wanted the Jews there, most of them as he emphasized incapable of work, "removed" and the "Jewish question" there "solved" as soon as possible. The authorities there would do all that they could to cooperate.⁵⁶ Bühler, and behind him Hans Frank, had their way. By spring 1942, what was now rapidly emerging as a comprehensive extermination program was extended from certain districts to the whole of the *Generalgouvernement* as train-loads of Jews were ferried to the newly erected camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and, a little later, Treblinka, in what soon came to be called *Aktion Reinhard*.⁵⁷

Ten days after the Wannsee Conference, speaking on January 30, 1942, at the Sportpalast in Berlin, Hitler again invoked his "prophecy." "I already stated on 1 September 1939 in the German Reichstag," he declared (as always, deliberately misdating his "prophecy"), "that this war will not come to an end as the Jews imagine, with the extermination of the European-Aryan peoples, but that the result of this war will be the annihilation of Jewry. For the first time the old Jewish law will now be applied: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."⁵⁸ Monitoring reactions to the speech, the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) remarked that Hitler's statement had been taken to mean "that very soon the last Jew would disappear from European soil."⁵⁹

At the end of March 1942, Goebbels wrote explicitly in his diary of the liquidation of Jews in the Lublin District of the General Government. "A judgment is being carried out on the Jews which is barbaric, but fully deserved," he noted. "The prophecy which the Führer gave them along the way for bringing about a new world war is beginning to come true in the most terrible fashion." He added: "Here, too, the Führer is the unswerving champion and spokesman of a radical solution."⁶⁰

During spring and summer of 1942 the deportation to the death-camps in Poland — now including the biggest of all, Auschwitz-Birkenau — was extended to the whole of the *Generalgouvernement* and to Slovakia, and finally to the occupied countries of western Europe. Previous important decisions concerning the "solution of the Jewish Question," such as the introduction of the Yellow Star or the deportation of Reich Jews, had required Hitler's authorization. It is unimaginable that it was not again sought and given for the massive extension of the killing program.⁶¹ As Florent Brayard has argued, this feasibly occurred during discussions with Himmler under the impact of Heydrich's assassination.⁶²

The head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, who bore the chief responsibility for the implementation of the extermination program, repeatedly claimed that he was acting on Hitler's authority.⁶³ In a secret memorandum of July 28, 1942,

to SS-*Obergruppenführer* Gottlob Berger, head of the SS-*Hauptamt*, for instance, Himmler stated: "The occupied eastern territories are being made free of Jews. The Führer has placed the implementation of this very difficult order on my shoulders."⁶⁴ He certainly spoke privately with Hitler on several documented occasions directly about extermination policy.⁶⁵ According to postwar testimony provided by his former personal adjutant, Otto Günsehe, and his manservant, Heinz Linge, Hitler showed a direct interest in the development of gas-chambers and spoke to Himmler about the use of gas-vans.⁶⁶ Though their testimony is inaccurate in a number of ways and cannot be trusted with regard to detail, Adolf Eichmann, in effect the "manager" of the "Final Solution," Dieter Wisliceny, one of his deputies, and Rudolf Höss, the Commandant of Auschwitz, all asserted after the war that the orders passed on to them to implement the "Final Solution" derived from Hitler himself.⁶⁷ Second- and third-tier SS leaders directly implicated in the "Final Solution" were in no doubt themselves that they were fulfilling "the wish of the Führer."⁶⁸ There is no reason to doubt that they were correct, and that Hitler's authority — most probably given as verbal consent to propositions usually put to him by Himmler — stood behind every decision of magnitude and significance.

Hitler was kept informed of the scale of the "removal" of the Jews — sometimes in detail. On December 29, 1942, for example, Himmler gave him a report, one of a series, of "bandits" liquidated in southern Russia and the Ukraine over the previous three months. The total "executed" numbered 387,370. Of these, 363,211 were Jews.⁶⁹ It was a clear indication that, as Hitler had agreed with Himmler a year earlier, the Jews were being exterminated in the east "as partisans."⁷⁰ But by the end of 1942 the killing was no longer confined to the east, and now extended over much of Nazi-occupied Europe. And as Hitler repeated his "prophecy," in his speech to the Party's "Old Guard" in Munich on November 8, according to the SS's reckoning close to four million Jews were dead.⁷¹

Hitler continued to be closely involved in the "Final Solution." The pattern is by now familiar. In line with his "prophecy," Hitler's aim to "remove" — which now, no one was in doubt, meant kill — the Jews of Europe set the framework. Within this general remit, a radicalizing proposal would then be put to Hitler to deal with some specific aspect of the overall problem. Hitler would give his approval. The action would follow. In this way, he agreed in September 1942 to a request by Goebbels to remove Jews from the armaments industry and have them transported to the east. The roundup of these Jews followed in January 1943.⁷² In December 1942, Hitler acceded to Himmler's request to have 600,000–700,000 Jews in France, where the southern part of the country was now also under German (and partly Italian) occupation,

"done away with." Only diplomatic difficulties over the deportation with both the Italians and the French prevented the implementation of the order.⁷³

As the war turned against Germany, such diplomatic difficulties intensified. Hitler's allies, looking to a post-Nazi future, became increasingly unwilling to deport their Jews to the gas-chambers. In the wake of the German military crisis following the catastrophe at Stalingrad, Hitler took a direct hand in trying to persuade them to be more cooperative. Obsessed as ever with the notion of demonic Jews presumed to be behind the war, he pressed his Romanian and Hungarian allies to sharpen the persecution. His language, when addressing the Hungarian leader, Admiral Horthy, in mid-April 1943, was particularly vicious. Hitler urged him—to no avail—to adopt a harsher stance towards the Jews, mentioning that the Polish Jews were being dealt with like a tubercular bacillus that attacks healthy bodies.⁷⁴ A month later, speaking to Goebbels, Hitler likened Jews to insects and parasites, declaring "there is nothing else open to modern peoples than to exterminate the Jews."⁷⁵

The "prophecy," by now essentially a cliché used to legitimate to others and to himself that the war he had launched, which was driving Germany ever closer to perdition, had been inevitable and warranted, was still evidently deeply embedded in Hitler's psyche. On May 26, 1944, he addressed a large gathering of senior officers on the Obersalzberg, above Berchtesgaden. In a central passage of his lengthy speech, he referred to the treatment of the Jews. The old notion that had possessed him since 1918 of Jews as a treacherous fifth-column of seditionists and revolutionaries on the home front was again voiced. The removal of the Jews had eliminated this danger within Germany, he declared. He defended himself against suggestions that it might have been achieved more humanely by emphasizing once more the war as an all-or-nothing, life-or-death struggle, giving an apocalyptic vision of what would happen if Germany's enemies were victorious, and speaking of the horrors of the bombing of Hamburg and other cities, summing up: "This entire bestiality has been organized by the Jews." Humanitarian feelings were, therefore, he argued, "cruelly towards one's own people." He went on to hint at the action about to be taken against the Jews in Hungary—the horrific destruction of Hungarian Jewry would indeed unfold within weeks, following pressure directly imposed by Hitler⁷⁶—to remove what he called "a seamless web of agents and spies." It was at this point that he turned once more to his "prophecy" of 1939 that in the event of war not the German nation but Jewry itself would be "eradicated." The audience of Wehrmacht officers responded with storms of applause.⁷⁷

In the last weeks of the war, the "prophecy" served Hitler's need for self-justification. Although his last recorded monologues from early 1945 survive

only in dubious form,⁷⁸ the comments about the Jews on February 13 certainly sound authentically Hitlerian, and are fully in line with the repetitions of his "prophecy" that we have noted. "I have fought openly against the Jews," the text runs. "I gave them a last warning at the outbreak of war. I never left them in uncertainty that if they were to plunge the world into war again they would this time not be spared—that the vermin in Europe would be finally eradicated."⁷⁹ And as we saw at the outset, his very last political manifesto was still urging the relentless persecution of the Jews.

Conclusions

Hitler's "prophecy" of January 30, 1939, which he was to invoke so frequently in the following years, has claim to be regarded as a key both to Hitler's mentality, and to the ways he provided "directions for action"⁸⁰ in the core element of his ideology. As such, it highlights the central ideological driving-force of National Socialism, and also shows the ways in which fundamental and unchanging ideas were accommodated to shifting forms of draconian persecution and translated into ever more radical policy-decisions. It illustrates, in fact, how "charismatic leadership"⁸¹ operated in the crucial area of genocidal policy, and how Nazi activists at different levels of the regime were adept in knowing how to "work towards the Führer" without having to wait for a precise Führer order. It seems unlikely that Hitler ever gave one single, explicit order for the "Final Solution." Within the unchanging framework of his "prophecy," he needed do no more than provide requisite authorization at the appropriate time to Himmler and Heydrich to go ahead with the various escalatory stages that culminated in the murder of Europe's Jews.

In speaking, as he had done in March 1942, of Hitler as "the unswerving champion and spokesman of a radical solution" to the "Jewish Question," Goebbels was correctly summarizing Hitler's role in the "Final Solution." This role had often been indirect, rather than overt, frequently granting approval rather than initiating. The unparalleled outpourings of hatred were a constant amid the policy shifts. They often had a propaganda or mobilizing motive, and usually remained generalized. Even so, there cannot be the slightest doubt: Hitler's role was decisive and indispensable to the unfolding of the "Final Solution." Had another form of nationalist government been in power at the time in Germany, it would probably have introduced discriminatory legislation against Jews. But without Hitler, the creation of a program to bring about the physical extermination of the Jews of Europe is unimaginable.

Notes

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P A R T II

Popular Opinion and the Jews in Nazi Germany

AN INTRODUCTION TO
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN
RELATIONS

EDWARD KESSLER



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Antisemitism and the Holocaust

The eighteenth-century European Age of Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason, marked the beginning of modernity. It challenged the intellectual assumptions of the traditional religious and political role of the Church and religious authority in general. It witnessed not only the emancipation of Jews and the granting of equal rights, but also the denigration of Jews and Judaism, rooted in a new form of political and social thinking, called antisemitism.

Reaction to the Enlightenment was mixed as both Jews and Christians were struggling to come to terms with it, and in both camps there were radicals and conservatives. Some Jews, like Moses Mendelssohn, the Reformers and the Orthodox leader S. R. Hirsch, welcomed its political and intellectual achievements; others, including the Gaon of Vilna (1720–97) feared the potential of the new ideas to undermine Jewish religious tradition. Engaging in precisely the same battle, conservative Christians such as Pope Pius IX (1846–78) denounced the Enlightenment, condemning freedom of religion and applying the phrase ‘synagogue of Satan’ to describe the enemies of the Church. Pius IX’s attitude towards Jews is demonstrated by the Mortara Affair, the forced removal in 1858 of six-year-old Edgardo Mortara (1851–1940) from the home of his Jewish parents because he had allegedly been baptised by a Christian servant as a sick infant. Pius, who took a personal interest in Edgardo, was aware of international outrage but was convinced he had acted in the boy’s interests.

Mendelssohn, known as the father of the Jewish Enlightenment, (*Haskalah*) was an observant Jew who engaged with Christian thinkers, demonstrated by his open correspondence (1769–70) with the Zurich theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater, but who maintained the traditional Jewish view of Christianity. He argued that rationality was the criterion by which to assess religious claims, and regarded Christianity as deficient in comparison with Judaism. In *Jerusalem* (1783) he urged tolerance for other religious groups based upon a common humanity, and regarded the

practice of religion as a private affair for the individual and for the community concerned.

On the political front, the Enlightenment led to the Jewish emancipation, that is, to Jews gaining civil rights on a more or less equal footing with other citizens of the countries in which they lived. On the intellectual front, humanist ideas were absorbed by the *Haskalah*, which also drew on earlier Jewish models from the Renaissance. It was assumed that there was one universal truth, attainable by reason, in which all might share, whether Christian or Jewish. Only the truths of reason, for instance in science, mathematics and ethics, were certain, and these were open to all.

France in 1791, the year of the emancipation act, was the birthplace of Jewish emancipation in Europe (although the Constitution of the United States of America was the first to grant Jews equality in 1789). Anti-Jewish laws began to be repealed in the 1780s, and the French Revolution granted Jews citizenship as individuals while depriving them of their group privileges. The emancipation of Jews was promoted alongside the emancipation of women, slaves and other religious minorities (Protestant groups in some countries, Catholics in England). However, the coming of the modern era resulted in political freedom for individual Jews, but not for the Jewish people as a community. So long as Jews identified themselves primarily as individual citizens they were accorded civil rights, but their communal identity was restricted.

The Emperor Napoleon (1769–1821) considered Jews ‘a nation within a nation’ and decided to create a Jewish communal structure sanctioned by the state. He also convened the Grand Sanhedrin which paved the way for the formation of the consistorial system, making Judaism a recognised religion under government control. There was much debate about whether Jews should be emancipated and a significant contribution was made by Count Clermont-Tonnerre (1757–92) in a speech to the Sanhedrin in December 1789. He argued for an inclusive interpretation of the declaration of rights, but rejected different legal status for Jews. In his view, citizens were citizens as individuals, not as members of a religion: ‘we must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals’ (quoted in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.), *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 325–6).

Underlying his words is a tension between religious and national identity, a tension that has existed from the rise of the modern nation state until today and can be illustrated with a brief discussion of the term ‘Pole’. This has normally been used, not least among Poles themselves, as an everyday synonym for ‘Catholic’: it is not applied to Jews (or Protestants, who are

also a small community in Poland). Yet are not Polish Jews, Poles? Is there no real identification of the Jewish community as part of the Polish nation? This tension, demonstrated by the inappropriate term 'Polish-Jewish relations', undermines a sense of one national community, holding Polish Catholics and Jews together, where there exists an overriding common interest shared by the whole community, transcending partisan interests. In this example, which is applicable well beyond the confines of Poland, it is sometimes difficult to acknowledge the common humanity of those who are excluded from our community, who live beyond its boundaries. This difficulty is easily transformed into hatred and can be viewed as a significant (although unappreciated) reason for the lack of opposition among Catholic Poles to outbreaks of antisemitic violence that were commonplace in Poland.

During the period of the Emancipation many expected Jews to assimilate or convert to Christianity, and significant numbers did indeed convert, amongst them the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who abandoned Judaism only to return to it in later life. His famous remark that his baptismal certificate was an 'admission ticket to European culture' indicated something of the pressure under which Jews remained to conform, at least outwardly, to the dominant faith.

Voltaire exemplified the ambivalence of the Enlightenment. He called for religious tolerance and advocated universal human rights but was not free of the very anti-Jewish prejudices that he ridiculed, discussing Jews in ways that suggested they had innate negative qualities. Voltaire has been seen by some scholars as the father of antisemitism, thus associating antisemitism and the Holocaust with the emergence of modernity.

Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904) was the first to use the term 'antisemitism' in 1879 but it would be a mistake to differentiate it completely from its much older sister prejudice, anti-Judaism, which has a theological basis. Marr saw Jews as biologically different to model blue-eyed, fair-haired, white Teutons and asserted that Semites, darker skinned than and inferior to northern European peoples, could not be assimilated to the majority race and were a threat to them.

In France, an upsurge of antisemitism began in the late 1800s, and Jews were blamed for the collapse of the Union Générale, a leading Catholic bank. Although the Jewish community was one of the smallest and most assimilated groups in Europe (perhaps 100,000), Edouard Drumont (1844–1917) in his very popular *La France juive* (1886) argued that Jews had seized power in the Revolution of 1789 and were subverting French tradition and culture.

The Dreyfus Affair epitomised the disdain held for Jews in French society, particularly among Catholic nationalists. In 1894 Captain Albert Dreyfus (1859–1935) was arrested and tried for treason. He was the only Jewish member of the French General Staff, and was blamed when military secrets were passed to the German military attaché in Paris. In 1895, Dreyfus was publicly stripped of his rank before a crowd that shouted 'Death to the Jews!'; he was then sent to Devil's Island. When it was clear that the evidence was fabricated, Dreyfus was tried again in 1899 and found guilty by a military court. There was no chance that they would find him innocent, since that would, by implication, apportion guilt elsewhere and implicate high-ranking officers in the machinations against him. In the event, ten days later, Dreyfus was pardoned by the President of France.

Emile Zola (1840–1902) was convinced of his innocence and in *Le Figaro* in 1897 wrote the famous article, *J'accuse!*, attacking antisemitism; further articles warned of the danger of a military dictatorship in alliance with the Catholic Church. French Protestants tended to support Dreyfus and Catholics to oppose him, and Dreyfus became a symbol either of the denial of justice or of the eternal Jewish traitor. The publication of *J'accuse!* was followed by antisemitic riots in France, notably in Catholic strongholds. Synagogues were attacked in fifty towns, and Zola was put on trial and fled to England to avoid imprisonment.

The debate about Dreyfus split France. To the French nationalistic and religious right, Dreyfus the Jew symbolised all the liberal, alien and de-Christianising pressures on the traditional Christian order in the country. The Catholic Church through its media gave considerable support to the anti-Dreyfus sentiment sweeping France. The Dreyfus Affair had two major impacts: it motivated Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), a Viennese journalist who covered the trial, to write his book *The Jewish State* in 1896, and it also eventually led to the 1905 law separating church and state in France.

Perhaps influenced by Luther, many Protestant churches also shared in the antisemitic outlook on Jews and Judaism at this time and maintained the traditional *Adversus Iudaeos* position. Protestants emphasised the importance of the Old Testament (*sola scriptura*) with the aid of polarities such as promise/fulfilment, law/grace, old/new, judgement/love. The history of the Jewish people became viewed as a history of failure: God's 'old' covenant with Israel was broken and the 'new' covenant was made with Christians. This polarity easily led to a selective reading of Scripture, illustrated by the following passage by the Jewish scholar and Liberal

leader Claude Montefiore (1858–1938), who criticised the approach of Harry Fosdick (1878–1969) to Scripture:

Theologians [should be] excessively careful of drawing beloved contrasts between the Old Testament and the New. We find even a liberal theologian, Dr. Fosdick, saying: 'From Sinai to Calvary – was ever a record of progressive revelation more plain or more convincing? The development begins with Jehovah disclosed in a thunderstorm on a desert mountain, and it ends with Christ saying: "God is Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth"; it begins with a war-god leading his partisans to victory, and it ends with men saying, "God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him"; it begins with a provincial deity loving his tribe and hating its enemies, and it ends with the God of the whole earth worshipped "by a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all the tribes and peoples and tongues"; it begins with a God who commands the slaying of the Amalekites, "both man and woman, infant and suckling", and it ends with a Father whose will it is that not "one of these little ones should perish"; it begins with God's people standing afar off from his lightnings and praying that he might not speak to them lest they die, and it ends with men going into their inner chambers, and, having shut the door, praying to their father who is in secret.' (*Christianity and Progress*, 1922, p. 209). Very good. No doubt such a series can be arranged. Let me now arrange a similar series. 'From the Old Testament to the New Testament – was there ever a record of retrogression more plain or more convincing? It begins with, "Have I any pleasure at all in the death of him that dieth?"; it ends with "Begone from me, ye doers of wickedness." It begins with, "The Lord is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy," it ends with, "Fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna." It begins with, "I will dwell with him that is of a contrite spirit to revive him"; it ends with, "Narrow is the way which leads to life, and few there be who find it." It begins with, "I will not contend for ever; I will not always be wrath," it ends with, "Depart, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire." It begins with, "Should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city?"; it ends with, "It will be more endurable for Sodom on the day of Judgement than for that town." It begins with, "The Lord is good to all who call upon Him"; it ends with, "Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, there is no forgiveness whether in this world or the next." It begins with, "The Lord will wipe away tears from off all faces; he will destroy death forever"; it ends with, "They will throw them into the furnace of fire; there is the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." And the one series would be as misleading as the other. (*The Synoptic Gospels*, edited with an introduction and commentary by C. G. Montefiore, London: Macmillan, 2nd edn 1927, vol. II, pp. 326–7)

Anti-Jewish presuppositions were common among Protestants, including eminent scholars such as Emil Schürer (1844–1910), who insisted that Judaism was doomed to fail because of its particularism. It is also possible to detect an anti-Jewish undercurrent in the writings of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), best known for *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1883)

and his pursuit of Higher Criticism, which inquires into the authorship and dates of different books of the Bible; it was dubbed by Solomon Schechter (1847–1915) the 'Higher Antisemitism' because of its claim that the latest strata of the Pentateuch reflected a degeneration of spirituality into a compulsively legalistic fixation on the details of a sacrificial cult. An extreme example is Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948), editor of the influential *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, who was also a Nazi, joining the party (1933) and its Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany (1936). He openly supported Nazi policies against Jews (whom he believed to be morally and racially degenerate), with the possible exception of genocide. 'Authentic Judaism', he wrote, 'abides by the symbol of the stranger wandering restless and homeless on the face of the earth' (*Die Judenfrage*, Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1933, p. 73). In 1933 the Synod of Saxony stated (Article 13), 'we recognise [...] in the Old Testament the apostasy of the Jews from God, and therein their sin. This sin is made manifest throughout the world in the Crucifixion of Jesus. From thenceforth until the present day, the curse of God rests upon this people.'

Anti-Jewish prejudice can also be found in Protestant writings in the first decades after the Holocaust. If we turn to the prominent exegete Martin Noth, whose *History of Israel* has become a standard reference for students and academics alike, we find a description of Judaism as dying a slow agonising death in the first century. Eventually, 'Israel ceased to exist and the history of Israel came to an end' (*History of Israel*, London: A. & C. Black 1960, p. 400). Rudolf Bultmann offers a similar view. He stressed the antithesis between the teachings of Jesus and Rabbinic Judaism, and argued that by the end of the biblical period the Jewish God had become so transcendent and remote as to have been almost purified away. As for the Old Testament, 'To the Christian faith the Old Testament is no longer revelation as it has been and still is for the Jews. For the person who stands within the Church, the history of Israel is a closed chapter [...]. To us the history of Israel is not a history of revelation.' ('The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith', in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith: A Theological Discussion*, ed. B. W. Anderson, New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p. 31). In *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1952, pp. 12–13), perhaps his most influential work, Bultmann held to the view that a Jewish people cannot be said to exist with the emergence of Christianity.

In Orthodox Christianity, with its veneration of tradition, the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition remained at the fore of its understanding of Jews and Judaism. Lengthy texts of Holy Week, included in the matins of Good

Friday, remained as anti-Jewish as the patristic and early medieval rhetoric that was employed to denigrate the 'perfidious Jews'.

There were serious outbreaks of antisemitism in Russia throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when no less than half the world's Jewish population was located within the Russian empire. In order to contain them, an extensive Pale of Settlement was established (1791), intended as a home from which Jews might move to other areas only with permission. Pogroms, a Russian word meaning 'devastation' and referring to violent attacks on Jews, regularly took place, the worst being in 1881, 1903 and 1905. While they might be prompted by social and economic factors, they were also coloured by religious ignorance dressed in the garb of zeal.

The most famous, or infamous, conspiracy document to condemn Jews was *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which originated in Russia and appeared in the West in 1917. These purport to be a series of lectures given by an 'elder of Zion' to people to whom he could frankly and openly reveal the Jewish plot to take over the world by overthrowing its rulers. In 1921, *The Times*' correspondent in Istanbul demonstrated that the *Protocols* were based upon *Dialogue aux Enfers entre Montesquieu et Machiavel*, a satire by Maurice Joly (1829–78) on the grandiose ambitions of Napoleon III, Emperor of France from 1852 to 1870. All that the authors of the *Protocols* had done was to substitute 'the Elders of Zion' for Napoleon III, and to rearrange, somewhat clumsily, the material to suit their own purpose. The *Protocols* still occasionally come to public attention when they are used by antisemites to justify their hatred of Jews. For example, belief in the veracity of the *Protocols* and Holocaust denial were the main reasons why the proposed re-communication of the antisemitic Bishop Richard Williamson (b. 1940) by Pope Benedict XVI caused such controversy in 2009. The *Protocols* are sometimes portrayed as historically correct in a few Arab countries and in 2002 there was controversy over the broadcast of a TV drama series in Egypt based on the *Protocols*. However, in this case antisemitism is closely bound up with the political conflict involving Israel and the Arab states.

There were church leaders who condemned pogroms and antisemitism but it was rare for an Orthodox Christian to welcome Judaism as it stands. This was the achievement of Nikolai Ziorov (1850–1915), Russian Orthodox Archbishop of Warsaw, in 1912 and the most senior of Russian bishops, Antonii Vadkovskii (1846–1912), Metropolitan of St Petersburg. Another bishop, Platon Rozhnadstvenskii (1866–1934), faced a mob in Kiev on his knees while endeavouring to still the pogrom of 1905.

Despite such individual exceptions, in the Age of the Enlightenment Christian anti-Judaism and its modern offspring, antisemitism, not only survived but thrived, gaining popularity both West and East. It could be found not only in theological and political writings but also in literary works, such as the books of English authors G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936, writer of many Christian works and the Father Brown detective stories), John Buchan (1875–1940, thriller writer, among whose works is *The Thirty-Nine Steps*) and Agatha Christie (1890–1976), 'the Queen of Crime'. In her *Three Act Tragedy*, first published in 1935, Mr Satterthwaite, an elderly snob yet an acute observer of the human condition, contemplates a young man named Oliver Manders:

A handsome young fellow, twenty-five at a guess. Something, perhaps, a little sleek about his good looks. Something else – something – was it foreign? Something un-English about him.

Egg Lytton Gore's voice rang out:

'Oliver, you slippery Shylock—'

'Of course,' thought Mr. Satterthwaite, 'that's it – not foreign – Jew!' (New edn, London: Pan in association with Collins, 1983, p. 28)

For further examples, including Buchan's frequent allusions to 'Judeo-Bolshevism' and Chesterton's description of 'the Jewish problem in Europe' in *The New Jerusalem* (1920) and elsewhere, see Bryan Cheyette's discussion of this topic in *Constructions of "the Jew" in English Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The point is not that these authors were particularly virulent exponents of antisemitism, or even consciously anti-Jewish; indeed, Buchan had Jewish friends and Chesterton explicitly condemned Hitler's actions; rather, the casual comments illustrate the stereotypes and caricatures widespread in the society of their day.

THE ROAD TO AUSCHWITZ

For Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) and his Nazi party, race and not religion was the dominant motive for destroying Jews. He espoused a conspiracy view of history: Jews were responsible for Germany's defeat in the Great War of 1914–18. He regarded the German Weimar Republic, which rose from the ashes of the Great War and collapsed in the economic crisis of the early 1930s, as a racket run by Jews for their own benefit. Such an interpretation built on a foundation laid by others.

Jews, according to Hitler, were vile, even vermin. Yet if race provided the mythology and motivation for anti-Jewishness, secularised religious

language provided the justification. In *Mein Kampf* (1925), Hitler did not hesitate to use overtly Christian language to appeal to a pious audience. He wrote that the Jews' 'whole existence is an embodied protest against the aesthetics of the Lord's image'. Thus he could piously affirm, 'I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the word of the Lord.'

Many Christians came to agree with him and many more stood by when the Nazis enacted policies that built on the racist and religious attitudes towards Jews in Europe that helped pave the way to Auschwitz.

- In 1933, book burnings began. Jewish scholars, members of the performing arts and others were forced from their posts.
- In 1935, liaisons between Jews and others were forbidden, designated as crimes against the state.
- In 1938, all Jews were forced to register their property, and Jewish communal bodies were put under the control of the secret police, the Gestapo.
- On the night of 9–10 November 1938, called *Kristallnacht*, a 'night of broken glass', over 300 synagogues were torched and many Jewish homes and businesses all over Germany were burned to the ground.

When Poland was occupied in September 1939, Jews were deprived of their belongings and forced into manual labour which Nazis called 'destruction through work'. After Hitler invaded Russia in 1941 Jews there were rounded up, taken to the outskirts of towns, shot and buried in mass graves. Between October and December 1941, perhaps 300,000 died in this way; and in 1942 a further 900,000. Special troops known as *Einsatzgruppen* were employed for this purpose. From 1941, death by gas was carried out and death camps were built: at Chelmno, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka and Belzec. After the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, the Nazis began the systematic deportation of Jews from all over Europe to these concentration camps which were designed to carry out genocide, known as the 'Final Solution', the extermination of all Jews. At the camps, the ill and the elderly were killed immediately, but the young and fit were put to manual work. At its greatest capacity, the camp at Auschwitz held 140,000. Its five ovens could burn 10,000 a day. Over 1.1 million people died at Auschwitz.

The Nazis aimed at identifying and murdering every single person they considered to be a Jew – without any exception. They included Jews who had converted to Christianity, such as Edith Stein (1891–1942), who converted to Catholicism in 1922 and became a Carmelite nun. She and her sister Rosa perished at Auschwitz. Controversy about Stein erupted with her canonisation in 1998, which whilst acknowledging her Jewishness recognised her as a Christian martyr. Stein herself interpreted her impending

death as part of her 'Jewish fate', a joining of the 'sacrifice' of the Jewish people, and saw God's judgement enacted in the Holocaust and the persecution and murder of the Jewish people as the 'cross' of Christ. Although the Nazis certainly robbed Jews, Jewish property was not the motivation for the murder; rather, robbery was the 'natural' accompaniment of the desire, first, to expel Jews, and then, to murder them. The Nazi ideology was not based on economic, cost-effective calculations – the genocide was committed for purely ideological reasons.

When the war ended in 1945, so had a whole way of life for European Jews. Their numbers were catastrophically reduced – 6 million had perished. Of the pre-war Jewish populations of Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Germany and Austria, fewer than 10 per cent survived; and fewer than 30 per cent of Jews in occupied Russia, Ukraine, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Norway and Romania.

In the Holocaust, the morality of many Christians was tried and found wanting. Relatively few non-Jews helped their Jewish neighbours and even fewer Christian organisations – Żegota in Poland was a noteworthy exception – were established to rescue them. The Jewish people, not least at the Jerusalem memorial, Yad Vashem, honour names like Oskar Schindler (1908–74), a German industrialist, Raoul Wallenberg (1912–47?), a Swedish diplomat, Nicholas Winton (b. 1909), a British civil servant, Anna Shimaite, a Lithuanian librarian, Charles Lutz (1895–1975), a Swiss consul, and other individuals for their courageous acts. There, from the 1950s, trees were planted in their names in the Avenue of the Righteous of Nations. Many of these righteous Gentiles were Christians, but many were not.

CHRISTIANS AND THE HOLOCAUST

Few leaders of the Christian churches did much. Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII from 1939 to 1958, remains a controversial figure, with some claiming that he knew much and yet did nothing of importance to help Jews during the Holocaust, while others retort that he did what he could and encouraged others to do more. As Vatican Secretary of State, he signed a concordat with Hitler on 20 July 1935, which guaranteed the right of the Church 'to regulate her own affairs'. Hitler broke its terms almost immediately, but that never encouraged Pacelli to think he might do likewise.

The Third Reich neutralised the Protestant churches as effectively as the Roman Catholic Church. On 14 July 1933, the Reichstag proclaimed a new 'Reich Church', forcibly bringing together all Protestant churches.