

NAZI
ANTI-SEMITISM

From Prejudice to the Holocaust

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Translated by Janet Lloyd



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raïga for the prewar period now, with hindsight, perceived as a golden age; the loss of the status of a great power, accompanied by an ever more pressing "German question"; the deep undermining of social areas in which self-esteem suffered from economic crises caused first by the hyperinflation of the early 1920s, then by the 1929 depression; and finally, all the frustrations felt by German Christians. From 1930 on, this, in its turn, made many Germans receptive to the appeal of Nazism's mixture of plebeian Caesarism, an ethnocentric chauvinism that ignored existing frontiers, a pseudo-Christian religiosity, and a quest for power. In a society in which many citizens yearned to set a new high value upon a Christian and authoritarian German identity, tolerance for the otherness of the Jews was bound gradually to shrink, just like Balzac's proverbial *jeune fille émigrée*.

JUDEOPHOBIA AND THE NAZI IDENTITY

NAZISM'S ACCESSION TO power in 1933 certainly marked a turning point of the greatest importance. However, there was still a long way to go before Auschwitz, and we now need to examine the problem of how that destination was reached.

The problem can be divided into two questions. The first concerns the dynamics of the persecution that was unleashed as early as 1933 and from then on never ceased to gather momentum. What was the mainspring of that dynamism? Many historians consider it to have been the very way in which the Nazi regime functioned—its polycentric structure and the intrinsic irrationality that allowed it to achieve only negative objectives such as the persecution inflicted upon the Jews. Although this thesis of a "cumulative radicalization," as Hans Mommsen puts it, may contain an element of truth, it discounts the propulsive force of ideology too easily by ascribing to the latter an inconsistency and incoherence that disqualify it as a grid by which to read the world and as a table of orientation for action. We must first check whether it did not, on the contrary, possess considerable coherence

and whether a fundamental radicalism was not an inherent part of this.

The second question is one that does not always receive as much attention: What of the German population? The new regime tried hard to imbue it with its own anti-Semitism, and, given that it undoubtedly succeeded, we must identify the means that made this possible. This is an important point, for the absence of any substantial opposition also contributed to the dynamism of the persecution.

* * *

It is frequently said of Hitlerian ideology that it contained nothing new and was a potpourri of notions already present in modern anti-Semitism more or less everywhere. This is quite true if one looks no further than the catalogue of its representations and themes: the Jew as an exploiter and a parasite, the Jew as a manipulator and a revolutionary, the Jew as a poisoner and a carrier of infection. All those images had been circulating throughout the continent for several decades, but if we wish to see beyond that inventory, we must seek what it was that fundamentally structured Hitlerian anti-Semitism and, to that end, pay serious attention to the picture that emerges from an attentive reading of *Mein Kampf*:

What do we find there? Above all, a racist ideology—an ideology that considers race to be the explanatory principle of the history of the world. Hitler, a racist thoroughly in agreement with that ideology, postulates the existence of human races as separate from one another as the animal

species and arranged in a hierarchy according to how they are evaluated. Positioned at the top of the hierarchy is the Aryan race, the sole creator of culture, as is "proved" by the great empires of antiquity, particularly those of Greece and Rome. Beneath, midway down the hierarchy, are races such as the Japanese, which preserve the fund of culture by assimilating that of the Aryans, particularly their technology, into their own lives. At the bottom of the hierarchy, according to this ideology, are the Jews, who create nothing, have no state or culture of their own, and are parasites living at the expense of the other peoples of the earth, which they inexorably destroy.

According to Hitler, the evolution of the human races established the decisive importance of two "laws of nature" that applied to the entire living world. One was the law of racial purity, racial endogamy, whose violation through interbreeding leads to decadence and eventual extinction. The other was the law of selection, or the elimination of the weak in combat or through a deliberate eugenic policy.

Such an ideology is strictly racist, for it focuses not only upon "aliens"—all those who are defined, by whatever criteria, as not belonging to the superior race—but also upon the members of that superior race itself, only some of whom (the best) must be encouraged to procreate while the rest, "the tainted," must be excluded from reproduction and even from "the banquet of life" itself. Unsurprisingly, Hitler emphatically praised the breeding system for horses and dogs and espoused the social Darwinist idea of a struggle for survival. His morality was of an ancient or, to be more precise, Germanic nature. His constant phrase of "toughness"

conveyed a desire to destroy the moral barriers of existing civilization, with all its humanitarianism and universalism, and to link up once more with a pre-Christian civilization ruled by ethnic exclusivism and the law of the strongest, which justified the extermination or enslavement of all conquered peoples.

All of this is cast in a biologizing register that testifies to the strength of Hitler's "scientism."⁴² But Hitler did not confine himself within this framework, for he also related the so-called "laws of nature" to "the Eternal One," or to "the Lord." He invoked not the personal god of monotheism but a deity confused with Creation, who remains forever mysterious, in contrast to the "laws of nature," which human reason can decipher and which, he recommended, should be observed.

Hitler established a link not only between the "laws of nature" and some kind of transcendence, but also with history, since historical understanding is the means for verifying the validity of all these so-called "laws." He did this when sketching in a history of the Aryans that followed a precise schema. The Aryan peoples, whose supposed superiority stemmed from their being endowed with idealism (a spirit of devotion to the community, reflected in the way they worked and fought), and who respected blood purity and practiced selection (for example, they killed deformed children at birth). In this way, they acquired such power that they were able to conquer peoples far greater numerically and to use them as slaves in the construction of great empires. These empires gave rise to brilliant cultures but then de-

clined, allegedly owing to their eventual interbreeding with the peoples they had conquered.

This historical schema was also a model. Nazism's mission was to restore Germany to a rank of power by curing it of the decadence that afflicted it, thereby enabling it to conquer an empire comparable to those of the past in every respect, including cultural greatness. At the heart of Nazism lay this imperial mission. Through every page of *Mein Kampf* can be glimpsed a portrait of Hitler *imperator*.

An anti-Semitic ideology nestles at the heart of this racist framework. The history of the races' battle for survival is immortal, but for two millennia a struggle had been raging between two races in particular, whose respective characteristics rendered them perfectly antagonistic. The characteristics of the Jews placed them, term for term, as ignoble is opposed to noble, in opposition to the Aryans. They supposedly possessed no idealism and consequently no solidarity, except in situations of danger or in order to lay hold of some prey. They had no religion—only a simple code of practical behavior—no culture other than through imitation, and no state, since they were incapable of organizing one. All they did have, in abundance, was deception, the weapon par excellence that enabled them to live as parasites lecting on other people by getting them to believe that they, the Jews, were assimilable into their nations. On the other hand, they did observe the so-called "laws of nature" and so preserved the purity of their blood. This made them redoubtable in their pursuit of power, as was allegedly illustrated by their project of world domination, which Hitler

claimed to be attested by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a Tzarist forgery that continues, even today, to be circulated by anti-Semites.

This historically determining struggle between Aryans and Jews began when primitive Christianity—proclaimed, of course, by an Aryan and therefore anti-Semitic Christ—was distorted by the Jew Paul, who turned it into a form of universalism that, just like the Bolshevism that it spawned much later, was to encourage the spread of crossbreeding and decadence, thereby greatly profiting the Jews. Ever since, that struggle had become increasingly intense, particularly in the nineteenth century and during World War I. At the time Hitler was writing *Mein Kampf*, he claimed that it was still ongoing, taking two forms that were contradictory only in appearance: one the class warfare propagated by Bolshevism (a supposed Jewish invention), the other the internationalization of economies, brought about by the Jewish financiers of the Anglo-Saxon countries. According to Hitler, the outcome of the struggle, through which the Jews aimed to destroy not only the nations of the world but the very principle of nationalism, would determine the fate of the German people and, indeed, that of the very planet. A Jewish victory would mean not only the end of all culture but, if the Aryan race came to disappear, also the death of the planet. This catastrophe was a theme to which Hitler repeatedly returned. The man's imagination was in thrall to the idea of the extreme situation par excellence—that of annihilation.

The coherence of this ideology hardly requires further corroboration. Although plenty of points, starting with the

definition of race, remained vague, there was nothing vague about its construction and articulation. Many of its ideas were already in circulation, but their combination is striking in two respects.

The first is its so-to-speak totalitarian quality. The Hitlerian ideology was cosmic or at least macro-historical. It encompassed the origin of civilizations and even of the planet. It reduced the whole of human history to a handful of determining elements: the observation of racial purity, a struggle between the various races for the possession of rare resources, and the malignant action of the Jews over the previous two thousand years. And, as if to magnify that omnipresence at the linguistic level, it consistently intertwined different semantic registers. We have already noted this with regard to biological, religious, and historical registers; to these, those of art and politics should be added.

It would be a mistake to dismiss this interweaving as the result of confused thinking or simply as indicating a half-baked mind seeking to link disparate areas of knowledge into a single system. Fundamentally, it conveys a totalitarian desire to shut down the world of liberal civilization in which social life is divided between a number of autonomous spheres (art, science, religion, politics, economics, and so on) and to do so in order to revert to the holistic universe of the tribe, with all its exclusivism and brutish morality.

The other aspect of Hitlerian ideology that is so striking is the place of prime importance that it assigns to politics. Hitler's thinking was political. He was preoccupied with the means of realizing his ideology and possessed an acute understanding of what was needed for political action to be

successful. Pragmatism was his foremost concern. This can be seen from the importance that he ascribed to a highly organized mass party with a modern propaganda apparatus at its disposal, and to the elaboration of not only an external but also an internal strategy. With perfect clarity, he set out the objectives of his foreign policy and also the means of realizing them—namely a strategy of alliances. In all these respects he had broken with the *völkisch* anti-Semites of both pre-1914 and post-1914. Skillfulness and fanaticism seldom go together, but Hitler possessed both to the highest degree.

How to characterize his anti-Semitism? On one level, it could be said that it was secondary, just a part of his racism. But in truth it was not secondary at all, for it lay at the very heart of his racism. For Hitler, the battle against the Jews possessed an immediacy and intensity unlike any other. What was at stake for him was existential in the strictest sense of the word.

This anti-Semitism of Hitler's combined all the three variants of modern anti-Semitism: Christian anti-Semitism, through Hitler's "Christian rhetoric" ("By defending myself against the Jew, I fight to defend the Lord's work"); national anti-Semitism, through his presentation of a Germany under mortal threat from the foreign presence and antinational behavior of the Jews; and racist anti-Semitism, of course, for this provided the general framework. This was, in short, a particularly successful example of syncretism, capable of branching out in every direction and producing an at least superficial consensus.

More important, this was a radical-Semitism, for it repre-

sented the Jews as the negative reverse of the Aryan identity. Hitler constructed a relationship of total opposition that implied a total rejection of not only Judaism but also its poisoned fruits, Christianity and all its avatars, which ranged from liberalism to Bolshevism. The "otherness" of the Jews was exaggerated and exalted into an essential "malignancy." The Jews were not only the authors of a two-millennia-old diversion of civilization that was responsible for the decadence of Germany, but they were also the principal adversary now blocking the Nazi path to power.

None of this was new, although the scale and the systematic character of the incrimination were certainly striking. What was new, however, was that the relationship between Aryan and Jews was structured according to an apocalyptic schema. The opposition between the two races was to lead to a final combat of planetary proportions. This was to be a clash between two ambitions for "universal empire": the one attributed to the Jews entirely fantastical, that of the Nazis carefully muted.

This apocalyptic schema was derived from the Christian tradition, but it is not hard to see that the latter was reworked in a distorted form. The Hittetan apocalypse accommodated no divine intervention, no eschatology. This battle for racial predominance was a secular one, of a revolutionary nature. The Jews no longer had any place in the divine plan, except perhaps through the anticipation of their conversion at the Last Judgment. They were set up as the enemy at the heart of a battle conceived to be decisive.

By his reuse of an apocalyptic schema, Hitler set himself apart from predecessors who, for their part, had resorted to

a Manichean schema. Edouard Drumont, for example, had declared, "When the Jew is on the rise, France declines; when the Jew declines, France rises"—an antagonistic view, to be sure, even a vision of a "final catastrophe." If nothing was done to prevent this, but not an evocation of a battle to the death that would involve the fate of not only France but the entire planet.

Hitlerian anti-Semitism was thus of an apocalyptic-racist variety. The strangeness of the association of those two terms needs to be underlined. The term racism evokes a would-be scientific approach, connoting objectivity and detachment. It suggests the impassivity of the doctor fighting infection and strengthening his patient, the gardener pruning and grafting his plants, or the animal breeder selecting his livestock. Apocalypse, in contrast, conjures up the figure of a prophet, evokes a metaphysical passion, nourishes an existential hatred, the angst of salvation or annihilation (the latter rather than the former being what Nazism cultivated, it must be said).

That association is characterized by the interpenetration of the semantic registers noted earlier: on the one hand that of the "parasitic" Jews, microbes, vermin, and so on, as listed by Eberhard Jäckel; on the other, that elaborated by Claus Eikehard Bartsch, featuring the insane Jew and the Antichrist. Historians tend to emphasize either one or the other. Most associate Hitlerian anti-Semitism with scientism, while a minority link it more with pseudoreligion or a political religion. But it is important to take equal account of both registers for, as already mentioned, they interact fully. To associate them closely in this way is to do justice to the

totalitarian aspiration that underlies the confusion. Hitlerian anti-Semitism implacably scans the entire universe, from the microbe to the cosmos. By portraying the Jews as sub-human microbes on the one hand and, on the other, associating them with the suprahuman devil, it produces an unassailable image of dehumanization.

The association of racism with an apocalypse only operated in reference to the Jews, sparing all the other targets of Hitlerian racism. And, as is not hard to see, it carried with it a limitless potential for violence, for anti-Semitism was further strengthened by being incorporated into a strict racism that not only did not spare its own people but even began by purging them. The violence of this racist anti-Semitism was then further magnified by its absorption into an apocalyptic schema that imbued it with all the fervor that a battle between the principles of good and evil engenders.

We have so far been considering Hitlerian ideology. But what of Nazi ideology? It is fair to say that this manifests a certain pluralism, bounded by two poles: on one represented by the Germano-Nordic and anti-Christian wing of Himmler and Darré, characterized by their vision of the various racially related peoples being brought together within a greater Reich incorporating Germans, Scandinavians, Dutch, and so on; and one represented by Goebbels, who was more concerned with mobilizing the masses around a "socialist" rhetoric. The link between the two sides was provided—as usual, with consummate skill—by Adolf Hitler.

However, a wide consensus did exist among the leadership of the Nazi party. It would have been surprising had it not been so, as Hitler was generally recognized as its incontest-

and *Mein Kampf* was the regime's bible. It served as a reservoir of maxims that were used in countless school textbooks. The consensus related to four points: (1) the racist idea of the diversity and fundamental inequality of the various human groups; (2) the idea of the regeneration of German society by encouraging the reproduction of its best elements, the purging of those who were flawed, and the expulsion of all aliens; (3) the idea of a special antagonism between the Germans and the Jews, an antagonism portrayed in either Manichean or apocalyptic terms; and finally, (4) the idea of an imperial expansion, guaranteed by that prior cleansing of German society.

This amounted to a body of ideas sufficiently consistent to direct political action and incorporating enough agreement for the leader at the head of the party, who held the most radical views, to pull that party in a maximalist direction and if necessary all the way to acceptance of the hypothesis of an extreme solution.

* * *

Having noted that the Hitlerian ideology did possess some novel elements, that it was fundamentally radical with a potential for limitless violence, and that it provided the bulk, if not quite all, of Nazi ideology, we must now determine what it was that made it possible for this radical anti-Semitism to root itself so firmly in German society.

Clearly, the crucially important condition was Hitler's appointment to the post of chancellor in 1933. His accession to power was by no means inevitable. It was engineered by a

clique of politically shortsighted conservatives at a time when the Nazi wave of popularity was already past its peak. Nor was the consolidation of the new regime a foregone conclusion: the Night of the Long Knives in the summer of 1934, when Rohm's SA was decapitated, shows that Hitler was walking a tightrope. Furthermore, it was not inevitable that he should then, within a relatively short space of time, acquire an autocratic position. Taken all together, these developments, completed by about 1937, were crucial for what followed. They formed the context for the period of peace in which anti-Semitism was progressively diffused throughout German society.

That diffusion, seldom closely examined, needs to be explained. At its peak, the Nazi party had received 44 percent of the poll, and this was at the time of the elections of March 1933, which were marked by the proscription of the Communist Party and the SA's campaign of intimidation in the streets. German society contained sizable subcultures, particularly those of social democracy and the Catholic world, which the Nazi party penetrated only gradually. Even within the Nazi party, the motivation for support varied greatly; anti-Semitism was probably a determining factor for no more than a minority.

Yet, by a few years later, this same society had, at least partially, internalized the regime's anti-Semitism, in its most gynecritic version at least, if not its apocalyptic-racist kernel. In other words, it had accepted the idea that there existed a "Jewish question," the solution of which implied at the very least discriminating legislation and possibly the departure of all Jews from Germany.

What is the evidence for this? The regime's police reports indicate so, as do the clandestine records of the socialist opposition, which registered the diffusion of anti-Semitism in circles such as the working class, which had been relatively free of it in the past; also, the weakness of reactions to the Nuremberg laws of 1935, the "Aryanization" of 1938, and the *Kristallnacht* of November 1938 are all indications, although the latter, the brutality of which was exceptional in recent European history, did prompt some mitigated response.

On the whole, the reception of the Nuremberg laws seems most revelatory. These laws demoted Jews from the rank of citizens to that of "people under the jurisdiction of the Reich," thereby introducing into European law a distinction of status that hitherto had characterized only the colonial discrimination between citizens of the metropolis and subjects of the colonies. Yet this considerable change, not to mention the sexual segregation that went with it, gave rise to no serious protest—something that would have been most unlikely only a few years earlier and possibly even in 1933.

It is essential to take this change in people's attitudes into consideration, for without it the genocide could never have been carried out with such efficiency and so little opposition. How can it be explained? One ready-made answer leaps to mind. Once the dictatorship was established, the checks and counterbalances to anti-Semitism disappeared, while, conversely, the new regime benefited from the advantages of legality and legitimacy. Those who had hesitated to allow free rein to their anti-Jewish prejudices under Weimar now

felt free to do so, and the rest were intimidated. Furthermore, anti-Semitism was now officially encouraged, whether it involved appropriating Jewish property, seizing Jewish jobs, or simply distancing oneself from Jewish acquaintances. Whatever the circumstances, it was internalized, for people had to find self-justification for what they were doing, and, rather than blame their own cowardice, it was easier to appropriate the "good reasons" provided by the regime. Propaganda was insidiously effective, and the socialization of the young through schools and the *Hitlerjugend*, membership of which became compulsory in 1936, was going full steam ahead.

In such conditions, a society rapidly adapts to exclusion, particularly when those excluded are groups that have long been stigmatized. On this subject the historian Detlev Peukert is probably right when he declares that the "national community" created by Nazism rested above all on the popularity of the measures of exclusion that it had introduced. It is worth adding that those measures constituted the reverse of the efforts at inclusion deployed by the same regime. Both sets of measures were designed to give the German people a new sense of self-esteem.

In any case, it seems clear that the exclusion of the Jews could only function provided it was justified by a whole body of representations in what seemed an acceptable manner. For negative images to be internalized, it was not enough simply for propaganda to purvey them, particularly (and this is the paradox here) when those images related to a population such as the German Jews, which was being progressively marginalized and excluded from any positions that might

have afforded it even the slightest power over the society that surrounded it.

Over and above the effects of propaganda and the socialization of the younger generation (although in fact most of those who participated in the genocide were already adult by the mid-thirties), acclimatization to anti-Semitism must have resulted from a more complex, indirect mechanism—namely, an internalization of the Nazi regime's political identity. For it did have an identity, one that involved more than simply negation and rejection. Far from constituting a "nihilism" as disappointed conservatives chose to present it at the time, it incorporated a collection of values that it considered to be "positive" and that oriented its policies. To pick out those values, all we need do is return to the historical schema sketched in by Hitler in relation to the Aryans, a schema that was, at the same time, a model for the future: Aryan peoples who respected blood purity and practiced selection, and who, as a result, developed such power that they were able to conquer peoples far greater numerically and then use these to construct empires that founded great cultures.

The three key values were health, power, and culture—all three interpreted from a racist point of view and all interconnected. Health was the indispensable condition of power, and it was power that created the culture; power was the main, pivotal value. Unlike the French Republic's triptych, these values were never set up as a slogan by the Nazi leaders, but it is not hard to show that these three values constituted so many polar stars that oriented all their policies. And

it is equally easy to show that the Jews, and they alone, represented their exact opposite.

Let us rapidly consider all three values, each one positioned at the center of a network of connected notions. Health is probably the value that may most easily be demonstrated to have oriented the actions of the regime. Health meant on the one hand (racial) purity and cleanliness, on the other industriousness and achievement. The healthy, clean, hardworking, athletic Aryan man, married to a woman of the same race who produced many children for him, was set up as a model and a norm. Anything that deviated from this model was, by contrast, thrown into relief and soon became the object of measures of extirpation: Germans suffering from hereditary diseases (about 400,000 of them) were sterilized; tens of thousands of "social" individuals and homosexuals were sent to concentration camps; Gypsies were segregated, and so on.

In this situation, the Jews were one target among many others, and up until 1941 the regime's most radical measures affected other groups, since those suffering from hereditary diseases were already being sterilized, and from 1939 on, the handicapped were murdered. The Jews, however, were directly and strongly affected at the level of how they were perceived. The effect of all the regime's measures in the domain of work and health was to reactivate and reinforce the whole baggage of negative images with which they were connected: images of the Jews as parasites, opposed to productive "German work," or, in the register of hygiene, the ancient association of Jews with filth and the whole re-

cent panoply of metaphors referring to the "Jewish microbe" and the "Jewish cancer" that had invaded anti-Semitic discourse since the end of the preceding century.

Power, as a value, for its part included both the theme of the Reich—the empire—and that of popular unity. The importance that the Nazi regime attached to power is unmistakable. Its propaganda projected the image of a country bent on reconquering the status of a great power, and the first stage in this project was rearmament. The new Wehrmacht was the object of a cult, as was conscription when it was reintroduced in 1935. Both were sources of pride for a people humiliated by Versailles, and were the instruments for creating a new greatness. But the precondition for any external action was internal unity, an objective that was achieved through a mixture of persuasion and terror. This was perfectly illustrated by the Nuremberg rallies: with their theatrical settings, they projected far beyond the boundaries of Germany the impression of a German people welded together around their supreme leader.

If the Jews were one target among others in the case of health, here they were positioned center stage, for the Nazis' desire for power, as if in a mirror image, lent growing importance to the clichés that had been crystallizing around the power of the Jews ever since their emancipation. The power of "Jewish gold" had never ceased to be a successful theme. In politics, the Jews' identification with, first, liberalism, then socialism and communism, had become solidly implanted. The association with Bolshevism had even become the object of renewed propaganda since the outbreak of the Spanish civil war, and it was compounded by the theme of

the "Jewish war," a war financed by Jews or fomented by them. This was a theme popularized by the German extreme Right in the immediate aftermath of World War I and later vociferously taken up by the Nazi regime, which propagated an image of Jewish power endeavoring to unite the world against the Reich so as to block the latter's legitimate march toward power. This was the context in which the opposition of those two ambitions for "universal empire" found its strongest expression at the level of representations.

Finally, the value of culture encompassed in the widest sense culture both in the common sense of the term and as religion, both of which served to bind the members of the community together. There is no need to dwell on the Nazi regime's cultural pretensions. They were marked by not only a brutal purging of artistic and intellectual life but also an attempt to encourage conformity with the aspirations of the new masters. The figurative arts and architecture lent themselves particularly well to this end. The importance that

Hitler attributed to them is well known. His own plans for the remodeling of the Reich's largest towns testify to his taste for a crushing monumentality that was intended not only to demonstrate the creative capacity of the regime but also to speed the onward march to empire by inspiring the people with confidence and zeal.

The negative reverse of the culture promoted by the regime was, of course, the so-called Jewish culture. In the Nazi mind, "artistic Bolshevism" and Jews were fixed, as was shown by the famous 1937 exhibition of "degenerate art," which was a fine example of semantic transition. The works of the avant-garde, identified with the Jews, were as-

simulated to mental illness by the device of hanging many paintings by mental patients alongside them.

Categorizing religion as a value promoted by the Nazi regime may elicit surprise, but it would be ill-founded. In contrast to its heavy-handed promotion of the values of health and power, the regime in this case tempered the expression of its views with prudence. Hitler remained silent as to his deepest convictions and distanced himself from the anti-Christian wing of the Nazi party, notwithstanding his agreement with it on many issues. On the other hand, he would often resort to "Christian talk," usually (but not invariably) invoking "Providence" rather than "God."

Basically, he tried to adopt a position above both the Protestant and the Catholic confessions and tended to use vaguely Christian references in a bid to plug the gap by which Catholics and Protestants were separated, for, like his *polished* predecessors, he regarded this as one of the nation's principal weaknesses. More precisely, he endeavored to encourage the emergence of a religiosity that was superficially Christian but the content of which conformed with a racist canon. Hence his support for the "German Christian" wing, which in 1933 predominated among the Protestants and claimed that its mission was to "dejudaeze" Christianity.

Despite rejecting racism on principle, Catholics fell into line with the new regime without much difficulty. Like the Protestants, they were hoping for a re-Christianization of German society. To some extent the Nazi regime responded to that hope with its policy of attacking pornography, prostitution, and homosexuality, not to mention the fact that it had already reduced the defenders of atheism, first and fore-

most the communists, to silence. Keen observers and ecclesiastical leaders, particularly Catholics, were not fooled but did not have the guts to risk a clash in which their flocks would probably not have followed them.

While Hitler, for his part, indulged in his "Christian talk," he allowed his faithful followers, led by Himmler, to support the diffusion of a Germano-Nordic ethoreligion that rejected Christianity as being not only infected by the Jewish spirit but also a dire symbol of foreign invasion. By 1939, the *Goeydabing* movement, to which the supporters of the new religion adhered, had rallied about 5 percent of the German population, a by no means negligible number, particularly as it included most of the members of the SS—a fact that needs to be remembered when one tries to understand their racist and anti-Semitic violence.

In the picture that thus emerges, the Nazi regime appears to have started a widespread religious reinvigoration that ranged in many different directions. The effects of this were bound to be harmful to the Jews, not only because it threw their religious "otherness" into relief, quite apart from the fact that this was increasingly interpreted in racial terms, but also because the Jews had for decades been identified with liberalism, free thinking, atheism, and in general with "disintegration" and "decomposition" of tradition, including—indeed, above all—religious tradition.

In short, the Nazis' efforts to diffuse an identity designed to become that of the German people as a whole needs to be taken seriously. It is hard to assess the degree to which the regime's values were absorbed by the population and to determine which of those values in particular was the one pre-

ferred by most Germans. But there can be no doubt that such an internalization did, at least partially, take place. Otherwise, it is hard to explain the growing popularity that Hitler enjoyed, short of postulating that it could be deliberately dissociated from the policies of the regime that he headed.

It is true that the reception of that Nazi identity was facilitated by a series of factors. In the first place, the successes achieved by Nazi policies both at home (principally the reduction of unemployment) and abroad (the reunion with the Germans of Austria and the Sudetens), both accomplished without unleashing war, seemed to invest that identity with a promising aura. Second, the values of the regime were familiar ones that lent themselves to perfectly benign interpretations as well as to extreme racist ones. Finally, they were soon incorporated into institutions that were directed to apply them in such a way as to strengthen the support for the identity forged by the regime.

Foremost among those institutions was Himmler's specialized apparatus, which combined authority over the police force with the direction of the SS and also became the instrument for executing Hitler's personal wishes. But the role played by many other sectors involved in the realization of the regime's values should not be overlooked. Thus, in the health organizations, the tendencies encouraged by eugenics and racism under the Weimar Republic were by now dominant, as were countless similarly influenced experts in almost every domain: the army—the principal tool for the restoration of power; the business world, which had suffered from the collapse of foreign markets during the depression

and now supported an expansionist policy that could bring it the kind of profits likely to accrue from an imperial situation; and the world of culture, particularly the circles that had clashed with the avant-garde movement of the Weimar Republic and also that of the Churches.

Hitherto forthrightly or discreetly, all these sectors involved themselves in the realization of the regime's persecution policy. They did so for a variety of reasons: corporate or personal interests that encouraged them to jostle for advantage in the takeover of Jewish jobs and the spoliation of their possessions; ideological adhesion to the regime; or cynicism pure and simple. As a result, as ideas and practices coagulated at an institutional level, racism and anti-Semitism became more solidly established everywhere.

In the absence of fundamental evidence, it is hard to gauge the relative impact of the various mechanisms involved in the diffusion of anti-Semitism—namely, the openly anti-Jewish propaganda, the racist socialization of the young, and the promotion and acceptance of the regime's "positive" identity. All things considered, the importance of this third factor was considerable. The term-for-term opposition with the Jews that the Nazi identity established either implicitly or explicitly not only made anti-Semitism easier to inculcate, but it also, and above all, made it harder to maintain an attitude of hostility or indifference toward it.

At any rate, the cumulative effect of these mechanisms was to reinforce all variants of Judeophobia: Christian anti-Semitism and religious anti-Semitism generally, as noted earlier; national anti-Semitism, as is clearly shown by the ac-

ceptance, without noticeable protest, of the 1935 abrogation of citizenship and the 1941 abrogation of nationality for German Jews, and finally, racist anti-Semitism, which grew increasingly strong and infiltrated the two other variants, although in its apocalyptic form it probably affected no more than a minority of people.

Obviously, the German people were not transformed into a people of radical anti-Semites, for these remained a minority, albeit a powerful one. However, they did become affected by a Judeophobia that assured the regime of a sufficiently wide consensus regarding its policies, as indicated by the fact that the Germans accepted a whole string of increasingly rigid measures ranging from the 1933 exclusion of Jews from public functions to regulations that banned them from engaging in any form of economic activity, a measure that had reduced them to the state of pariahs by the eve of World War II.

On one point, certainly, the population and the regime appear to have been in perfect agreement: the image of the Weimar Republic. This was now increasingly generally identified with the Jews, and that image became more and more negative as the new regime demonstrated its ability to do better. On every level, whether that of health, power, or culture, the image projected by the defunct regime was one of decadence and failure that now had to be eradicated, if necessary by eradicating the Jews responsible.

In a development unprecedented in the history of modern Europe, Germany had become by the end of the 1930s the laboratory of an experiment designed to create a racist and anti-Semitic society, and the Nazi regime was pressing

ahead along this path, strengthened by growing, albeit possibly not homogeneous, popular support. The task that remained was to produce the nucleus of a "genocidal community" from within this apartheid society. The war was to make this possible.