

# THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF THE HOLOCAUST

21 November 2012

An essay invoking portions of three books:

1. The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, A History of Nazi Germany by William Shirer
2. Hitler's Willing Executioners, Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust by Daniel J. Goldhagen
3. WHY The Holocaust Happened, Its Religious Cause & Scholarly Cover-Up by Eric Zuesse

by Abe Van Luik ([abevanluik@thoughtsandplaces.org](mailto:abevanluik@thoughtsandplaces.org))

I have wondered if the plethora of Holocaust Museums is doing their intended job of preventing a recurrence. I wonder this because current events show us that it doesn't matter what your national affiliation is, if an 'enemy' is sufficiently dehumanized and feared to a proper extent, then those feeling called to fight this enemy can be talked into, or even themselves devise, inhumane courses of ill-treatment, garnished with outright torture and even murder. Scale is the biggest difference between these disturbing current events and the Holocaust, in my opinion.

If my description above has merit in terms of describing reality, then there is an obvious preventive: stop dehumanizing humans, even if they are temporarily enemies in the military sense. This is quite difficult. It is hard to get people to kill other people if they innately sense that these are people just like themselves. Differences must be found, emphasized and hyped to help the devaluation of the humanity of the enemy. Pejorative nicknames help: killing x number of 'gooks,' for example, is more palatable than killing x number of human beings.

It is my personal observation that when there is a military conflict, there is also usually a cultural conflict, and if there really isn't, one will be manufactured. Simmering just below almost as often there will also lie a religious conflict to help define one side as cosmically right, on Heaven's side. Then, by definition, its opponents are wrong in a cosmic sense, infected with evils that lie in cosmic darkness and chaos, cosmic forces always seeking to engulf the works of God/good. They are creatures of Hell.

It is persuasively argued in one of the three books I read for this essay on anti-Semitism (the third of the three books discussed below) that killing the Jews was a religious duty, and the war against other nations with a similar culture and similar racial make-up as Germany was for the purpose of ridding the world of Jewry. Others also rounded up during the Holocaust were "collateral damage" --perhaps-- but fit in with the creation of a 1,000-year Paradise on Earth with no sub-humans (Jews), no lesser

humans (anyone other than an Aryan), and no deformed humans. Perfection was the goal, Paradise requires perfection. It was all a (Christian) religious quest, according to the third book.

To satisfy myself that the rather startling conclusions in the third book seem plausible, I read substantial portions of the other two. The portions I was interested in were those that described the ubiquitous anti-Semitism at play, its roots, and its propagandists. I am not at all interested in writing a graphic description of the Holocaust's inhumanity and stupidity, others, including especially the second of the three books discussed below, do that well enough..

The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, A History of Nazi Germany by William Shirer, Simon and Schuster, 1960.

Shirer goes into some detail to document the growth of Hitler's anti-Semitic leanings during his formative years in Austria. Viennese political parties were all anti-Semitic, some more overtly than others, and Hitler found them to be weak in this respect. His strongest citations are from Hitler's autobiographical Mein Kampf (see Shirer's pages 26-27) where he cites Hitler describing his first encounter with a Jew dressed in peculiar black clothes (a "kaftan") and wearing his hair in a peculiar way. This alien sight so disturbed him that he instantly and intuitively knew that this was not and could never be a German. He went searching for more information in anti-Semitic literature, after which he began to see that all of the societal ills such as prostitution and white slavery, had Jews behind them. Shirer quotes Hitler on page 26:

Gradually . . . I began to hate them . . . For me this was the time of the greatest spiritual upheaval I have ever had to go through. I had ceased to be a weak-kneed cosmopolitan and become an anti-Semite.

Shirer makes mention of anti-Semitic activities in Germany during the years that the Nazi party was growing and coming to power, at one point (p. 35) showing that Hitler's strident anti-Semitic proclamations is what caused him to rise to a level of prominence in the Bavarian military, allowing him to use his voice and teach others.

My largest surprise in this book was its coverage of the role of religion, especially Lutheranism, in terms of actively sewing a malevolent anti-Semitism in the German-speaking lands. I knew Martin Luther had been largely responsible for approving of the savagery with which the Peasants' Revolt of 1525 was quashed by the princes with whom he sided, even though the peasants had revolted because of their belief in their own worth as gleaned from Luther's teachings (see pages 91 and 236). It is worth citing Shirer at some length here (page 236):

The great founder of Protestantism was both a passionate anti-Semite and a

ferocious believer in absolute obedience to political authority. He wanted Germany rid of the Jews and when they were sent away he advised that they be deprived of “all their cash and jewels and silver and gold” and furthermore, “that their synagogues or schools be set on fire, that their houses be broken up and destroyed . . . and they be put under a roof or stable, like the gypsies . . . in misery and captivity as they incessantly lament and complain to God about us” ---advice that was literally followed four centuries later by Hitler, Goering, and Himmler.

In what was perhaps the only popular revolt in German history, the peasant uprising of 1525, Luther advised the princes to adopt the most ruthless measures against the “mad dogs,” as he called the desperate downtrodden peasants. Here, as in his utterances about the Jews, Luther employs a coarseness of language unequaled in German history until the Nazi time. The influence of this towering figure extended down the generations in Germany, especially among the Protestants.

This begins a section on Hitler's conflict with the Protestant churches, but it is interesting that the many hundreds of pastors jailed and abused who were not willing to go along with the Nazification of their churches were arguing about who was in charge, over their pulpit-power, and except for some rare instances was not a protest over the treatment being accorded to Jews. A notable exception from what Shirer calls the “Confessional Church,” is a letter that protested the treatment of Jews, led to the jailing of hundreds of its pastors, the confiscation of its moneys, and a ban on collections. A prominent signatory of that letter, a Dr. Weissler, was sent to a concentration camp and there martyred as an object lesson (page 238). Later that same year more than 800 pastors and members of that same church were jailed and that church's resistant spirit was no more. Obeying God rather than man was not a valid concept when the man being disobeyed was “the herald of a new revelation” (page 239).

I quite liked the discussion of Einstein's celebrated discovery of relativity on page 251 where a “Professor Mueller” is cited saying that the worldwide acclaim over this discovery

. . . was really only a rejoicing over “the approach of Jewish world rule which was to force down German manhood irrevocably and eternally to the level of the lifeless slave.”

On the same page Shirer then cites a “Professor Lenard” who dismisses Jewish physics:

“the Jew conspicuously lacks understanding for the truth . . . being in this

respect in contrast to the Aryan research scientist with his careful and serious will to truth. . . . Jewish physics is thus a phantom and a phenomenon of degeneration of fundamental German physics.”

Shirer observes after that citation:

And yet from 1905 to 1931 ten German Jews had been awarded Nobel Prizes for their contributions to science.

There is much more of interest in Shirer's book, but this will have to do for the purpose of this review since I have two more books coming up that actually go into the source of the ubiquitous anti-Semitism that Hitler made into his personal crusade for total elimination..

What I have picked up on from this reading (not just the citations given here) is that anti-Semitism was endemic and at its roots religion-spawned. It was virulent in the Middle-Ages and reignited at the end of that time by Martin Luther and many others who were reading their scriptures carefully and saw a reason to continually attempt to avenge the killing of their God. Pseudo-science then added another layer to human knowledge in terms of what was vulgarly (and by Hitler) called “blood,” and Hitler became convinced that a purification of German, Aryan, Teutomic blood would solve all ills and lead to a paradise without illness. The price for this transition, which included killing millions of tainted-blood Jews, and some others with impure blood or with physical imperfections or behavioral problems that set them apart from the ideal German. But this price was worth it. It would usher in Paradise.

Economic hard times were also blamed on Jewish conspiracies and international Jewish cabals designed to keep the Germans down, of course. So guilds and trade organizations threw out and barred Jews. But at its core the anti-Semitism that was the seed for the Holocaust in Germany and Europe was planted in the souls and minds of believers: it originated and spread as a religious dogma, an article of faith, almost. It was a Christian thing.

Hitler's Willing Executioners, Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust by Daniel J. Goldhagen, Vintage Books, 1997.

The title of this book made it irresistible to me. As a youngster I had several times asked my father to please tell me that it was only a very tiny fraction of Germans that had any part in the way he was treated and in the Holocaust. He never gave me the answer I was hoping for. As far as his own observations went, it was well known and generally accepted that Jews were undesirable, even evil, and had to be done away with. The fact that he chose not to go along with this idea in the Netherlands is what landed him in a slave labor camp in Germany.

This book comes to the same conclusion: anti-Semitism was ubiquitous and actively taught in churches and schools and guild halls. Hitler was a mushroom growing out of this forest floor. He was neither original, nor unique except that he became unique when he actually started doing what others just talked about as being desirable: getting Jews out of Germany.

That is the gist of the first part of the book, which also explains the nature and sources of this general fear and loathing of all things Jewish. It is time to go to the book, so to speak:

Page 49, the beginning of Chapter 2 entitled “The Evolution of Eliminationist Antisemitism in Modern Germany:”

European antisemitism is a corollary of Christianity.

I'll let that sink in a while before I go on. What Goldhagen is saying is that if you have Christianity as commonly understood in Europe at that place and time, you have antisemitism. Goldhagen devotes a paragraph to drive this point home, but quickly goes to the theological/psychological/sociological 'why' behind this corollary:

. . . as long as Jews rejected the revelation of Jesus, they unwittingly challenged the Christians' certitude in that revelation. If the Jews, the people of God, shunned the messiah that God had promised them, then something was awry. Either the messiah was false, or the people had gone, profoundly astray, perhaps tempted by the Devil himself. Christians could not countenance contemplation of the former, so they opted with heart and soul for the latter. . . .

Goldhagen then (pages 49-50) spells out a second, but closely related reason for the Christian antagonism toward Jews: they shared the same Jewish Bible as a common heritage, but read it differently:

. . . Christians conceived of their religion as superseding Judaism. Therefore, Jews as Jews ought to disappear from the earth. They ought to become Christians. But Jews adamantly would not. . . . So a never-ending antagonism over the meaning of this heritage, over the interpretation of the Bible and God's words, over many of the sacred texts of Christianity itself, produced additional pressure for Christians to disparage Jews, to impugn their understanding of the contested sacred terrain. If the Jews were right, the Christians were wrong. The very understanding of the sacred order and its symbols, and of the moral order derived from them, depend upon ensuring that all Christians believed the Jews to be in error. . . . Jews came to represent much that was antithetical to the moral order of the Christian world.

Finally, there is this (page 50) which deserves serious thought, hence I will cite Goldhagen at some length to allow him to explain the point:

A third source of the abiding Christian hostility towards Jews and of their reflexive disparagement of them was the axiomatic belief that Jews were “Christ-killers.” Christians held not only the Jews of Jesus' time responsible for Jesus' death but also Jews for all time. Contemporary Jews indeed rejected Jesus as messiah and the son of God no less than their forebears had, who, according to passionate and continuous Christian teaching and preaching, had killed him. All Jews, by taking this rejectionist stance, implicated themselves in the crime which had been the original consequence of their forebears' denial of Jesus' divinity. Jews became symbolic Christ-killers, were seen as having approved of the crime and, indeed, if given the chance, were considered to be capable of repeating it. And do, the Jews' continuing, daily rejection of Jesus was seen as an act of sacrilegious defiance, as an open, brazen, contemptuous gauntlet thrown in the faces of Christians.

On the rest of page 50 and much of page 51 Goldhagen supports the assertions just made with a citation from the early Church Father John Chrysostom, and discusses how Chrysostom's attitude toward the Jews permeated the church. He then concludes that discussion with these words:

From the time of John Chrysostom until the modern period, the attitudes and treatment of Jews in the Christian world underwent frequent adjustment, as did Christian doctrine and practice. Yet while all the changes in Christians' theology and doctrine were taking place, the underlying belief in the divinity of Jesus remained firm. So too was antisemitism. While changes in Christians' elaborated beliefs about about, and treatment of, Jews did occur, their most essential conception of the nature of Jews, as killers of Jesus and blasphemers, endured and was transmitted from generation to generation. . . .

Goldhagen continues to summarize on page 52:

The Medieval Christian world conceived of Jews as being in binary opposition to Christianity. The Church, secure in its theological and practical hold over the dominions of Europe, was nonetheless totalitarian in aspiration. It responded to the symbolic challenge to its rule that it saw in Jews with a ferocity that was tempered or inflamed according to contextual conditions. The Jews' special status as the people that both had rejected Jesus' revelation and had “killed” him, although they, of all people, ought to have recognized and embraced him as their messiah, was the source of the enduring and bitter hatred of Jews by the Church, the Christian clergy, and the people of Europe. . . .

Lest we lay all modern European antisemitism on the Catholic Church, Goldhagen explains on page 53:

The medieval European hatred of Jews was so intense and so divorced from reality that all calamities in society could be and were attributed to the Jews' malfeasance. The Jews stood for everything that was awry, so that the reflexive reaction to a natural or social ill was to look for its supposed Jewish sources. Martin Luther's antisemitism was ferocious and influential enough to have earned him a place in the pantheon of antisemites. This did not matter to the Church that Luther was fighting, for the Church denounced him and his followers as heretics and Jews.

A delicious irony.

Goldhagen quickly takes us into modern times by observing that the Europeans, by the 1500s, had forcibly emptied Europe of Jews. There were very few Jews. The Church wanted them gone, but by forcing them to move away or to convert, not by killing them.

Goldhagen spends many pages proving that so called German liberals arguing for the rehabilitation of Jews through conversion were readily admitting that they were evil and anti-German until such a conversion took place. The liberals actually had their way in the late nineteenth century with laws passed to allow Jews to be full German citizens. But the backlash from religious leaders and business and guild interests was powerful and again ruled the day by the time the Nazis showed on the scene. Antisemitism changed its face as pseudo-science offered it to be recast as a biological-racial necessity. This Jew, even if converted, is still the same evil person as taught in Christian churches. Perhaps the convert's mind or even heart is leaning toward Christianity, but the Jewishness and its innate evil cannot be 'converted' out of his very biology. Many have claimed that 'science' made the Holocaust possible. That is absurd, of course. Science-so-called gave a new mask to the religion-based age-old antisemitism. It also argued for not ever trusting a Jewish convert to be really Christian, or really German.

The above paragraph is not to be laid at the feet of Goldhagen, it is my impression from reading much in the earlier parts of his book. What Goldhagen himself says about the "cultural model" of antisemitism in vogue in Germany during the last of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is this (page 54):

The cultural model preserved, or differently conceived, was an enduring expression of the vast majority of Germans' shared emotional attitude towards the Jews which was derived from the medieval animus that underlay German's

conception of Jews and relations with them. . . . For hundreds of years, antisemitism had lent coherence and esteem to the self-image of the Christian world; as many of the certitudes about the world eroded in nineteenth century Germany, the centrality of antisemitism as a model of cultural coherence and eventually as a political ideology—and its balmic quality to a society losing its moorings—grew tremendously.

Goldhagen continues in this chapter to map the underpinnings of the more virulent antisemitism that grew in reaction to the liberalizing that had occurred for a time. He shows philosophers and churchmen both admitting that the Jew, even if it was admitted that he or she ought to be treated humanely, was innately evil and needed to be separated from German society to keep it from being corrupted. He shows that German Christian pastors were surprised and perplexed when their views on the necessity of eliminating Jews from Christian societies were rejected by Christian leaders from other parts of the western world. The rest of his book then goes on to prove (to my satisfaction) that if these were one's beliefs concerning the nature of the Jews, whether consciously from a religious or a cultural perspective, one could easily believe that punishing and eliminating Jews was doing a service to society and to God.

In the “Foreword to the German Edition” (pages 482-483) Goldhagen makes some optimistic observations on what has changed in Germany since the war. He cited documentation based on surveys showing that as democratic beliefs and values increased, antisemitism has measurably declined. He praises the modern, post-war governments and societal leaders for instilling a new egalitarian view of races and humanity. He observed that what antisemitism there still is has at least lost its

. . . central, hallucinatory elements—which attributed to the Jews demonic powers and intentions—that characterized antisemitism during the Nazi period and before.

To me this is a backhanded and indirect way of saying that either the Christian religion has changed its teachings or that it has simply lost power over the minds of the German people. Likely it is some of both. Throughout Europe, the Christian religions religion have lost adherents and influence since the war. I am very sorry, but I see this as a good thing.

What I fear for the far future is the resurgence of fundamentalist Christianity, in my own country and elsewhere. If that magical mindset, with its view of the Bible as the literal inerrant word of God, is ever again coupled with absolute political power, the Holocaust is not likely to happen again but worse, some semblance of an Armageddon-type conflict will be engineered that will leave only a remnant of humanity alive as prophesied in the Word of God, and then the Christ-figure these people fervently believe in will come back from heaven and usher in the thousand-year reign



of peace and human perfection—a variant on Hitler's dream. Today's fundamentalist Christians supports Israel materially and wants it to be armed to the teeth. Not because they love Jews, but because it sets up all the players needed for carrying out the drama in the hate-fueled end-time vision of John of Patmos. If that vision is from God, then that God as a miserable misanthrope, and do are those who hunger and thirst for these end-times to come in their lifetimes so they can experience the Rapture, and rise from the Earth to meet Christ, as their fellow humans suffer grotesque fiery deaths below for failure to believe, or if they believed, simply holding to the wrong belief.

For a view that is very compatible with my rather alarmist view, I now turn your attention to the third book in my book-troika.

WHY The Holocaust Happened, Its Religious Cause & Scholarly Cover-Up by Eric Zuesse, SuperiorBooks.com, Inc., 2001.

Zuesse is the most focused on the very issue that interests me, which is the nature of the fuel that allowed the Holocaust to occur. It takes people, and leadership, and both must share a common view of reality. Zuesse's message is strong and strident. He squarely blames Hitler's Christianity and Hitler's very own fundamentalist, literal, reading of the Bible, accepting each word of it as God-spoken truth and actual history.

I felt the need to look at the other two books to see if his views were credible and plausible. My conclusion: they were credible and are plausible, and if the currently virulent strains of fundamentalist Christianity ever gain the upper hand politically in any country, reflecting the beliefs and values of its citizenry, a Holocaust-like scenario could happen again.

I can hear the objections now: fundamentalist Christians are the greatest supporters of Israel! Sure, but why? Because they love the Jews? In my opinion it is almost the opposite: they love the idea of Armageddon coming soon, which requires there to be Jews living in Israel. That conflict will wipe out most of the Jews and many others, and bring Christ back in triumph and glory. Christ, having defeated his enemies, leaving the Earth cleansed of evildoers, will reign among the righteous believing remnant.

Christ will reign for a thousand years and all human corruption and imperfection will be done away. Any remaining Jews will have seen with their own eyes who the true God is, and will worship Jesus. It is Hitler's vision, but without the racial overlay and substituting divine violence for human violence, tempered by some divine magic involving human physical imperfections being fixed among the faithful rather than being eliminated through murder.

As I suggested at the end of the last section, this *Book of Revelations*-fueled Christian

vision of the end-time is just as brutal and bloody as Hitler's vision. Cleansing the Earth by fire (cleansing it of its undesirable humans) is extreme violence, it is *not* humane, "just war" doctrines notwithstanding. Being carried out by legions of destroying angels under the command of Jesus does not make it humane. The Divine is above human notions of ethics, I have been told. The Divine Plan is 'just,' I have been told, we are just too ant-like to see the bigger ethical and moral picture. That bigger picture includes something we cannot see, and that is the next life when all the scales of justice will be balanced. So I have been told I should believe.

It is a test of faith.  
A test I am happy to fail.

OK, you have heard enough from me and my strident views on the topic of the Christina vision of the end-time. I have strongly negative opinions on this aspect of the Christian religion's vision, and see it as a violence-accepting mythos that too easily carries into this life. I also see great danger in the ready acceptance of the destruction of neighbors, colleagues, and even close kin who fail to believe, or fail to believe properly. If they are 'deserving' of God's vengeance for no belief or wrong belief, who are we to object? As an advertising executive seeking to have the entire world understand what their true religion ought to be, God is incompetent judging by the plethora of religions (even within Christianity) and by several of them being convinced they are the sole dispensers of Rapture boarding passes.

As Christ's destroying angels begin their cleansing operation, those whose belief was true and correct will be caught up into heaven, and as Christ descends to take possession of his new, clean Earth, they will descend with him for a thousand years of life in peace, with no disease and plenty to eat: Paradise regained!

Hitler was working on bringing about this same scenario, he had only forgotten that the deadly violence and the cleansing fire was to be provided by God's angels, not Hitler's.

But this section is supposed to be a collection of statements from Zuesse's very provocative book, not provocative statements from me, so let's get to what Zuesse provides us in terms of understanding the roots of the Holocaust in his book:

Before one even gets to the Contents page, Zuesse gives us this bone-chilling citation from Hitler:

"The teachings of Christ have laid the foundations for the battle against Jews as the enemy of Mankind; the work that Christ began, I shall finish."  
*Adolf Hitler, speech to his followers, December 18, 1926*

In stark contrast with the upbeat ending of the Goldhagen book, Zuesse begins the

main part of his book by citing a broadcast from National Public Radio by Reporter Sylvia Poggioli who toured Europe in 2000 to investigate the resurgence of racism and racist violence there. On pages 12 and 13 this is what he cites from Poggioli's report after noting that she says this resurgence has nothing to do with economic hard times:

Racism and xenophobia are strongest in the most affluent of European countries—in Austria, in Switzerland, and in some Scandinavian countries. More than anything, I think that Europeans believe that it's their cultural identity that is being threatened.

Modern European states were built on the idea of monoethnicity. . . . Europeans are not shocked by the idea of ethnic division and partition. This is also the reason why right-wing parties have succeeded in creating an image of immigrants as an underclass of undeserving members of society.

Recent polls show that xenophobia is gaining respectability. Over two-thirds of those polled admitted to being a little racist, and 33% admitted they were very racist or quiet racist. . . . There are also many much more worrisome signs, what former Swiss President Ruth Dreifuss called the return of the repressed in European politics. She meant that all of a sudden we see an acceptance of ultra-right-wing language and platforms that have been rejected since World War II, and this made me think about what I believe is Europe's dirty secret: its continuing reluctance to come to terms with the worst crime ever committed against humanity, and which happened on its territory by Europeans against Europeans half a century ago, . . . the Holocaust. And I think it's this reluctance by Europe to come to terms with its past that makes it much more difficult for it to confront its new racism.

Zuesse suggests that confronting that past must focus on the religious roots of the Holocaust, and not get side-tracked into convoluted discussions of complex social theories of human motivation. Sure the reasons for the Holocaust are multi-faceted, but they are structures resting on a foundation without which none of them would have stood up: religion. That is my interpretation of Zuesse's theme, but I ought to let Zuesse speak for himself.

The theory put forth by some great thinkers that 'science' lies at the root of modern antisemitism is roundly rejected by Zuesse. I agree. As I stated previously, biology and race pseudo-science allowed the linking of the absurdities that religion had taught about the evil inherent in Jewishness into the very corporeal nature of Jews, as if evil resided in their bones as it were, making conversion to Christianity a suspicious act to say the least.

Where Zuesse first really shocked me is on page 16 of the Preface where he

suggested that the German war machine was not all about gaining more *Lebensraum* (living room) for the German people, but its primary mission was the destruction of Jews, everywhere:

The Führer's words right before his suicide—his final, supreme, statement of his war-aims—urged his people to continue the war, until victory, against what he held to be the sole real enemy: “the poisoner of all nations, international Jewry.” The enemy for him was Jews in *all* nations; this also sheds light on why over 96% of the Jews slaughtered in the Holocaust did not come from Germany. We shall indeed show that, for Hitler, defeat of the enemy entailed nothing less than the extermination of all Jews.

In other words, for Hitler, the Holocaust—the “final solution”—was not a military device, it was a military goal; in fact, it was the central military goal, which took precedence over even the expansion of *Lebensraum*. In order to understand why the Holocaust happened, it therefore is necessary to understand why Hitler hated Jews so fanatically and so obsessively that nothing less than their total extermination would satisfy him.

The reason this shocked me is that I always thought the primary military goal was territorial conquest. But this is the gauntlet Zuesse throws down and spends his book proving, to an astonishingly convincing degree.

Zuesse is very interested in showing that Hitler was not swept up by the crest of an upwelling wave, but instead worked hard at making that crest rise and then rode it like an expert surfer toward his shoreline-destination: Paradise on Earth. So Zuesse's focus is on proving that Hitler knew of and bought into and used to his advantage the religious underpinnings of antisemitism already present in the society he was part of in Austria and Germany (and many other places in Europe of course). He makes the case that Hitler, a Catholic, was a fundamentalist and a true believer in the Bible even though he had big jurisdictional (power) fights with both the Catholic and Protestant churches. But those churches at the official levels did not stand in the way of his carrying out his terror campaign against the Jews, as has already been mentioned it was quite the opposite, with some very notable local exceptions who suffered greatly for expressing their contrary beliefs.

I will follow Zuesse's interest in Hitler's personal understanding only to the extent that it shows what devastating use was made of religious texts to argue that eradicating Jews was a Godly and noble thing to do.

Zuesse begins reading about Hitler's religious beliefs in a speech he made in 1919 (on pages 24-25):

. . . the case is presented that the reason why Hitler wanted it to happen is that

in 1919, when he first entered politics, Hitler came to the conclusion that the only way possible for him to deal with certain personal problems that had long plagued him, and also the only way for him to achieve his spiritual salvation as a Christian, would be for him to execute God's will on Earth, as expressed in "The Bible—Monumental History of Mankind," (as he phrased the matter), and to cleanse the world of the "original sin" of the "blood poisoning" of "The Aryan" or "Children of God" (or pureblooded Christians) that has occurred by "miscegenation" with "the Jews," whom Christ had identified in *John 8:44* as being the child of Satan. Hitler, as a fundamentalist Christian to whom the Bible was "history" instead of myth, had concluded that this "race-mixing" violated "Racial purity the highest law" of God, and thus constituted "a terrible fact" producing "misery forever." And he was determined to end it.

What does John 8:44 say? I will cite the Phillips translation here (the equivalent of verses 41-45) because it makes this point crystal clear: rejection of Jesus means you are a child of the Devil:

"We are not illegitimate!" they retorted. We have one Father—God."

"If God were really your Father," replied Jesus, "you would have loved me. For I came from God; and I am here. I did not come of my own accord—he sent me, and I am here. Why do you not understand my words? It is because you cannot hear what I am saying. Your father is the devil, and what you are wanting to do is what your father longs to do. He always was a murderer, and has never dealt with the truth, since the truth will have nothing to do with him. Whenever he tells a lie, he speaks in character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. And it is because I speak the truth that you will not believe me. . . .

If one takes these words (or any other translation's variant reading of them) as truth spoken by God then it takes no convoluted logic at all to conclude that current-generation Jews are children of the devil: they still reject Jesus. Being of the devil, they are liars, fully capable of murder, and impervious to truth. Zuesse, later in this book and especially in his book *Christ's Ventriloquists* [link] on Paul as the inventor of Christianity, makes a sound case for this type of antisemitic diatribe to have been invented by Paul's followers, following Paul's lead, when they wrote or edited what later became the books of the New Testament.

Zuesse (pages 23-26) goes on to show that Hitler early-on in life developed a morbid fascination with 'blood' and its purity. (Aha! Science!) His abhorrence of miscenegation between Jews and Christians/Germans stemmed from his unique concept of "original sin" which led to mental and physical problems in such impure-blood people, some of which were those from which he suffered, and for which he blamed a distant Jewish ancestor that was never proven to have existed.

Zuesse explains that this fueled his need to prove to God that he was willing to cleanse himself by cleansing the whole world of Satan's brood. It must have worked: his Church gave him a requiem mass after he killed himself! That is a sendoff to heaven reserved for Catholics in very good standing indeed! Would God have allowed that had He not approved?

I am sorry, but blasphemy is not something I can control at times.

Hitler's earlier stridently antisemitic views are matured somewhat and plainly reflected in his two volume opus published in 1925 and 1926: *Mein Kampf*. Zuesse cites that source several times to show that Hitler widely advertised his plans to eradicate the Jews, and appealed to the Christian religion for his basis.

Zuesse makes it very clear that he believes that if there had been no Hitler, there would not have been a Holocaust. He takes issue with some of the Goldhagen conclusions. Societal antisemitism was an important platform, without it a Holocaust would not have been possible, But it took a Hitler to form it into the extermination program and unimaginable horror that it became. It took a Hitler with personal problems he felt to be from God, punishing him for some blood taint, and his actions were his atonement, his reach for salvation. On page 25 Zuesses spelled out his logic this way:

The German public were raised with the same anti-Semitic myths as Hitler. That is the key reason why they considered Hitler's anti-Semitism acceptable or even good. That, in turn, is a major reason they elected him, and *why they carried out* his Holocaust. Thus, the Bible placed the seed for the Holocaust in Hitler's mind, and fertilized the soil—the German public—for the bumper crop of death that was to come.

In sum: the Holocaust was inspired by the Bible, but was triggered by Hitler's personal problems. The Versailles Treaty and Weimar collapse were the stage-setting for the crime, religion was the gun, the Holocaust was the bullet, and Hitler's personal problems triggered the gun that delivered the bullet.

His next chapter, Chapter 1, provides documentary support for these assertions, please consult it for the details.

What I am particularly interested in is the key role of the Bible. Zuesse suggests, in this book and in his *Christ's Ventriloquists* book, that the writings of Paul were particularly useful to the antisemites, and that followers of Paul wrote into the corpus of documents later fated to become scripture many antisemitic things that in all likelihood are purposeful fictions designed to make Jews bad guys and Christians good guys to the intended Greco-Roman audience's societal sensibilities. Why would a man proudly proclaiming himself a Jew (and Roman citizen at the same time, don't forget) be antisemitic? Because the Jewish Christians rejected his version of

Christianity, which elevated a holy man to Godhood, a violation of a basic Jewish tenet, and rejected the Jewish Law. It is that simple. Zuesse spends later chapters (15 and 16) on this topic.

So how did Hitler make use of Bible texts? Like a true fundamentalist would. Zuesse discusses Hitler's fundamentalism extensively in his Chapter 3, and I will cite from him at some length because I believe this is a crucial point in identifying the fuel used to fire the holocaust [see Zuesse for the proper source-references for cited statements, references were taken out and replaced with '. . .' here for the sake or readability]:

[Page 53] “The teachings of Christ have laid the foundations for the battle against Jews as the enemy of Mankind; the work that Christ began, I shall finish.” Thus did Hitler summarize his mission, addressing his followers on 18 December 1926, in a speech to the Nazi Party . . . . He was speaking to people he viewed as supporters, not as enemies; so it came from the heart, it expressed his true convictions. Similarly, prior to his power struggle with the churches culminating in 1937, Hitler felt that the Roman Catholic church, and the other Christian denominations, were “my people,” not “outsiders,” much less “the enemy.” So it was with sincerity that Hitler, at the beginning of his reign, reassured Bishop Berning in conversation on 26 April 1933, “I am doing what the Church has done for 1,500 years. I am simply finishing the job.” . . . Hitler, in fact, had good reason to expect that the Catholic Church would support his policies in this regard. Already on 1 April 1933, Cardinal Bertram had specifically interceded in support of Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies by issuing a decision not to oppose the Nazis’ first official act against Germany’s Jews, a boycott against Jewish-owned businesses. . . .

[Page 54] . . . the real start, according to Hitler’s repeated testimony twenty years later, such as in speeches on 10 February and 23 November 1939, had come in 1919, “when, after long internal struggles, I became a politician and took up the battle against my enemy.” Hitler’s private notes to himself in 1919 document the very moment of the Holocaust’s likely conception—the first recorded statement by Hitler of what was to become, in fuller flower, Hitler’s theory behind the Holocaust; the seed from which the Holocaust ultimately grew. . . .

On the basis of “The Bible—Monumental History of Mankind,” Hitler in these notes identifies the meaning of “original sin” as consisting of the “blood poisoning” of “the Aryan” or “Children of God” by “the Jew” via “miscegenation,” violating “Racial purity the highest law,” and so constituting “a terrible fact” that produces “misery forever.” On this basis, Hitler asks, “Purification of the Bible—what of its spirit remains?” What he is referring to here is the Garden of Eden; Paradise lost. Also a prerequisite in order to understand these momentous

private notes of Hitler, is to understand the Roman Catholic concept of “original sin,” which itself has its roots in the story of Adam and Eve in *Genesis*, in the Bible.

[Page 55] . . . Basing its teaching firmly on Scripture (esp. *Romans* 5:12–19), the Church teaches that from Adam original sin has been transmitted to all men. . . . The original sin each person inherits is not an actual sin he personally commits.” Furthermore, “We do not know the exact nature of the first human sin”; Hitler, first in outline in these notes, and then later on in *Mein Kampf* and his other writings and statements, filled in the blanks on that. The concept, however, of collective or inherited guilt was not Hitler’s invention. It is prominent throughout the Bible, and the very basis of the concept of “original sin.” In fact, both the *New Testament* and the *Old* endorse the concept of collective guilt, even in the context—widespread in the Bible—of a “people” as, essentially, a race.

. . . Hitler had been struggling all his life with his ailments, which he believed had their origins in some kind of “blood poisoning.” The question gnawed at him whether the source of this “poisoning” was Jews, perhaps via his father’s original sin of having been born from one and so inheriting and passing on the contamination. As we have mentioned, Waite . . . quotes Hitler as having speculated to an associate, “All of us are suffering from the ailment of mixed, corrupted blood. How can we purify ourselves and make atonement?” In the same place . . . , Waite also has Hitler saying to another friend, “In the Gospels [*Matthew* 27:25] the Jews call to Pilate when Pilate hesitated to crucify Jesus: ‘His blood comes over us and over our children.’ I must perhaps fulfill this curse.” Here Hitler was expressing his own, medically unexplained, persistent ailments and malaise, as a “curse,” and asking “How can we purify ourselves and make atonement” for “the ailment of mixed, corrupted blood?” There are likewise numerous other occasions, some of them in *Mein Kampf* itself, in which Hitler makes references that are difficult if not impossible to interpret any other way . . . .

[Page 56] . . . Hitler believed the Bible to be “history,” not myth. That constitutes the core belief of fundamentalist Christianity; it, in fact, *defines* Christian fundamentalism, just as, say, Moslem fundamentalism is defined by one’s taking the Koran to be the literal and infallible Truth. The belief is derived from the more basic one that the given Scripture is inerrant, infallible, the literal Word of God. . . . Hitler was a Roman Catholic fundamentalist or believer in “The Bible—Monumental History of Mankind.” Consequently, when he later referred to “this curse” from the Gospel of *Matthew*, he meant that literally. And also, when *John* 8:44 refers to “the Jews” as the children of the devil, Hitler took that literally—and he feared that this referred to *himself*. When Hitler learned the Bible as a



child, he learned that “the Jews” were, as Christ was quoted in *John 8:44* as calling them, children of the devil, who was “a murderer from the beginning,” and also “the father of lies,” so that Jews, likewise, were murderers and liars. Elsewhere in the *New Testament*, he learned that Jews were “snakes” or “vipers,” which represented Satan in several places in the *New Testament*.

[Page 57] . . . (Only later was Hitler to try to integrate the two [science and religion], by his conviction that Satan’s blood poisoning of Aryans worked *by means of* a “virus” or a “bacillus” that Jews carried.)

Hitler, evidently, did not believe that God was punishing him for any sins that he had *personally* committed. He was one of “God’s People,” and always strove to follow God’s will. Thus, his answer must lie elsewhere: it must lie in *original sin* itself. This is what God was punishing him for.

. . . What the *New Testament* did is to expose “the Jews” as *not only* no longer “God’s Chosen People,” but as *actually* the people of Satan. Precisely when this transformation—if that is what it was—took place is not stated. In the *Old Testament*, Jews repeatedly disappointed God’s expectations of them. But it was not until *John 8:44* and other passages in the *New Testament* that “the Jews” were identified as today’s incarnation [Page 58] of Satan. And in *Matthew 23:33* and other *New Testament* passages, Christ was quoted as exposing them as “a brood of snakes” who are “sentenced to hell.” Hitler had his answer; he received it from Christ Himself. *Hitler was being punished for Satan’s blood; Hitler’s original sin was his own “blood poisoning.”*

[Zuesse next shows Hitler to have been aware of end-times descriptions of the final wars between God and Satan and that his invasion of Russia was an eschatological war, an attempt to defeat Satan:]

. . . near the end of *Mein Kampf*, under “Eastern Policy,” Hitler placed Russia in the context of “Jewry’s twentieth-century effort to take world dominion unto itself,” by his asserting that “the international Jew today rules Russia absolutely,” and that the Jew “continues to move farther on his fatal course, until another force opposes him and, in a mighty struggle, once more pitches the stormer of the heavens back to Lucifer.”

Hitler went on to refer to “the Jews” as “this international snake,” and “this spawn of hell,” after, respectively, passages such as *Matthew 23:33* and *Revelation 20:2* in which Satan and/or “the Jews” appear in the form of a snake; and *John 8:44* calling “the Jews” the children of Satan. Hitler concluded the tirade with: “The struggle against Jewish bolshevization of the world requires a clear attitude towards Soviet Russia. You cannot drive out the Devil with Beelzebub.” In other words, Lucifer, the Devil, or Beelzebub, represents or else

is represented by “the international Jew,” who can never be a partner with Germany (i.e., with German Christians) except by enslaving Christians in Germany just as Christians in Russia had been enslaved by this Satanic force. Earlier, in the book’s [*Mein Kampf*] most important chapter, Chapter 11 on “Nation and Race,” Hitler demonized Jews in not just one, but *four* different contexts. . . .

Another example of this anti-Semitic demonization in *Mein Kampf* refers to Hitler’s most traumatic period, Germany’s loss in World War I, which the annotator to the 1939 English edition described by saying that the German people “were utterly stunned by the suddenness of their defeat, for which nothing had prepared them” (p. 312). Hitler (pp. 312–3; 1943, pp. 231–2) attributed this military loss to Jewish “moral poisoning” of Germany, and described the press accounts of the military failures of Germany’s wartime leadership as having been nothing but another example of the “bottomless lying of Jewry,” who “have been nailed down forever, in an eternally correct sentence of fundamental truth, by one of the greatest minds of mankind; he called them ‘the great masters of lying,’” paraphrasing Christ’s reference to the devil in *John* 8:44. It is therefore not at all surprising that a 24 February 1943 speech by Hitler that promised to exterminate all Jews in Europe pointed to “the devilish plot of the Jewish global criminals,” and vowed to “wreck” the plot, presumably by means of this extermination. In a theoretical vein, Hitler said in a speech in May 1923 at the Circus Krone in Munich, “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but not human. They cannot be human in the sense of being in the image of God, the Eternal. Instead, the Jews are in the image of the devil.” . . .

[Page 60] [Referring to Hitler’s making use of *John* 8:42&44 often, labeling Jews as Satan’s children, Zuesse suggests:]

. . . These words do not come from Fichte, Plato, or some other abstruse philosopher that the boy Hitler was never exposed to, but instead from the very “Word of God,” the Bible itself, which he had mastered as a child. Furthermore, many children are first exposed to the Bible in a red-letter edition, and these are red-letter words, not black-letter ones. To Hitler, this was not inspired by God; it *was* God speaking.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler based a passage on this portion of *John* and *also* on *John* 2:13–22 describing Jesus taking the whip to beat “the Jews” out of the temple for having been changing money and selling goods there: Hitler referred to “the Sublime Founder of the new doctrine. Of course, the latter made no secret of His disposition towards the Jewish people, and when necessary He even took to the whip in order to drive out of the Lord’s temple this adversary [as ‘children of Satan’ would be] of all humanity, who even then as always saw in religion only a

means for his business existence. But for this, of course, Christ was crucified,” which actually combines also *Mark 11:18*, *Matthew 27:25*, and *1 Thessalonians 2:15–6*. So this Hitler-statement drew on *five* New-Testament passages.

Hitler’s Munich speech of 12 April 1922 drew indirectly from these and other passages when it said, “Watch the Oberammergau Passion Plays [which are based on these passages] this summer, and see who have the time and leisure and money to enjoy nature and the spectacle of Christ’s sufferings.” Such anti-Semitic passages were deeply rooted in the whole culture.

[Page 61] . . . Hitler’s theory behind the Holocaust, then, was based on his own answer to the question that the Catholic catechism could not answer: “We do not know the exact nature of the first human sin.” Hitler’s answer was based on *John 8:44* and *Matthew 27:25*: Jews are the children of Satan, and the blood of Jesus is upon them as a curse for their being so; Jewish blood is Satan’s blood, and because Jews carry this blood within their veins they killed Jesus for His having whipped them for their greed and evil. When Hitler’s 1919 notes mentioned “miscegenation,” this referred to Hitler’s interpretation of the meaning of “original sin.” And this was the “original sin” for which Hitler himself had to “atone,” and suffered his ailments.

Hitler’s literalist, fundamentalist Christian, theology retrojected or read-back into the ancient Jewish *Old Testament* account of Man’s Fall, the distinctively *New Testament* equation of snake=Satan=Jew, thus implicitly (Page 62) explaining why it was that in the *Old Testament* the Jews repeatedly disappointed God. According to Hitler’s theological interpretation, *there was a constitutional defect in the Jewish people*, which came to a climax in the Deicide, as reflected in passages such as *John 8:44*, *Matthew 23:33* and *27:25*, and *Luke 19:27*, which Hitler seems to have understood as Godly authorization for the Holocaust, as a new-dispensation version of such *Old Testament* instructions or commands from God as *Deuteronomy 7:1-3* and *20:16-8* (only *now*, “God’s People” were *Christians*, not *Jews*).

Hitler would “atone” for his own “curse” of his personal “original sin” of his “blood poisoning.” He passionately meant it when he said in *Mein Kampf* that he would heed God’s (*Deut.7:1–3*) “admonition finally to put an end to the permanently continuous original sin of a race poisoning and to give the Almighty Creator beings as He Himself created them. . . . Because God’s will once gave men their form, their being, and their faculties. Who destroys His work thereby declares war on the creation of the Lord, the divine will. . . . The sin against the blood and the degradation of the race are the hereditary sin of this world and the end of a mankind surrendering to them. . . . The Aryan gave up the purity of his blood and therefore he lost his place in the Paradise which he had created for himself.

He became submerged in the race-mixture, he gradually lost his cultural ability more and more, till at last not only mentally but physically he began to resemble more and more the subjected and aborigines than his ancestors.” Diseases such as Hitler complained of were, in his view, the consequence of such a “race poisoning”—from the worst of all sources, “the people of the devil.” The Holocaust was Hitler’s “atonement” for his own “original sin.” The leeches and doctors had failed, so Hitler relied upon the Bible.

[Zuesse shows through further references that Hitler's earlier passion of always carrying a whip was in conscious imitation of Christ's using a whip (which he must have carried) to chase the money-changers (=Jews) from the temple.] We will end with Zuesse's last statement in this chapter on Page 64:]

. . . as a Christian fundamentalist—a believer in “The Bible—Monumental History of Mankind”— Hitler looked up to an even higher source than medical science to find “Truth.” The Bible supplied him the answers that the doctors could not. To Hitler, “Truth” was a deeper truth. And it gave him a mission.

Zuesses' book is not an easy read, nor is it a pleasant read. But it tells a tale that has been avoided for far too many decades because saying that Hitler's insane hatred of the Jews came from his reading of the Bible is not palatable to the largely Christian world in which Hitler operated. Christians farther away from the Holocaust in both time and space were and still are, rightly, appalled and horrified by the Holocaust. To point to their very own and very revered book of scripture as the source of Hitler's 'madness' would be very offensive to that very large audience.

It suggests that their scripture may have some defects and not be an infallible “word of God” after all. Hitler's aberrations came not from a wrong reading of scripture, but from a very literal reading of scripture. Scripture was the tap-root of the Holocaust tree of evil, providing it its primary source of nourishment.

**CONCLUSION:** So how can a Holocaust Museum better prevent another Holocaust? By pointing out that the Bible, both in its Old and New Testaments, contains ethically and morally defective opinions of men, masquerading as God's word.

What sort of God orders genocidal actions? What sort of God labels a whole group of people as being subhuman children of evil for simply not being convinced by an argument that goes against their understanding?

The Bible is an interesting book and Jesus' life is an exemplary life to be sure, but it must be recognized that people with an “ax to grind” added material into these records that can easily be taken as truth when in fact they are human attempts to manipulate believers into feeling superior to, shun, or even mistreat and kill certain groups of non-

believers. The Bible is written by men, not by God. That applies to the portion of scripture revered by Jews as well the portions revered by Christians.

BUT, in defense of reluctance on the part of Holocaust Museum curators to add a plaque with a message such as this one about the evils lurking in “Holy Scripture,” huge masses of both believing Jews and Christians would be so shocked and offended that they would not come to a museum with such a message.

So here we are seventy years later, in a new Millennium with the same old religious falsehoods carefully maintained for the sake of politeness, and God-fueled self-righteousness keeping the various fires going under slow-simmering hatreds, thus maintaining the potential for violence under the veneer of otherwise peaceful and civilized “Christian” societies.

---

PS: Very recently I was reminded of the reason I should not confuse the good, helpful, caring social structures built by Christians, based on positive Christian principles, with the potentially violent fundamentalist aberrations I just described. (The same can no doubt be said about Muslim society.)

Those aberrations sometimes show up in individuals among otherwise good and kind people. They sometimes show up as a mass-movement in a subset of a religion, a sect. Or across several religions and several nations as occurred in Europe, ready to be dragged to a violent extreme end by the right (meaning wrong) leader. Biblical literalism and focus on those few portions that allow labeling unbelievers as children of Satan who deserve death underlay the Holocaust.

Can it happen again? The US “religious right” has several voices saying things eerily similar to what was being said in Germany before the Holocaust, except this time the militaristic rhetoric is aimed at another set of the “people of the book” who do not recognize Jesus as being God, Islam, and it is part of the overall rhetorical carping about the coming end-times Tribulation, etc.

But every religion teaches love and caring for fellow believers and others, and every religion has good people who seek to do and are willing to do good.

What reminded me of the kinder, gentler side of Christianity was the help my family recently received from a religion I no longer consider mine, but that locally continues to consider me one of theirs since my good wife is still an adherent. I can't go into the details of the help provided, but it involved several hurdles that my wife and I just could not get across until help was offered, accepted, and delivered. These were difficult challenges. The help was wonderful, and so was its outcome!

The particular religion I am referring to as having been very, very helpful to me is in no danger of going Biblically fundamentalist anytime soon, in my opinion. They had the audacity to add three books of 'modern scripture' to that ancient tome.