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## 2.

### **Christians and Jews after Auschwitz**

Being a Meditation also on the End  
of Bourgeois Religion

#### **A Moral Awareness of Tradition**

I am no expert in the field of Jewish-Christian ecumenism. And yet my readiness to voice an opinion on the question of Jewish-Christian relations after Auschwitz is motivated not least by the fact that I no longer really know—faced with the catastrophe of Auschwitz—what being an expert can possibly mean. So already that name has been uttered which cannot and should not be avoided when the relationship between Jews and Christians in this country—or in fact anywhere else—is being formulated and decided. It is a name which may not be avoided here, nor forgotten for an instant, precisely because it threatens already to become only a fact of history, as if it could be classified alongside other names in some preconceived and overarching history and thereby successfully delivered over to forgetfulness, or—amounting in the end to the same thing—to selective memorial celebrations: the name “Auschwitz,” intended above all here as a symbol of the horror of that millionfold murder done to the Jewish people.

Auschwitz concerns us all. Indeed what makes Auschwitz unfathomable is not only the executioners and their assistants, not only the apotheosis of evil revealed in these, and not only the silence of God. Unfathomable, and sometimes even more disturbing, is the silence of men: the silence of all those who looked on or

looked away and thereby handed over this people in its peril of death to an unutterable loneliness. I say this not with contempt but with grief. Nor am I saying it in order to revive again the dubious notion of a collective guilt. I am making a plea here for what I would like to call a moral awareness of tradition. A moral awareness means that we can only mourn history and win from it standards for our own action when we neither deny the defeats present within it nor gloss over its catastrophes. Having an awareness of history and attempting to live out of this awareness means, above all, not evading history's disasters. It also means that there is at least *one* authority that we should never reject or despise—the authority of those who suffer. If this applied anywhere, it applies, in our Christian and German history, to Auschwitz. The fate of the Jews must be remembered as a moral reality precisely because it threatens already to become a mere matter of history.

### **Auschwitz as End Point and Turning Point?**

The question whether there will be a reformation and a radical conversion in the relations between Christians and Jews will ultimately be decided, at least in Germany, by the attitude we Christians adopt toward Auschwitz and the value it really has for ourselves. Will we actually allow it to be the end point, the disruption which it really was, the catastrophe of our history, out of which we can find a way only through a radical change of direction achieved via new standards of action? Or will we see it only as a monstrous accident within this history but not affecting history's course?

Let me clarify the personal meaning I attach to Auschwitz as end point and turning point for us Christians by recalling a dialogue I shared in. At the end of 1967 there was a round-table discussion in Münster between the Czech philosopher Machovec, Karl Rahner, and myself. Toward the end of the discussion, Machovec recalled Adorno's saying: "After Auschwitz, there are no more poems"—a saying which is held everywhere today to be exaggerated and long since disproved—unjustly, to my mind, at least when applied to the Jews themselves. For were not Paul Celan, Thadeus Borowsky, and Nelly Sachs, among others—all born to make poetry as few others have been—destroyed by the sheer unutterability of that which took place at Auschwitz and the need for it somehow

still to be uttered in language? In any case, Machovec cited Adorno's saying and asked me if there could be for us Christians, after Auschwitz, any more prayers. I finally gave the answer which I would still give today: We can pray *after* Auschwitz, because people prayed *in* Auschwitz.

If this is taken as a comprehensive answer, it may seem as exaggerated a saying as Adorno's. Yet I do not consider it an exaggeration. We Christians can never again go back behind Auschwitz: to go beyond Auschwitz, if we see clearly, is impossible for us of ourselves. It is possible only together with the victims of Auschwitz. This, in my eyes, is the root of Jewish-Christian ecumenism. The turning point in relations between Jews and Christians corresponds to the radical character of the end point which befell us in Auschwitz. Only when we confront this end point will we recognize what this "new" relationship between Jews and Christians is, or at least could become.

To confront Auschwitz is in no way to comprehend it. Anyone wishing to comprehend in this area will have comprehended nothing. As it gazes toward us incomprehensibly out of our most recent history, it eludes our every attempt at some kind of amicable reconciliation which would allow us to dismiss it from our consciousness. The only thing "objective" about Auschwitz are the victims, the mourners, and those who do penance. Faced with Auschwitz, there can be no abstention, no inability to relate. To attempt such a thing would be yet another case of secret complicity with the unfathomed horror. Yet how are we Christians to come to terms with Auschwitz? We will in any case forgo the temptation to interpret the suffering of the Jewish people from our standpoint, in terms of saving history. Under no circumstances is it *our* task to mystify this suffering! *We* encounter in this suffering first of all only the riddle of our own lack of feeling, the mystery of our own apathy, not, however, the traces of God.

Faced with Auschwitz, I consider as blasphemy every Christian theodicy (i.e., every attempt at a so-called "justification of God") and all language about "meaning" when these are initiated outside this catastrophe or on some level above it. Meaning, even divine meaning, can be invoked by us only to the extent that such meaning was not also abandoned in Auschwitz itself. But this means that we

Christians for our very own sakes are from now on assigned to the victims of Auschwitz—assigned, in fact, in an alliance belonging to the heart of *saving history*, provided the word “history” in this Christian expression is to have a definite meaning and not just serve as a screen for a triumphalist metaphysic of salvation which never learns from catastrophes nor finds in them a cause for conversion, since in its view such catastrophes of meaning do not in fact exist at all.

This saving history alliance would have to mean, finally, the radical end of every persecution of Jews by Christians. If any persecution were to take place in the future, it could only be a persecution of both together, of Jews *and* Christians—as it was in the *beginning*. It is well known that the early persecutions of Christians were also persecutions of Jews. Because both groups refused to recognize the Roman Emperor as God, thus calling in question the foundations of Rome’s political religion, they were together branded as atheists and haters of the human race and were persecuted unto death.

### **The Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Remembrance of Auschwitz**

When these connections are seen, the question becomes obsolete as to whether Christians in their relations to Jews are now finally moving on from missionizing to dialogue. Dialogue itself seems, in fact, a weak and inappropriate description of this connection. For, after all, what does dialogue between Jews and Christians mean in remembrance of Auschwitz? It seems to me important to ask this question even though—or rather because—Christian-Jewish dialogue is booming at the present time and numerous organizations and institutions exist to support it.

1. Jewish-Christian dialogue in remembrance of Auschwitz means for us Christians first: It is not we who have the opening word, nor do we begin the dialogue. *Victims* are not offered a dialogue. We can only come into a dialogue when the victims themselves begin to speak. And then it is our primary duty as Christians to listen—for *once to begin really listening*—to what Jews are saying of themselves and about themselves. Am I mistaken in the

impression I have that we Christians are already beginning in this dialogue to talk far too much about ourselves and our ideas regarding the Jewish people and their religion? That we are once again hastening to make comparisons, comparisons separated from concrete situations and memories and persons, dogmatic comparisons which may indeed be better disposed and more conciliatory than before but which remain equally naïve because we are once more not listening closely? The end result is that the dialogue which never really achieved success is once more threatened with failure. And is not the reason for this that we are once again unable to see what is there, and prefer to speak about "Judaism" rather than to "the Jews"?

Have we really listened attentively during the last decades? Do we really know more today about the Jews and their religion? Have we become more attentive to the prophecy of their history of suffering? Or is the exploitation not beginning again, this time in a more sublime fashion because placed under the banner of friendliness toward the Jews? Is it not, for example, a kind of expoliation when we pick out fragments of texts from the Jewish tradition to serve as illustrations for our Christian preaching, or when we love to cite Hassidic stories without casting a single thought to the situation of suffering out of which they emerged and which is obviously an integral part of their truth?

2. No prepared patterns exist for this dialogue between Jews and Christians, patterns which could somehow be taken over from the familiar repertoire of inner-Christian ecumenism. Everything has to be measured by Auschwitz. This includes our Christian way of bringing into play *the question of truth*. Ecumenism, we often hear, can never succeed if it evades the question of truth: it must therefore continually derive from this its authentic direction. No one would deny this. But confronting the truth means first of all not avoiding the truth about Auschwitz, and ruthlessly unmasking the myths of self-exculpation and the mechanisms of trivialization which have been long since disseminated among Christians. This would be an ecumenical service to the one undivided truth! In general, Christians would be well advised, especially in dialogue with Jews, to show particular sensitivity in using the notion of truth.

Too often, in fact, has truth—or rather what Christians all too triumphantly and uncompassionately portrayed as truth—been used as a weapon, an instrument of torture and persecution against Jews. Not to forget this for a moment belongs also to the respect for truth in the dialogue between Christians and Jews!

Something else has to be kept in mind, too: When we engage in this Christian-Jewish dialogue, we Christians should be more cautious about the titles we give ourselves and the sweeping comparisons we make. Faced with Auschwitz, who would dare to call our Christianity the “true” religion of the suffering, of the persecuted, of the dispersed? The caution and discretion I am recommending here, the theological principle of economy do not imply any kind of defeatism regarding the question of truth. They are rather expressions of mistrust in relation to any ecumenism separated from concrete situations and devoid of memory, that so-called purely doctrinal ecumenism. After Auschwitz, every theological “profundity” which is unrelated to people and their concrete situations must cease to exist. Such a theology would be the very essence of superficiality. With Auschwitz, the epoch of theological systems which are separate from people and their concrete situations has come to its irrevocable end. It is for this very reason that I am hesitant about all systematic comparisons of respective doctrines, however well-intentioned and gentle in tone; hesitant also toward all attempts to establish “theological common ground.” Everything about this is too precipitate for my liking. Besides, did this common ground not always exist? Why, then, was it unable to protect the Jews from the aggressive scorn of Christians? The problems must surely lie at a deeper level. We have to ask ourselves the question: Can our theology ever be the same again after Auschwitz?

3. There is yet another reason why the Jewish-Christian dialogue after Auschwitz eludes every stereotyped pattern of ecumenism. The Jewish partner in this sought-after new relationship would not only be the religious Jew, in the confessional sense of the term, but, in a universal sense, every Jew threatened by Auschwitz. Jean Améry expressed it thus, shortly before his death: “In the inferno [of Auschwitz] the differences now became more than ever tangible

and burned themselves into our skin like the tattooed numbers with which they branded us. All 'Arian' prisoners found themselves in the abyss *elevated* literally light-years *above* us, the Jews. . . . The Jew was the sacrificial animal. He had the chalice to drink—to its most bitter dregs. I drank of it. And this became my existence as Jew."

### **Christianity and Theology after Auschwitz**

The sought-after ecumenism between Christians and Jews does not, of course, depend only on the readiness of Christians to begin at last to listen and to let Jews express themselves as Jews, which means as the Jewish people with their own history. This ecumenism contains also a fundamental theological problem regarding Christianity's own readiness, and the extent of this readiness, to recognize the messianic tradition of Judaism in its unsurpassed autonomy; as it were, in its enduring messianic dignity, without Christianity betraying or playing down the christological mystery it proclaims. Once again, this question is not to be handled abstractly but in remembrance of Auschwitz. Does not Auschwitz compel Christianity and Christian theology toward a radical inquiry into their own condition, a self-interrogation without which no new ecumenical evaluation of the Jewish religion and of Jewish history will be possible for Christians? I would like briefly to develop certain elements of this self-interrogation which seem important to me; these contain, moreover, just as many indications of constantly recurring and therefore quasi-endemic dangers within Christianity and its theology.

1. In the course of history, has not Christianity interpreted itself, in abstract contrast to Judaism, far too much as a purely "affirmative" religion, so to speak, as a theological "religion of conquerors" with an excess of answers and a corresponding lack of agonized questions? Was not the question of Job so repressed or played down within christology that the image of the Son who suffers in relation to God and God's powerlessness in the world became all too adorned with the features of a conqueror? Does not the danger then arise of a christological reduction of the world's history of

suffering? I want to illustrate what this means by a brief quotation from the German synodal document, "Our Hope": "In the history of our church and of Christianity, have we not taken . . . Christ's suffering, in its hope-inducing power, and then separated it too much from the one history of suffering of humanity? In connecting the Christian idea of suffering exclusively with his cross and with ourselves as his disciples, have we not created gaps in our world, spaces filled with the unprotected sufferings of others? Has not our attitude as Christians to this suffering often been one of unbelievable insensitivity and indifference"—as though we believed this suffering fell in some kind of purely profane sector, as though we could understand ourselves as the great conquerors in relation to it, as though this suffering had no atoning power, and as though our lives were not part of the burden placed upon it? How else, after all, is that history of suffering to be understood which Christians have prepared for the Jewish people over the centuries, or at least not protected them against? Did not our attitude in all that time manifest those typical marks of apathy and insensitivity which betray the conqueror?

2. Has not Christianity, precisely in comparison with the Jewish religion, concealed time and again its own *messianic weakness*? Does there not break through within Christianity, again and again, a dangerous triumphalism connected with saving history, something the Jews above all have had to suffer from in a special way? But is this the unavoidable consequence of Christian faith in the salvation definitively achieved in Christ? Or is it not true that Christians themselves still have something to await and to fear—not just for themselves, but rather for the world and for history as a whole? Must not Christians too lift up their heads in expectancy of the messianic Day of the Lord? This early Christian doctrine about expecting the messianic Day of the Lord—what level of intelligibility does it really have for Christian theologians? What meaning does it have—not only as a theme within Christian theology (one mostly dealt with in a perplexed or embarrassed way), but rather as a principle of theological knowledge? If this meaning were operative, or if Christians had rediscovered it in the light of Auschwitz, it would at once make clear that messianic trust is not identical with the euphoria about meaning often prevalent among Christians, some-



thing which makes them so unreceptive toward apocalyptic threats and perils within our history and allows them to react to the sufferings of others with the apathy of conquerors. And this meaning of the messianic Day of the Lord would make Christian theology perhaps more conscious of the extent to which the apocalyptic-messianic wisdom of Judaism is obstructed and repressed within Christianity. If the danger of Jewish messianism resides for me in the way it continually suspends all reconciliation from entering our history, the inverse danger in a Christian understanding of messianism seems to me to be the way it encloses the reconciliation given to us by Christ too much within the present, being only too prepared to hand out to its own form of Christianity a testimony of moral and political innocence.

Wherever Christianity victoriously conceals its own messianic weakness, its sensorium for dangers and downfalls diminishes to an ever greater degree. Theology loses its own awareness for historical disruptions and catastrophes. Has not our Christian faith in the salvation achieved for us by Christ been covertly reified to a kind of optimism about meaning, an optimism which is no longer really capable of perceiving radical disruptions and catastrophes within meaning? Does there not exist something like a typically Christian incapacity for dismay in the face of disasters? And does this not apply with particular intensity to the average Christian (and theological) attitude toward Auschwitz?

3. Is there not manifest within the history of our Christianity a drastic deficit in regard to political resistance and a corresponding excess of political conformity? This brings us, in fact, to what I see as the central point in the self-interrogation of Christians and of theology in remembrance of Auschwitz. In the earliest history of Christianity, as was already mentioned, Jews and Christians were persecuted together. The persecution of Christians ended, as we know, fairly soon, that of the Jews continued and increased immeasurably through the centuries. There are certainly numerous reasons for this dissimilar historical development in regard to Christians and Jews, and not all of them are to be used in criticism of Christianity.

Yet in making this observation, a question regarding our Christianity and its theology forces its way into my consciousness, a

question that has long disturbed me and must surely affect every theology after Auschwitz: Has Christianity not allowed too strict an interiorization and individualization of that messianic salvation preached by Jesus? And was it not precisely this extreme interiorization and individualization of the messianic idea of salvation which placed Christianity—from its Pauline beginnings onward—at a continual advantage over against Judaism in coming to an arrangement with the political situation of the time and in functioning more or less without contradiction as an intermediary and reconciling force in regard to prevailing political powers? Has Christianity, perhaps for this reason only, been “in a better position?” Has the two-thousand-year-old history of Christianity contained less suffering, persecution, and dispersion than the history of the Jews for the very reason that with Christianity one could more easily “build a state?”

In a sense, Bismark was on the right track when he said that with the Sermon on the Mount “no one can build a state.” But has it then been an advantage, I mean a messianic advantage, that Christians have obviously always been more successful than Jews in knowing how to accommodate their understanding of salvation to the exigencies of political power by using this extreme individualization and interiorization? Should we not have expected to find in the history of Christianity many more conflicts with political power similar to the history of suffering and persecution of the Jewish people? Does not Christianity, in fact, manifest historically a shattering deficit in political resistance, and an extreme historical surplus of political accommodation and obedience? And finally, is it not the case that we Christians can recognize that concrete destiny which Jesus foretold for his disciples more clearly in the history of suffering undergone by the Jewish people than in the actual history of Christianity? As a Christian theologian, I do not wish to suppress this question, which disturbs me above all in the presence of Auschwitz.

This is the question that compelled me to project and work on a “political theology” with its program of deprivatization (directed more toward the synoptics than to Pauline traditions), to work against just these dangers of an extreme interiorization of Christian salvation and its attendant danger of Christianity’s uncritical rec-

conciliation with prevailing political powers. This theology argues that it is precisely the consistently nonpolitical interpretation of Christianity, and the nondialectical interiorizing and individualizing of its doctrines, that have continually led to Christianity taking on an uncritical, as it were, postfactum political form. But the Christianity of discipleship must never be politicized postfactum—through the copying or imitation of political patterns of action and power constellations already present elsewhere. Christianity is in its very being, as messianic praxis of discipleship, political. It is mystical and political at the same time, and it leads us into a responsibility, not only for what we do or fail to do but also for what we allow to happen to others in our presence, before our eyes.

4. Does not Christianity conceal too much the *practical core* of its message? Time and again we hear it said that Judaism is primarily oriented toward praxis and less concerned with doctrinal unity, whereas Christianity is said to be primarily a doctrine of faith, and this difference is held to create considerable difficulty for Jewish-Christian ecumenism. Yet Christianity itself is not in the first instance a doctrine to be preserved in maximum “purity,” but a praxis to be lived more radically! This messianic praxis of discipleship, conversion, love, and suffering does not become a part of Christian faith postfactum, but is an authentic expression of this faith. Ultimately, it is of the very essence of the Christian faith to be believed in such a way that it is never just believed, but rather—in the messianic praxis of discipleship—enacted. There does, of course, exist a Christianity whose faith is only believed, a superstructure Christianity serving our own interests—such a Christianity is bourgeois religion. This kind of Christianity does not live discipleship but only believes in discipleship and, under the cover of merely believed-in discipleship, goes its own way. It does not practice compassion, but only believes in compassion and, under the screen of this merely believed-in compassion, cultivates that apathy which allowed us Christians to continue our untroubled believing and praying with our backs to Auschwitz—allowed us, in a phrase from Bonhoeffer, to go on singing Gregorian chant during the persecution of the Jews without at the same time feeling the need to cry out in their behalf.

It is here, in this degeneration of messianic religion to a purely bourgeois religion, that I see one of the central roots within contemporary Christianity for our failure in the Jewish question. Ultimately, it is the reason why we Christians, as a whole, have remained incapable of real mourning and true penance, the reason also why our churches have not resisted our society's massive repression of guilt in these postwar years.

Presumably, there are still other Christian and theological questions posed to us in remembrance of Auschwitz, questions which would open a way to an ecumenism between Christians and Jews. We would certainly have to uncover the individual roots of anti-Semitism within Christianity itself, in its doctrine and praxis. A continual and significant part of this is that relationship of "substitution within salvation history," through which Christians saw themselves displacing the Jews and which led to the Jews never being really accepted either as partners or as enemies—even enemies have a countenance! Rather, they were reified into an obsolete presupposition of saving history. However, this specific inner Christian research cannot be undertaken here; it would go far beyond the limits of this paper. I must also rule out here any investigation of the roots of anti-Semitism in those German philosophies of the nineteenth century which in their turn have lastingly marked the world of theological ideas and categories in our own century.

What Christian theologians can *do* for the murdered of Auschwitz and thereby for a true Christian-Jewish ecumenism is, in every case, this: Never again to do theology in such a way that its construction remains unaffected, or could remain unaffected, by Auschwitz. In this sense, I make available to my students an apparently very simple but, in fact, extremely demanding criterion for evaluating the theological scene: Ask yourselves if the theology you are learning is such that it could remain unchanged before and after Auschwitz. If this is the case, be on your guard!

### **Revisions**

The question of reaching an ecumenism between Christians and Jews, in accepting which the Jews would not be compelled to deny their own identity, will be decided ultimately by the following factor: Will this ecumenical development succeed within the church

and within society? Theological work for reconciliation remains nothing more than a surface phenomenon when it fails to take root in church and society, which means touching the soul of the people. Whether this ecumenism successfully takes root, and the manner of its success, depends once again on the way our churches, as official institutions and at the grass-roots level, relate to Auschwitz.

What is, in fact, happening in our churches? Do not the "Weeks of Christian-Jewish Fellowship" threaten gradually to become a farce? Are they not a witness to isolation far more than to fellowship? Which of us are really concerning ourselves about the newly emerging fears of persecution among the Jews in our country? The Catholic Church in West Germany in its synodal decree, "Our Hope," declared its readiness for a new relationship with the Jewish people and recognized its own special task and mission. Both the history behind the preparation of this section of the synod's text and its finally accepted form could show how tendencies to hush up and exonerate had a powerful impact. Nevertheless, if we would only take this document really seriously even in this final version! "In that time of national socialism, despite the exemplary witness of individual persons and groups, we still remained as a whole a church community which lived its life with our backs turned to the fate of this persecuted Jewish people; we let our gaze be fixed too much on the threat to our own institutions and remained silent in the face of the crimes perpetrated on the Jews and on Judaism."

Yet, in the meantime, has not a massive forgetfulness long since taken over? The dead of Auschwitz should have brought upon us a total transformation; nothing should have been allowed to remain as it was, neither among our people nor in our churches. Above all, not in the churches. They, at least, should necessarily have perceived the spiritual catastrophe signified by Auschwitz, one which left neither our people nor our churches undamaged. Yet, what has happened to us as Christians and as citizens in this land? Not just the fact that everything happened as if Auschwitz had been, after all, only an operational accident, however deplorable a one. Indications are already appearing that we are once more beginning to seek the causes for the Auschwitz horror not only among the murderers and persecutors, but also among the victims and persecuted themselves. How long, then, are we to wear these peniten-

tial garments? This is a question asked above all by those who have probably never had them on. Has anyone had the idea of asking the victims themselves how long we have to drag out our penance and whether something like a general "limitation of liability" does not apply here? The desire to limit liability in this area is to my mind less the expression of a will to forgiveness from Christian motives (and indeed *we* have here hardly anything to forgive!) than it is the attempt of our society and of our Christianity(!) to decree for itself—at last—acquittal and, poised over the abyss of horror, to get the whole thing—at last—"over with."

Faced with this situation, one thing is clear: The basis for a new relationship between Christians and Jews in remembrance of Auschwitz must not remain restricted to the creation of a diffuse sense of reconciliation nor to a Christian friendliness toward Jews which is as cheap as it is ineffective (and is itself, in fact, not seldom the sign of an unfinished hostility to Jews). What must be aimed at is a concrete and fundamental revision of our consciousness.

To take one example: This new dialogical relationship we are seeking, if it is truly to succeed, must not become a dialogue of theological experts and church specialists. This ecumenism must take root in the people as a whole, in the pedagogy of everyday life, in Sunday preaching, in church communities, families, schools, and other grassroots institutions. Everyone knows that new traditions are not established in advanced seminars nor in occasional solemn celebrations. They will only emerge if they touch the souls of men through a tenacious process of formation, when they become the very environment of the soul. But what is actually happening here in our churches and schools? Not least in our churches and schools in the rural areas which are held to be so "Christian"? Certainly anti-Semitism in rural areas has varied causes; yet not the least of these are related to religious education. In my own rural area, in a typically Catholic milieu, "the Jews" remained even after the war a faceless reality, a vague stereotype; representations for "the Jews" were taken mostly from Oberammergau.

Some historians hold the view that the German people in the Nazi era were not, in fact, essentially more anti-Semitic than several other European peoples. Personally, I doubt this, but if it were

true, it would raise an even more monstrous possibility, something already put forward years ago by one of these historians: Might the Germans have drawn the ultimate consequences of anti-Semitism, namely the extermination of the Jews, only because they were *commanded to*; that is, out of sheer dependence on authority? Whatever the individual connection may have been, there is manifest here what has often enough been established as a “typically German danger.” And this is the reason why the question being dealt with here demands the highest priority being given by both society and the churches to an energetic educational campaign supporting critical obedience and critical solidarity, and against the evasion of conflict and the practice of successful conformism, opportunism, and fellow-travelling.

In this context I want to quote, without pursuing her argument further, the thoughts of a young Jewish woman, who worked as a teacher in West Germany, regarding the Week of Fellowship: “There are two expressions I learned in the school without having the least idea of their significance. One of them is ‘in its juridical form,’ and the other is ‘legal uncertainty.’ Every event in the school, and I assume in all other institutions, has to be confirmed in its juridical form, even when this leads to senseless behavior. . . . Wherever I look, I see only exemplary democrats who, according to the letter and without any reason or emotion, observe laws and ordinances, instructions, directions, guiding lines and decrees. The few who protest against this and display some individualism and civil courage are systematically intimidated and cowed. . . . That is the reason why I do not fraternize with the Germans, why I reject the Week of Fellowship, and why my soul boils over at the empty babble about our dear Jewish brethren; the same people who today speak eloquently of tolerance would once again function as machines which had been presented with a new and different program!”

At the beginning, I mentioned that Auschwitz can only be remembered by us as a moral reality, never purely historically. This moral remembrance of the persecution of the Jews touches finally also on the relationship of people in this country to the *State* of Israel. Indeed, *we* have no choice in this matter (and I stand by this against my left wing friends). *We* must at all events be the last

people to now accuse the Jews of an exaggerated need for security after they were brought in the most recent history of our country to the edge of total annihilation; and *we* must be the first to trust the protestations of the Jews that they are defending their state, not from reasons of Zionist imperialism but as a "house against death," as a last place of refuge of a people persecuted through the centuries.

### **Ecumenism in a Messianic Perspective**

The ecumenism between Jews and Christians in remembrance of Auschwitz, which I have been discussing here, does not lead at all to the outskirts of inner Christian ecumenism, but rather to its center. It is my profound conviction that ultimately ecumenism among Christians will only make progress at all, and certainly will only come to a good conclusion, when it recovers the biblical-messianic dimensions of ecumenism in general. This means it must learn to know and recognize the forgotten and suppressed partner of its own beginnings, the Jewish people and their messianic religion. It is in this sense that I understand Karl Barth's warning in his 1966 "Ecumenical Testament": "We do not wish to forget that there is ultimately only one really central ecumenical question: This is our relationship to Judaism." As Christians, we will only come together among ourselves when we achieve together a new relationship to the Jewish people and to its religion; not avoiding Auschwitz, but as that particular form of Christianity which, after Auschwitz, is alone permitted to us and indeed demanded of us. For, I repeat: We Christians can never again go back behind Auschwitz. To go beyond Auschwitz is, if we see clearly, impossible for us of ourselves; it is possible only together with the victims of Auschwitz.

And so we could arrive one day, although I suggest this cautiously, at a kind of *coalition of messianic trust* between Jews and Christians in opposition to the apotheosis of banality and hatred present in our world. Indeed, the remembrance of Auschwitz should sharpen all our senses for present-day processes of extermination in countries in which on the surface "law and order" reigns, as it did once in Nazi Germany.



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