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Redemptive Memory: The Christianization of the Holocaust in America

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There has been a considerable debate among historians concerning the role of the Holocaust in the American collective memory. Since the watershed year 1993, when the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened its doors on the Mall in Washington, DC, and the film *Schindler's List* debuted, the level of awareness of the Holocaust in the public mind has been at an all-time high in the United States. The question at the heart of this academic discussion is how Americans have come to identify so strongly with an experience that occurred over sixty years ago, on foreign shores, to a group of people to which most Americans have no obvious connection. This being the case, the question has been asked whether the Holocaust can be part of the American collective memory at all.[1] This essay will contend that incorporation of the Holocaust into American consciousness has indeed taken place, albeit decades after the event, and that, furthermore, the religious belief system of the majority of Americans has played a central role in this development.

Although the last decade has witnessed an increase in secularization, the United States is still a nation in which over three quarters of the citizens identify themselves as Christians while just over one percent identify themselves as Jewish.[2] Although there were many non-Jewish victims of the murderous Nazi campaigns, the fact

[1] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Mariner, 2000) 4.

[2] *American Religious Identification Survey,* 2001, Graduate Center of The City University of New York, http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_index.htm. This study was directed by Ariela Keysar, Ph.D., a Research Fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Center of CUNY. It indicated that, between 1990 and 2001, the percentage of the sampled adult population that identified themselves with one or another religious group had dropped from 90 percent to 81 percent. The percentage that identified themselves as Christians had dropped from 86 percent to 77 percent. This may seem to be counterintuitive because the actual number of respondents reporting religious affiliation has increased overall. The number of respondents reporting their affiliation as Christian increased from 151,225,000 to 159, 030,000, and the number of respondents reporting affiliation with other religions increased from 5,853,000 to 7,740,000. The total U.S. adult population, though, increased from 175,440,000 to 207,980,000 in this period. As a percentage of the population, the number of respondents reporting religious affiliation substantially decreased. Percentage wise, the top three groups gaining members were Evangelical Christians, Non-Denominational Christians, and those professing no religion.

remains that the vast majority of those marked for deportation and death were targeted solely because they were identified as Jews by the Nazi state.[3] Rather than addressing the significance of the Holocaust to the Jewish minority in America, this work will seek to explain the way in which this event has been woven into a Christian metanarrative in American public life. It will examine how it has been appropriated from its context as a Jewish catastrophe perpetrated by Christians and reconstituted as a saga of Christian heroism and a test of "true Christianity." Through critical analysis of the use of metaphor and imagery in Holocaust representation, it will examine the functions of this approach as both a theodicy and as an agent of triumphalism.

History is different from collective memory. The very basis of collective memory is the ideological agenda, the common point of view that binds together the group. The goal of collective memory is not objective scrutiny of the past but reinforcement of an existing belief system. It necessarily relies on a mythology that validates group identity and explains common experiences.[4] Sometimes this mythology is rooted in truth, and sometimes it is counterfactual. Collective memory is essentially ahistorical. In contrast, history is the product of scholarly comparison of collective memory with factual evidence. It detaches the myth from the event and endeavors to construct an impartial narrative.[5]

Collective memory manifests itself in various forms of public expression. Film, literature, and museum exhibitions all articulate the agenda of a cultural viewpoint through representational choices of both inclusion and exclusion. However, the act of representation involves two interpreters, a creator and a viewer. While the creator may intend to convey a particular narrative, the viewer is free to dismiss or emphasize selectively aspects of this narrative in accordance with his own worldview. This essay will examine how both interpretive parties have contributed to a prevalent undercurrent of Christian thought in American Holocaust memory. It will assert that the ironic cost of incorporating remembrance of the destruction of the Jews of Europe into the cultural consciousness of an essentially Christian nation is that the historicity of the event has become increasingly relegated to the confines of academic circles and alienated from the public realm of the American collective memory.

For a nation in which the majority of citizens are at least nominally Christian, the Holocaust frequently functions as an illustration of the human relationship with God. There is a paradox to be reconciled, however. Because Christianity is considered by its adherents to be the one true faith, the Jew continues to remain the "other," the unconverted, the unsaved. He is both the competitor in the true path of righteousness and the antithetical nonbeliever against whom Christianity has defined

[3] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* student ed. (New York: Holmes and Meyer, 1985) 27.

[4] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis Coser (Chicago; U of Chicago P, 1992) 175-176. Also see Peter Novick's comments in *The Holocaust in American Life*, 3-6.

[5] Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Moral Commitment and Scholarly Detachment: The Social Function of the Historian," *Historians and Social Values*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Ann Rigney (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2000) 45.

itself.[6] As Richard Rubinstein puts it: "the fate of the Jews has been a primary datum used to prove the truth of Christianity from its inception."[7] Christian doctrine also professes, however, that all people are children of God and that a Christian must love his neighbor as he loves himself.[8] The paradox, then, is one that involves the very core of Christianity. According to Mark Gammon, "The great question for Christian theology is 'How could a good and just God let his chosen people (Christians) perpetrate this crime or stand by and let it happen?'"[9]

This is a thorny question for Christians to address because it requires identification with the victimizers rather than the victims. In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi wrote of "the tendency, indeed the need, to separate good from evil, to be able to take sides, to emulate Christ's gesture on Judgment Day: here the righteous, over there the reprobate."[10] How is it possible, then, for Christians to reconcile the foundations of their faith with the atrocities perpetrated by their coreligionists during the Holocaust? The annihilation of the Jews of Europe turned the tables on the dogmatic "good versus evil" equation of Christianity. By dint of the extremity of their mass victimization, Jews assumed the role of the righteous; their Christian persecutors became the reprobates.

The necessity of reconciling this juxtaposition is especially imperative for American Christians, for two specific reasons. The first is that the United States is home to the largest Jewish population in the world outside of Israel. The Holocaust has become a touchstone of Jewish identity in the United States, and its memorialization is prioritized accordingly by Jewish religious and community organizations. Although Jewish Americans constitute a small minority, many have achieved great success in both business and higher education. Their vocal efforts have allowed remembrance of the Holocaust to receive wide attention and support within a gentile majority that might otherwise be inclined to consider the coordinated slaughter of millions of European Jews as simply part of the catastrophic cost of the Second World War.

The second reason is that Americans, in general, are particularly inclined to define right and wrong, guilt and innocence, in moralized, black and white terms. It is especially imperative, therefore, for members of a faith that promotes the emulation of the loving image of Christ to align the actions of the truly faithful with the side of righteousness. The Nazi perpetrators also present, as perceived paragons of absolute evil, the opportunity to sanctify the heroic behavior of Christians who opposed them as symbolic of "true Christianity." The American Christian viewpoint

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[6] Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995) 59, 63.

[7] Richard Rubinstein, *The Cunning of History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 2-3.

[8] *The King James Bible*, Book of Matthew 22:37-39. "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

[9] Mark E. Gammon "Our Failure to React: Method in Christian Moral Theology After the Holocaust," *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, eds. Elisabeth Maxwell and John Roth (Oxford: New York, 200) 703.

[10] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage, 1989) 37.

toward the Holocaust, then, incorporates both defensive and pedagogical components. It diverts or assuages guilt, and it instructs believers on the rectitude of authentically "Christian" behavior.

This is not to say that there are no Christian leaders, theologians, or other individuals who have endeavored to examine critically the tenets of their faith, attempting to detect and remove antisemitic doctrines that have historically provided the basis for actions against Jews. Three examples of such organized attempts are the revisions of Roman Catholic doctrine expressed in the 1965 Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the 1994 *Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community,* and the Committee on Church Relations and the Holocaust of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Attempts to expunge explicitly antisemitic passages of Christian text are one thing; the question of a Christianization of collective memory, is quite another. Most gentile Americans have very little knowledge of the historical event of the Holocaust, nor do they know anyone whom it directly affected. For them, the event holds primarily symbolic moral significance. The interpretation of its meaning arrives through the conduit of religious thought with which it must be reconciled. There are several representational motifs prevalent in popular film and literature that reflect the formative influence of the Christian metanarrative.

The first is a universalization of the event. Popular representations tend to paint, in broad strokes, an image of a Manichaean struggle between good and evil that imparts universal moral lessons about the nature of humanity. They often downplay the intrinsically Judaeophobic core of the Nazi Weltanschauung.[11] By sublimating the religious roots of both Nazi ideology and the anti-Jewish prejudice of the masses,[12] they instead cast the story of the Holocaust as the definitive cautionary tale of "man's inhumanity to man."

An example is the often-quoted words of German pastor Martin Niemöller:

> First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade-unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.[13]

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[11] Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 261.

[12] John K. Roth gives a most concise explanation of this: "…apart from Christianity, the *Shoah* is scarcely imaginable because Nazi Germany's targeting cannot be explained apart from the anti-Jewish images ('Christ-killers,' willful blasphemers, unrepentant sons and daughters of the Devil, to name only a few) that have been deeply rooted in Christian practices. Existing centuries before Nazism, Christianity's negative images of Jews and Judaism—supported by the institutions and social relationships that promoted those stereotypes—played key parts in bolstering the racial and genocidal antisemitism of Adolph Hitler and the Third Reich." "What Does the Holocaust Have to Do with Christianity?" *The Holocaust and the Christian World,* eds. Carol Rittner et al. (New York: Continuum, 2000) 6-7.

[13] Quoted in Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust As Told In the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (New York: Little, Brown & Co. 1993) 41.

The impact of this quotation stems from the fact that Niemöller was himself imprisoned in a concentration camp in 1938 for his opposition to the National Socialist regime. It epitomizes one of the major moral lessons conveyed by universalization: the responsibility of the bystander to intervene in defense of the oppressed. It is only a partial truth, however. It would appear from these words that Niemöller's culpability was a product of his inaction.

In itself, Niemöller's stance seems viable for those attempting to extract moral lessons from history. It is a question of conscience upon which all those seeking to be their "brother's keeper" can reflect. Niemöller stands as the repentant Christian who discovered his error only by being forced to walk in the shoes of those that he failed to defend. There is another side to the story, however. In 1933, Niemöller was a self-professed antisemite who supported the Nazi party. He demonstrated, with his 1934 break with the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) over the "Aryan Clause," that his anti-Jewish convictions were primarily of a religious nature.[14] Niemöller, and those like him, were therefore not simply silent bystanders but causative agents in the destruction of the Jews.

The actions and inactions of Martin Niemöller do not constitute a simple story. That it is often presented as such demonstrates a basic fallacy of universalization. Seldom are all the facts included in an appeal to an audience that may not be completely receptive. Rather, these facts are sacrificed so as not to dilute the potency of a message that has greater odds for acceptance by a particular group. In this instance, universalization results in ahistoricization because, in greater context, Niemöller's words take on a different meaning. The appeal of this simplification for Christians, however, is that it imparts a moral lesson in keeping with their faith that does not question the tenets of the faith itself.

In contrast to those Christian bystanders who stood aside and did not act during the Holocaust were those who risked their own lives to intervene. Their stories are emphasized in the second theme in American representation, that of rescue and redemption. These are the most popular stories among audiences because they satisfy the desire for clear-cut heroes and, usually, for a triumphant ending. Although these films and books are for the most part historically accurate in their portrayal of events, their disproportionate prevalence results in a skewed picture of the overall response by Christians. In truth, these rescuers were exceptional in their actions, not representative of the majority. Thus, their appeal seems to indicate a desire to find hope within tragedy or to detect a glimmer of humanity in a sea of barbarity. The appeal is compelling, but these representations also bear a subtext with a different agenda.

In these portrayals, Jews are seen as passive sufferers whose only salvation is through the Christ-like intercession of the rescuer. Jewish resistance is largely ignored as the terrorized victims go, as in the Book of Jeremiah, "like lambs to the slaughter."[15] Redemption does not come only to the Jews in these stories. It is sometimes the rescuer who is redeemed as well by overcoming temptation or weakness through faith. The most notable example is Oskar Schindler, who will be discussed

[14] Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996) 34-35.
[15] *The King James Bible*, Jeremiah 51:40.

at length later. The role of the Jews in this kind of narrative is not only to function as the objects of salvation but also to be witnesses to the acts of their saviors.

It might be argued that, of course, Christians were in the best position to be rescuers. After all, they were not the ones being hunted like animals across Europe, forced into ghettoes, and murdered with bureaucratic efficiency. To feature their heroics is not to be untrue to history. In response, two points must be made: The first is that the significance of an act of resistance is directly proportional to the duress that one is under while committing it. Jewish resisters performed many acts, both great and small, to defy their fate. To understand the enormity of their sacrifices, however, one must be able to grasp fully the reality of their experiences. This understanding is almost, perhaps completely, impossible for people who were not there. On the other hand, it is much easier to place oneself mentally in the stead of an Oskar Schindler because his role is at least imaginable.

The second point is that there is another side to the story of the Christian rescuer. The very exceptionalism of his or her actions serves as a stark reminder that so many Christians who could have also aided the victims of the Holocaust chose not to do so. The decision of Steven Spielberg, the Jewish American director of *Schindler's List*, to make a film featuring a Christian hero has been roundly questioned and criticized in academic-historical circles even as it is praised in the broader public discourse. It was stated at the beginning of this essay that there are two interpretive parties for every representation, the creator and the viewer. While it is difficult for an observer to ascertain Spielberg's exact intentions, it may be assumed that he wanted to make a film about the Holocaust that an audience of mostly Christian Americans could connect with, both emotionally and intellectually. The overwhelming success of his film proves that he accomplished his goal. Perhaps his choice was partially the result of insight into what his audience could and would identify with. It is also possible that the film was meant not so much as a tribute to Schindler as an indictment of the behavior of others.

In returning to the depiction of Jews as eternal victims, one finds the third theme of American Holocaust representation, transcendence of suffering. In this specifically Christian construct, one finds the pain of human beings metaphorically linked with the passion and death of Christ. In light of the inescapable presence of evil and sorrow in the world, as symbolized by the Holocaust, there is a search to understand a divine plan that will make sense of it or will give it value. The predominantly Christian idea that deeper truths may be gleaned from the atrocities of the Holocaust is antithetical to the thoughts expressed in the testimonies of many Jewish survivors, who more often speak of the absolute senselessness of their experiences. Sometimes they even speak of the search to find meaning in their pain as if it were a blasphemy in itself, almost a justification for the perpetrators.

Christian theodicy regarding the Holocaust involves two central themes: the power of faith to transcend misery and the role of the Jews as God's "long-suffering chosen people."[16] Both serve to highlight and reinforce Christianity as the true path

[16] Michael R. Steele, "Christianity, the Other, and the Holocaust," *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, eds. Elizabeth Maxwell and John Roth (New York: Oxford, 2001) 194.

to salvation. In both themes, there is an intrinsic supersessionism. The power of faith is highlighted in rescue literature such as *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom. It is not the prayers of the Jews, though, that are answered. Rather, it is the prayers of the Christians who put their trust in Christ as he put his faith in God, the father, at Gethsemane.

Philip Gourevitch wrote an article in 1995 for the *New York Times Magazine* entitled "What They Saw at the Holocaust Museum."[17] It gave an interesting insight into why Christians might believe that Jews are God's chosen people while having suffered so greatly. In it, he recounted a conversation that he had with class of eight- and nine-year-old children and their teacher at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The children were on a field trip from their apostolic Christian school in Baltimore. Gourevitch asked the children and their teacher why they thought that God could have allowed so many people to be killed unjustly. One boy declared, "They didn't pray." Gourevitch replied, "Many did pray, right to their deaths." A little girl said, "Then they weren't believing." It was the response of their teacher, however, that was most revealing. She said, "I believe that the Jews are God's chosen people. But they don't recognize that Jesus Christ is the messiah, that He came already. If they had, I think that the Lord could have heard their prayers a lot more. In a way, they were praying to a God that they didn't really know."[18]

What was the lesson that the children took from the museum that day? It was certainly not one that the creators of the exhibits intended. Rather, it was a lesson shaped by the religious view of the world that they already possessed before ever walking through the doors. It was not to question what beliefs the murderers held that would cause them to commit such crimes. Instead, it was the victims that they blamed, people who seemingly brought their destruction upon themselves by worshipping the wrong god.

Critics have questioned whether the Holocaust Museum serves as no more than a titillating "chamber of horrors" for a public that is far removed from the events that it documents, a kind of pornography of violence. This may be true of some people, especially the young who have had little personal experience of tragedy or anguish. I believe that most people, however, come to the museum for the same reason that they watch films such as *Schindler's List* and read books like *The Hiding Place*. They are trying to understand a greater truth about life, about the nature of humanity, and to make sense of a world in which such pain can coexist with love, beauty, and their image of an omnipotent and merciful God.

In discussing collective memory, historian Peter Novick states:

> To understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities, of protagonists' motives and behavior. Collective memory simplifies, sees events from a single,

[17] Philip Gourevitch, "What They Saw at the Holocaust Museum," *New York Times Magazine* (February 12, 1995): 45.

[18] Gourevitch, "What They Saw at the Holocaust Museum," 45.

> committed perspective, is impatient with ambiguities of any kind, reduces events to mythic archetype. Typically, a collective memory, at least a significant collective memory, is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group—usually tragic.[19]

Keeping this in mind, one finds that the most significant aspect of the Holocaust for most Christian Americans is not an understanding of the reasons why it happened but rather the fact that it happened at all. Its primary meaning is derived not from critical evaluation of the political, cultural, and religious factors that combined to cause this unprecedented catastrophe but rather from an existing metanarrative that it reinforces. Upon examination, several of the most popular and familiar American Holocaust representations can be shown to illustrate this point. The film *Schindler's List*, Corrie ten Boom's memoir *The Hiding Place*, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are the examples that I have selected because of their popular and accessible status.

SCHINDLER'S LIST

Based on the 1982 Thomas Keneally novel, *Schindler's List* won seven Academy Awards, including those for Best Picture and Best Director, in the year of its release. It has subsequently been utilized frequently as part of the history curricula of American high schools and has been screened by a large number of religious and community organizations across the country. It may be contended, although arguably, that the film is the single most important work of popular Holocaust representation ever in the United States. At the very least, its influence is commensurate with other influential works such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and the 1978 NBC miniseries *Holocaust*.

Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is an epic piece of storytelling. To the viewer, it appears so authentic, so seamless, that it is seems akin to stepping back fifty years into a different place and time. Shot almost entirely in black and white, it gains credibility with audiences by evoking memories of actual films and photographic images familiar to the public.[20] According to Gary Weissman, this was the filmmaker's intention.[21] With the addition of sound, though, Spielberg added an important element to the images. Sound lends a sensory immediacy to the viewing experience, rendering authentic footage comparatively sterile and remote.[22]

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[19] Novick, 3-4.

[20] Geoff Eley and Atina Grossman observe that the use of monochromatic imagery "reduces distance: our images of the Holocaust are constructed in black and white, whether from newsreel or photographs, and the film resonates with this existing archive of representation; it places us immediately into that place of memory." "Watching *Schindler's List*: Not the Last Word," *New German Critique* 71 (1997):47.

[21] Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004) 161.

[22] The soundtrack of the film is an integral part of its emotional appeal. From the staccato of machine guns to the strains of Mozart, it leads the viewer to anticipate and experience feelings of fear, suspense, and relief with the characters. Miriam Bratu Hansen discusses the displacement of image by sound and its effect at length in "Schindler's List is Not Shoah," *The Historical Film*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001) 208-210.

Many Americans have seen U.S. Army Signal Corps film documentation of liberated concentration camps. Included in films such as *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), this footage has been widely available for years.[23] The experiences of viewing the actual aftermath of the Holocaust and of watching an artfully depicted representation evoke different responses, however. These films compete with each other as sources of understanding and memory. One of the main differences between the two is the degree of empathy that the images engender. *Schindler's List* was specifically created to have a powerful emotional impact on audiences and, to judge by public reactions, it has succeeded. To watch *Schindler's List* is almost to feel as though one actually witnessed the depicted events.

What is problematic is simply that *Schindler's List*, both the film and the novel, are works of fiction. The story is based on real events, but it is far from historically accurate. There is absolutely no doubt that events depicted in the film, such as the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto, occurred. What makes both the film and the novel upon which it was based fictional is that these events did not occur exactly as depicted. This is not simply "splitting hairs"—there are significant divergences from the historic record. Keneally composed his work from a limited number of oral and written accounts by surviving "Schindler Jews" or *Schindlerjuden*. Not only were some witnesses who declined or were unable to participate necessarily excluded from both the novel and the film, but also the recollections of some witnesses may have been given more weight than those of others.[24] Working with witness testimonies has natural limitations, but certain elements were purposefully altered. One example is that the character of Itzhak Stern, who is central to the storyline of the film, was actually created as a composite of several individuals from the novel.

Such liberties taken with the narrative of events are important because, in the film, they amount to an interpretation of an interpretation. The truth has been changed, through both emphasis and exclusion, to suit the requirements of the story that Spielberg wished to tell and of the audience to whom he wished to tell it. His message is apparent. One need only look to the publicity materials of the film to see it proclaimed clearly: "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." With this redemptive message as a starting point for analysis, one may begin to evaluate how Spielberg rendered his subject matter intelligible to his audience through a series of familiar tropes.

His target audience is easily identified through his choice of a protagonist: a Christian hero for a largely Christian audience. The viewer experiences the action of the film as seen through Schindler's eyes. Schindler occupies a privileged position because he is not a potential victim but rather a bystander who has the luxury of choice in his responses. Therefore, his decisions are not based on his physical

[23] See *Death Mills*, Dir. U.S. War Department (Signal Corps), 1946 as an example of such newsreel footage along with *Judgment At Nuremberg*, Dir. Stanley Kramer, RoxLom Films, 1961, MGM/UA Home Video, 1989. For a detailed discussion of the footage that has been made available since the end of the Second World War, see Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 5-26.

[24] Weissman, 152-156.

survival but rather on the rectitude of his moral compass. The plight of the *Schindlerjuden* is not the central focus of this "Holocaust" film. It is merely the background to a titanic clash between good and evil. Schindler's soul is the prize to be won or lost on this battleground.

Although "Schindler's List" is mainly a story of rescue and redemption, all three major themes of Holocaust representation are present. It is a complex film because it relies on a web of interwoven myths. The major characters transcend their particular stories and are symbolic of greater truths about humanity as a whole. The struggle between good and evil is universalized through the clearly defined but unequal triangle of perpetrator-victim-bystander. On this field, the perpetrator and the bystander are considered equals while the victims are relegated to the status of hapless witnesses. In this film, there is a misleading characterization of the power equation between the perpetrator and the bystander. The emphasis on Schindler's charm, virility, and wiliness exaggerate his power and status.[25] He seems to possess a strength that the Jews, as well as others around him, do not. This imbalance of power is critical because it emphasizes the ability of the individual to make a stand for good. Schindler is not only able to make a choice, but he must do so.

Omer Bartov characterizes Schindler's role in a slightly different light.[26] He writes that Schindler complicates the perpetrator-victim-bystander equation because he does not neatly fit into one of these categories. He begins as a perpetrator, a Nazi war profiteer. He moves into the role of bystander as he comes into direct contact with the Jews. Then, by his actions on their behalf, he runs the risk of becoming a victim himself. I believe that, although Bartov may be technically correct, the role of Schindler as a bystander is overwhelmingly emphasized in the film. He is never shown committing any acts that lead to victimization, nor does he ever seem to be in imminent danger. The closest that he comes to becoming a victim is the brief stint that he spends in a German jail for kissing a Jewish girl. Schindler is portrayed as an opportunist masquerading as a Nazi. In this way, the notion of him as a perpetrator is undermined. In the language of the film, there are only three distinct types of roles, and they are mutually exclusive: the hero/bystander (Schindler), the villain/perpetrator (the Nazis), and the victim (the Jews). Bartov's interpretation gives a more nuanced, and perhaps, more honest picture of Schindler's character than I believe the film actually contains.

Bartov also contends that it is the power of choice that moves Schindler from one role to another: "Because Schindler chooses to act, and because by making this choice he assumes a new identity, he belies the assertion that his (bystander) world denied one the freedom of choice and the choice of identity."[27] This amounts to a refutation of the denials of complicity by Germans who claimed that they were

[25] Daniel R. Schwarz comments, "Schindler's characteristic chutzpah becomes almost magical, as if it were a biblical figure who can create miracles and suspend history." *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1999) 232.

[26] Omer Bartov, "Spielberg's Oskar," *Spielberg's Holocaust*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 44.

[27] Bartov, 44.

helpless to render aid to the Jews by the overwhelming strength of the Nazi machine. In this instance, I agree with Bartov, but with a caveat. As a historian, he is analyzing this narrative on two levels: both the actions of the real Oskar Schindler and the representation of these actions that are contained in the film. I believe that his statement is applicable to the real Schindler but that Spielberg's character is drawn in far simpler terms. In a sense, this portrayal does a disservice to the actual man because it makes his choice to aid Jews seem far easier and more clear-cut than it is in Bartov's scenario. I would characterize the shift in Schindler's actions in the film as one that moves from detached neutrality to positive engagement. While many may view neutrality as a condition that places one in the category of perpetrator, here it is shown as one of the two choices of the bystander: acquiescence to or resistance of evil.

The immorality of the Nazi state is personified in SS *Hauptsturmführer* Amon Goeth, the commandant of the Plaszów slave labor camp. In many ways, he is Oskar Schindler's antithesis. The idea of Goeth as Schindler's negative image is reinforced in the film with the visual juxtaposition of both men shaving. They are alike in some ways, but opposite sides of the same coin. They both fulfill hedonistic desires with multiple women, good food, and wine. Yet Schindler's relationship with women is romanticized while Goeth's is violent and tawdry. Schindler is suave where Goeth is base.

The clearest example involves the manner in which each man encounters Goeth's Jewish maid, Helen Hirsch, in her cellar refuge. Schindler approaches her with chaste sympathy. Goeth is frustrated, menacing, and cruel. This interaction exemplifies one Christian interpretation of the relationship between the genders, in which the woman is a dependent creature and the righteous man is obligated to respect and cherish her but still to hold the greater measure of power. It can also be interpreted, as Judith Doneson has done, as a "feminization" of the Jew in relation to the Christian protector. Doneson writes,

> . . . the prevailing vision that informs Holocaust films is rooted in the popular theology that views the Jews as condemned eternally for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah but whose continuing existence is necessary as witness to Christian doctrine as well as to test the qualities of mercy and goodness incumbent upon a good Christian. This takes shape in the alliance of the weak, passive, rather feminine Jew being protected by a strong Christian/gentile, the male, signifying a male-female relationship.[28]

Helen is different from the other women in the film. She is objectified because the only quality that defines her is her beauty. She is not a wife, nor a mother, nor a daughter. She is the perfect victim because she is both a temptation and a test, and nothing more. When Schindler saves her, with no thought of personal gain, the audience sees clearly that his motivation is simply that of goodness and mercy. He sees beyond her beauty to her humanity. Goeth, on the other hand, is so obsessed with the

[28] Judith E. Doneson, "The Feminization of the Jew in Schindler's List," *Spielberg's Holocaust*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 140.

desire to possess her that he would rather send her to her death than allow Schindler to save her. In the end, though, even her beauty is not enough to mitigate his greed, and he sells her life to Schindler.

Amon Goeth is, in many ways, a symbolic character even though he was a real man. His name, coincidentally, is one peculiar indicator of this: Amon (Ammon) was the chief god of the ancient Egyptians, the enslavers of the ancient Hebrews. The surname "Goeth" bears a striking resemblance to that of that of the beloved German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The name of Schindler's nemesis places him, then, as the modern German incarnation of the ancient foe of the Jewish people. It alludes to the centuries-old persecution of Jewry as a "normal" state in which the Holocaust was the extreme example.

In one scene, these men sit on the balcony of Goeth's villa above the camp, seeming almost god-like as they look down on the mere mortals whose lives they both hold in their hands. It is from this place that they decide the fates of the Jews in the camp, Goeth doling out random death with a rifle and Schindler making deals to redeem "his" Jews. There, Schindler explains to Goeth that inflicting just punishment is different from exercising power: "Power is when we have every justification to kill, and yet we don't." He tells the story of a criminal who deserved to be punished but instead was pardoned by the emperor. Schindler attempts to convert Goeth, to convince him that there is power in mercy. Goeth, though, is ultimately unable to overcome his nature and to pardon the Jews. The evil that he represents is absolute and unchangeable. This portrayal belies the truth that there is identification possible with the perpetrators. It denies the ambiguities in human nature that allow men and women who lead perfectly normal, decent, and productive lives in other ways to commit atrocities by deluding themselves that they are justified.

Much has been written about the two church scenes in the film. The first scene, in Krakow, in which Jews are involved in black market trading while passing as worshipping Catholics has been seen as an allusion to the stereotype of Jews as greedy profiteers. The scene does seem reminiscent of the New Testament story of the moneychangers in the Temple.[29] Although Schindler solicits their help rather than chastising them, most of the traders "slink away" for fear of discovery. What is more striking about the scene, however, is the depiction of the Catholic Church as a sanctuary. All that the traders need do is remove the yellow star, the symbol of their Jewishness, from their clothes as they enter and then anoint themselves with holy water, the water of baptism, to find refuge.

This symbolism is disturbing on several levels. The first level involves the idea that Jews could find sanctuary within the Christian Churches of Europe during the Holocaust. The Catholic Church, in particular, was so intent on self-preservation that any refuge or protest offered came from individual Catholics and clergymen rather than from the institutional Church itself. To suggest otherwise is to cater to those who would rather not deal with difficult questions of bigotry, corruption, and antisemitism

[29] For a detailed discussion of this symbolism, see Sara R. Horowitz, "But is it Good for the Jews?" *Spielberg's Holocaust*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 125-126.

within a faith that professes love and tolerance. The second suggestion is that Jews could have saved themselves by casting aside the religion of Judaism and embracing Christianity. Countless secular and converted Jews were murdered because of Nazi racial classifications. Their "degeneracy" was thought to be in their blood and therefore unalterable through a change in confession. Whether sincere or not, conversion was no panacea. The third suggestion, and perhaps the most troubling, is the depiction of Jews donning the mantle of Christianity as a subterfuge. Many Jews, desperate to evade death through any means possible, did attempt to pass as gentiles. Here, though, "passing" is not presented as a matter of life and death but rather as a means to monetary gain. The subtle implication is that, though he might appear outwardly as Christian, a Jew could not change his internal Jewish (and manipulative) nature.

The second and very brief church scene takes place after Schindler returns to Brinnlitz with "his" Jews. He enters, genuflects, and kneels in the pew behind his wife, Emilie. He whispers, "No doorman or maitre d' will ever mistake you again. I promise." His redemption is complete. He has undergone a transformative experience by discovering his true path through the suffering of others. While the scene in the Krakow church had Schindler conspiring with Jews to purchase illicit goods, now he is once again one of the faithful, the prodigal son returned.

The next scene contains perhaps the most outright supersessionism in the film. It is a Friday night near the end of the War, and the sun is setting on the Brinnlitz munitions factory. Schindler approaches one of his workers, a rabbi, and chides, "Shouldn't you be getting ready for the Sabbath?" As the rabbi's face lights up with surprise and gratitude, Schindler, the savior, has not only restored the keeping of Shabbat to the *Schindlerjuden* but has also become their teacher. The flickering flames of the Shabbat candles glow in color as hope reemerges in the bleakness of despair. In the next scene, Schindler's personal sacrifice becomes clear as it becomes apparent that he has bankrupted himself to save his workers.

Shortly thereafter, news of the German surrender reaches the factory. Schindler gathers workers and guards together onto the factory floor and delivers what has been referred to as his "Sermon on the Mount" in which he "teaches a doctrine of forgiveness and a renunciation of violence."[30] As Schindler stands above and before the assembly, as a holy man addressing a congregation of followers, he leads them in prayer in memory of the murdered Jewish people. He speaks of a "We," as though he has become one of them. Yet, as he makes the sign of the cross and folds his hands in prayer, he is not one of the Jews, the victims. He is the savior and they are the redeemed.

Schindler's final scene, in which he escapes with his wife, is one created purely for closure and effect.[31] Sobbing, he demonstrates his humility in the face of the

[30] Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2001) 154.

[31] Historian Tim Cole observes, "This final scene –where the playboy and manipulator Schindler weeps over the realization that he could have done more, and then flees westward with the wife whom he has pledged faithfulness to—doesn't fit with the Schindler shown to us during the course of the film. Nor does it fit with the Schindler of history. As a number of Schindler Jews have noted, the Schindler of history simply made a speedy getaway just prior to liberation, with his wife *and* mistress." *Selling the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 80.

knowledge that he could have done more. His remorse and confession are a salve to the Christian conscience. He is a good man, a "true Christian," who did what he could to help at great personal cost to himself. His repentance, like Niemöller's, deflects closer scrutiny of the actions of Christians within the larger context.[32] As Gammon notes, " In suffering with the Jews after the fact, [Christians] avoid the need for confession and repentance for the Church's multiple failures."[33] After all, Schindler is not remorseful that he failed to act but that he failed to act enough.

The epilogue to the film is an ode to the triumph of good over evil, and much more. To the strains of "Jerusalem of Gold," the Schindler Jews leave the camp, destined for freedom, while Amon Goeth is hanged for his crimes. The location then morphs into present-day Israel as the surviving *Schindlerjuden* make a pilgrimage to Schindler's grave on Mount Zion in remembrance and tribute.[34] The inaccuracy of this patently Zionist conclusion has best been summed up by Omer Bartov:

> Thus, a relatively minor, and quite extraordinary case, has been transformed into a representative segment of the "story" as a whole, obliterating, or at least neglecting the fact that in the "real" Holocaust, most of the Jews died, most of the Germans collaborated with the perpetrators or remained passive bystanders, most of the victims sent to the showers were gassed, and most of the survivors did not walk across green meadows to Palestine . . . [35]

Every single one of the Jews that the audience has come to know during the film has survived. Yet "the six million" remain nameless and faceless. As Stalin is said to have remarked, "A single death is a tragedy, but a million deaths are a statistic."[36] There is never any real sense of loss, except in the abstract. To focus on loss rather than on survival would be to deny the hope with which Spielberg infused his film.

Based on a historical novel, *Schindler's List* has gone further toward portraying the horrors of the Holocaust than any American popular film so far. Its scenes of graphic violence, fear, and brutality stop short of the unimaginable reality, but it is debatable how far they can and should go. Spielberg has created a vision of the Holocaust that leaves his audience still able to sleep at night, confronting it not head-on but rather from an angle that renders it less blinding. He has created a filter through which Christian Americans not only can but also want to make a connection with the event. To tread any closer to the truth is perhaps so threatening that the audience would avert its eyes.

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[32] Mintz writes, "Instead of Christianity's being charged with evasion of responsibility during the war, or even being held accountable for laying the doctrinal groundwork for the murderous rage against the Jews, Christian faith is depicted in the film as a force that makes for deliverance." Mintz, 154.

[33] Gammon, 703.

[34] Cole, 87.

[35] Bartov, 46.

[36] This quotation is popularly attributed to Joseph Stalin, possibly as spoken to Winston Churchill at the 1945 Potsdam Conference. In his memoir, however, Churchill makes no mention of this remark. Winston Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953).

Schindler's List, then, does not question the myths of the Christian world but reinforces them. Its status as a "historical" narrative is buttressed by not only the care for authenticity with which it was made but also the good intentions of the filmmaker. Spielberg's Shoah Foundation is his testament to the importance that he places on memory of the Holocaust. Therefore, for many people, Spielberg's Holocaust is the "real" Holocaust. He has allowed them to "feel" it more, to understand it better, and to come to satisfactory conclusions about its meaning. Unfortunately, the truth that they can bear to look at is not the truth at all.

THE HIDING PLACE

> For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye.'[37]

Among the Christian denominations in the United States, there is a growing segment for which the Holocaust holds special significance, the Evangelical Protestants (particularly the ultraconservative Fundamentalist movement).[38] Following from a literalist hermeneutics, many Evangelicals hold that the fate of the Jewish people has been and remains part of a divine plan. In the case of the prevalent premillennialist exegesis, Jews have been under divine discipline since the fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., which began the Diaspora, or exodus from Palestine.[39] This discipline is thought to be the result of refusal to accept the great truth of Christianity—that of Jesus Christ as the messiah. While triumphalist in the dogma that God has made a new covenant with Christians that defines the singular path to eternal salvation, premillennialist Evangelicals also believe that the original covenant that God made with the Jewish people is still in force. The Jews remain God's original "chosen people." According to this interpretation, the first duty of the "true Christian" is to proselytize Jews and to convert them to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as the messiah. Conversion attempts are viewed as acts of brotherly love and concern for their future in eternity. Christians must preserve and protect unconverted Jews as well so that they may fulfill their role as the excluded witnesses in the eschatological process of salvation.

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[37] *New American Standard Bible*, Zechariah 2:8.

[38] *American Religious Identification Survey,* 2001, Graduate Center of The City University of New York, http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/aris_index.htm. In utilizing the umbrella term "Evangelical," as differentiated from Mainline Protestants, I am referring to those sects whose members claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, tend toward a literal interpretation of scripture, and who claim a "born again" experience. They fall into the most conservative category of American Christianity.

[39] Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam, 1989) 30-31. Lindsey, author of the 1970 best-seller *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, writes in the Christian literary genre of Biblical prophecy interpretation. *The Road to Holocaust* is an excellent source for understanding the postmillennialist viewpoint regarding Jews because it is, basically, a defense against the postmillennialist Dominion Theology movement, which is patently antisemitic. For an in-depth review of this book, see Stephen R. Haynes, "Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust*: A Review Essay," *Fides et Historia* 24:3 (Fall 1993): 111-129.

Within the vast body of Holocaust narrative, no work has approached the exemplary status that Christian rescuer Corrie ten Boom's 1971 memoir *The Hiding Place* holds among Evangelical Christians.[40]

Ten Boom, who died in 1983, was a member of the evangelical wing of the Dutch Reformed Church. This sect is distinct from other branches of the Dutch Reformed Church in its philosemitism, holding Mosaic Law in higher esteem than Christian sects that fault Judaism for depending on law rather than faith for salvation.[41] During the Second World War, ten Boom lived with her sister and elderly father above their watch shop in the Dutch city of Haarlem. Devoutly religious, the family became active in the underground, aiding Jews and hiding many in their home during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. In early 1944, the family was betrayed and arrested, although the Jews hidden in the house at the time were able to avoid detection. Within days, ten Boom's father, Casper, died in Scheveningen Prison. Her nephew, Kik, also perished, and her brother, Willem, a Dutch Reformed minister, later succumbed to an illness contracted while he was interned. Ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, were deported to Ravensbruck where Betsie died of disease shortly before Corrie was released.

The experiences of the ten Boom family hold dual significance for American Christians. In *The Hiding Place*, ten Boom asks, "How should a Christian act when evil [is] in power?"[42] The implications of ten Boom's story, in relation to this question, are broadly relevant to all Christian denominations in that they compose a model for living the values of faith, love, charity, and forgiveness. Here, the event of the Holocaust is subsumed into the category of generalized evil. As one author has written of this memoir, "After years of suffering and sacrifice, the heroine's faith remains unshaken. This then is the central message [of ten Boom's story] whose Christian framework appears to exceed the Holocaust, which emerges as a historical accident or religious trial."[43]

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[40] Lawrence Baron, "Supersessionism Without Contempt: The Holocaust Evangelism of Corrie ten Boom," *Christian Responses to the Holocaust*, ed. Donald Dietrich (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2003) 119. According to Baron, *The Hiding Place* "has sold over four and one-half million copies." He places it in the top three best-selling books about the rescue of Jews during World War II. Baron also cites Rhonda Renee Gamble as the source of his statement, "In 1997 it became the only Holocaust memoir ever to make the top 10 list of best-selling Christian books in the United States." Gamble, "Evangelical Representations of Corrie ten Boom," Masters Thesis, 1997, San Diego State University.

[41] Baron, "Supersessionism Without Contempt," 124-125.

[42] Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Washington Depot, CT: Chosen Books, 1971), 71.

[43] Esther Fuchs, "Gender and Holocaust Docudramas: Gentile Heroines in Rescue Films," *Shofar* 22.1 (2003): 86. Fuchs' comment was in reference to the 1973 film The *Hiding Place*, which was produced by the evangelist Billy Graham and was based on ten Boom's memoir. Her exact wording is "After years of suffering and sacrifice, the heroine's faith remains unshaken. This then is the central message of the film whose Christian framework appears to exceed the Holocaust, which emerges as a historical accident or religious trial." Although Fuchs notes that the Graham film takes liberties with the original text, I believe that her quoted observation holds true of both representations.

What seems to be most strongly appealing to mainstream Christians is ten Boom's ability to maintain her faith sincerely in the face of both her own persecution and the loss of her family. She relates that, upon learning of her father's death, she prayed "Dear Jesus . . . how foolish of me to have called for human help when You are here. To think that Father sees You now, face to face!"[44] Throughout the memoir, ten Boom constantly affirms that she was able to find such meaning, at the time, in her suffering. Part of this meaning seems to be that she felt it gave her opportunity to bring spiritual rather than physical salvation to those around her. She relates that, during her entire imprisonment, she continued to proselytize fellow prisoners.

Despite her constant striving toward a theodicy to explain her experiences, ten Boom had difficulty finding sense in the deaths of those whom she considered good and innocent. Once, an interrogator asked her, "What kind of God would let that old man [her father] die here in Scheveningen?" She remembered and was reassured by her father's typical answer to difficult theological questions: "Some knowledge is too heavy . . . you cannot bear it . . . your Father [God] will carry it until you are able."[45] By affirming her ordeal as part of an unknowable divine plan, ten Boom effectively diverts moral judgments away from the actions of the perpetrators and onto the reactions of the victims and bystanders. By replacing an examination of human motivations with a mystical explanation, both ten Boom and her Christian readers sidestep the real issue that Casper ten Boom died not because he was a devout Christian but because he helped to save Jews who were targeted for murder by the citizens of essentially Christian nations.[46]

Ten Boom's story, like that of Oskar Schindler, vindicates Christianity in hindsight by spotlighting the righteous exceptions. Christianity is portrayed as a force for salvation rather than for destruction. It denies contradictory evidence cited by authors such as Michael Berenbaum, who writes:

> Religious practice measurably influenced the behavior of the perpetrators and the response of the bystanders. There was a direct correlation between the intensity of religious practice and the percentage of Jews killed in an occupied territory. Where Christians were most devout—Poland, Slovakia, and the Baltic countries—the percentage of Jews killed increased . . . [47]

To use the story of the ten Boom family to make generalizations about the behavior of European Christians during the Holocaust is to ignore specific factors that may have caused them to act as they did. K. Alan Snyder of Regent University has made one such attempt. He writes:

> The history of purges and other acts of discrimination in Christian Europe . . . has led to deep suspicions in some that the attitude of evangelicals toward Jews may not be as altruistic as it appears, or that at least their views are

[44] Ten Boom, 157.
[45] Ten Boom, 163.
[46] Steigmann-Gall, 261-262.
[47] Michael Berenbaum, "The Nativization of the Holocaust," *Judaism* 35 (1986): 456.

> tinged with a certain condescension for a race of people who have rejected their Messiah. [T]hose suspicions can be tested on the ten Boom family.[48]

First, the ten Booms were citizens of a nation, Holland, that had a long history of religious tolerance. Although antisemitism existed in the Netherlands, it was relatively mild compared to levels in other European countries.[49] For instance, the Dutch churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, officially protested Nazi anti-Jewish policies and deportations in 1942.[50] As has already been stated, the ten Boom family also belonged to a denomination that was particularly philosemitic. There seems to have been especially strong institutional remonstration in the defense of converted Jews.[51] How much of this was caused by actual affinity for Jews and how much was the result of other factors such as nationalist, anti-German sentiment remains to be thoroughly researched. The point here is that there are several reasons the attitudes of the ten Boom family cannot be viewed as representative of the attitudes of European Christians as a whole.

Along with ten Boom's universalized message, there exists, concomitantly, a particularized, Evangelical reading in which the event of the Holocaust is of principal importance. Here, the theodicean weight of the narrative rests on the triad of Jewish victimization, Christian faithfulness, and Nazi ungodliness. At the center of this triad is scripture, the "word of God." Each group's relationship to the center explains its relationship to the other two members of the triad. Evangelical Christians such as Corrie ten Boom believe that the Old Testament (The Tanakh or "Hebrew Bible") and the New Testament (its fulfillment) are equally valid in stature as divinely inspired works and must both be accepted. The Jews, the original "chosen people," received the word as expressed in the Tanakh and have remained committed to it. Yet, by not accepting the New Testament as truth, they remain outside the completeness of revelation embraced by Christians. It is this incomplete understanding that they believe has resulted in the dispersion and persecution of the Jewish people throughout history, which can only be resolved through conversion.

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[48] K. Alan Snyder, "Corrie ten Boom: A Protestant Evangelical Response to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews," *Neopolitique* (October 1999): 6-7, http: www.neopolitique.org/Np2000/Pages/Essays/Articles/Ten boom-oct'99.htm, Accessed January 31, 2005. Neopolitique is a student publication of the Robertson School of Government at Regent University. His original quotation reads: "The history of purges and other acts of discrimination in Christian Europe, however, has led to deep suspicions in some that the attitude of evangelicals toward Jews may not be as altruistic as it appears, or that at least their views are tinged with a certain condescension for a race of people who have rejected their Messiah. This paper cannot be expected to deal with all evangelicals, but those suspicions can be tested on the ten Boom family."

[49] Dienke Hondius, *Return: Holocaust Survivors and Dutch Anti-Semitism*, trans. David Colmer (London: Praeger, 2003) 18-19.

[50] Lawrence Baron, "The Historical Context of Rescue," *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, eds. Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner (New York: The Free Press, 1988) 37.

[51] J. Presser, *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969) 22-23.

Lawrence Baron points out that ten Boom, in her later writing, quoted a converted Jew who had said in a speech, "It is true that Israel missed God's target and was, for a time, set aside and dispersed among the nations. But the day will come when they will fall at the feet of their Messiah in true repentance and live!"[52] Evangelicals such as ten Boom, then, view Jews as brothers in faith who will eventually find salvation by accepting the truth of Christ. The theme of martyrdom that runs powerfully through ten Boom's work suggests that she believed that Christian sacrifice would be necessary to bring about this day of Jewish enlightenment. In her memoir, she recounts her Christ-like willingness to die not only to save Jews physically but also to serve as a witness to them of the truth of her beliefs. At one point, she recounts that she acted in conscious emulation of the passion and death of Christ: "I had read a thousand times the story of Jesus' arrest—how soldiers had slapped Him, laughed at Him, and flogged Him. Now such happenings had faces and voices."[53]

The image of Jews as incomplete Christians is personified in *The Hiding Place* by an apostate Jew, Harry de Vries. It was in him that ten Boom saw the potential of the Jewish people fulfilled. She related that "he had become a Christian, some forty years earlier, without ceasing in the least to be a loyal Jew. 'A completed Jew!' he would tell us smilingly. 'A follower of the one perfect Jew.'"[54] De Vries is ten Boom's example of how a converted Jew could be brought into the fold of Christianity and achieve even the sanctity of martyrdom through adherence to Christian tenets. He was a member of the underground, married to a gentile woman. When speaking of the danger to himself and his wife that he perceived, although he was a convert, he said, "It is not for ourselves that we mind, we are Christians, Cato [his wife] and I. When we die we will see Jesus and this is all that matters."[55] While he was speaking of the concern that he had felt for his two dogs that would be left behind, implicit in his words is the sentiment that he felt assured that he would achieve a transcendence of death as a Christian that would not have been his as an "incomplete Jew." After de Vries was eventually arrested, he said to ten Boom, "I shall use this place—wherever they're taking us. It will be my witness stand for Jesus."[56] He had been arrested with his wife in a raid, but she had been released when it was discovered that she was not Jewish. Ten Boom never heard from him again. So, Harry de Vries, who was determined to be a witness for Christ as he was taken away, died because he was also a Jew.

Ten Boom's assessment of Harry de Vries, as well as her belief in the necessity of conversion for Jewish salvation, reflects a profound ambiguity in the attitudes of Evangelical Christians toward Jews. On the one hand, there is a deep respect and brotherly affection based on a perceived shared history as the "people of God." However, it

[52] Quoted in Baron, "Supersessionism Without Contempt," 122. Originally quoted in Corrie ten Boom, *Father ten Boom: God's Man* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1978).
[53] Ten Boom, 195.
[54] Ten Boom, 73.
[55] Ten Boom, 72.
[56] Ten Boom, 95.

is *the potential of the Jews* to fulfill divine intentions that provokes a continued engagement concerning their welfare. More than the Jewish people of the present, it is the Jews of the past who lived in the time before Christ and the Jews of the future who will become enlightened through conversion that are worthy of Christian admiration and protection. It is for their sake that Christian mercy and tolerance must be shown to those who are both the descendants and the progenitors of a fulfilled Jewish people.

There is another reason that Evangelicals who rely on a literal interpretation of scripture profess such philosemitism. It is based on two seemingly contradictory beliefs. The first, as previously mentioned, is that Jewish suffering, especially during the Holocaust, is a self-inflicted wound resulting from a failure of both faith and understanding. It is essentially the will of God to punish them. The second and conflicting belief is that those who mistreat the Jews will also be punished.[57] The fact that these two beliefs can be held at the same time—that the Nazis committed evil (and "un-Christian") acts but that the Jews "deserved it"—can be found in the attitudes that Philip Gourevitch encountered when conversing with a Christian teacher and her students at the Holocaust Museum.

To say that ten Boom believed that Jews had "missed God's target" does not necessarily lead to a conclusion that she was antisemitic. She seems to have practiced what Baron has termed "supersessionism without contempt."[58] In her recorded words and actions, it is virtually impossible to find evidence of derogatory opinions about Jews or Judaism. Rather, she appears to have thought that Judaism and Christianity had more beliefs in common than in conflict. In fact, in many instances she speaks with both respect and affection for Jewish friends and their faith. Her family seems to have emphasized proselytizing through the example of how they conducted their lives. It appears that they believed that, by living righteously, they could attest to the validity of their religious beliefs.

In *The Hiding Place*, ten Boom recalls an experience in which she and her father witnessed the roundup and deportation of Jewish men, women, and children from a marketplace in Haarlem. In her recollection, Casper ten Boom referred to the scriptural passage of Zechariah 2:8 in his phrase "the apple of God's eye":

> 'Father, those poor people!' I cried...'Those poor people,' Father echoed. But to my surprise I saw that he was looking at the soldiers now forming into ranks to march away. 'I pity the poor Germans, Corrie. They have touched the apple of God's eye.'[59]

Casper ten Boom's words allude to the special relationship that he believed that the Jews had with God as the first "chosen people." One wonders, then, what meaning American Evangelicals derive from these words.

There is a tendency among scholars to view Christian supersessionism and proselytizing of Jews as patently antisemitic. Yet, if ten Boom's line of reasoning is accepted within the Evangelical audience, it is possible to imagine that feelings of doctrinal superiority can exist without hatred or even dislike of Jews or Judaism. This

[57] Lindsey, 2-3.
[58] Baron, "Supersessionism Without Contempt," 119.
[59] Ten Boom, 68-69.

reasoning may be illustrated through a simple example: One may warn a friend not to make a mistake, but the friend may choose to ignore the advice because he does not see the merit in it. If he is subsequently harmed as a result of his own actions, is the friend then worthy of contempt? Are his beliefs? In this case, the answer would be "not necessarily." The friend may have simply made an honest error from which one hopes that he will learn. His beliefs may be meritorious, but flawed. In the context of describing the murder of European Jewry during the Holocaust, this reasoning is surely offensive to many people. It certainly does not view Judaism as an equally viable path to salvation with Christianity. Yet, without the element of contempt, it is difficult to label this attitude as antisemitic.

Evident also in Casper ten Boom's words about the Nazis is an attitude similar to that held toward the Jews: that of pity for those who have refused God's calling but also recognition that they are human beings who have the potential for salvation. In their case, however, they have not merely come under divine discipline but have turned to evil as the result of rejecting scripture entirely. In turning to Corrie ten Boom's depiction of the Nazis, one finds repeated suggestion of what Yaakov Ariel calls "[a] major element in the evangelical understanding of the Holocaust." It is that the Nazis were not only non-Christian antisemites but were actually anti-Christian as well.[60]

Examples of Nazi rejection of the Old Testament are more pronounced in ten Boom's memoir, although she does not note whether she sees this rejection as the cause or the effect of their hatred of Jews. She gives a specific example, however, in which the rejection of the Old Testament and antisemitism are intertwined. Prior to the invasion of the Netherlands, a young German apprentice and member of the Hitler Youth, Otto, came to work at the ten Boom's watch shop. His first morning, he attended the family's morning Bible study with the other employees but, from then on, declined to attend. When he was asked why, ten Boom recalls that he replied "he had seen Father reading from the Old Testament which, he informed us, was the Jews' 'Book of Lies.'" She then recounts how her father, without derision, responded, "I was shocked, but Father was only sorrowful. 'He has been taught wrong,' he told me. 'By watching us, seeing that we love this Book and are truthful people, he will realize his error.'"[61] The ten Booms did not dismiss Otto for his antisemitic words, instead attempting to win him over by example and displays of kindness. He was finally let go, however, for physically abusing an elderly watchmaker.

In another incident, this time occurring during the raid on her home, ten Boom again writes of Nazi disdain for the Old Testament. Her nephew, Peter, says, "But if they learn that Uncle Willem was teaching this morning from the Old Testament, it could make trouble for him."[62] Barring other previous incidents, the experience with the German apprentice apparently gave the ten Boom family ample reason to believe that the Nazis were very much opposed to the Old Testament because of its Jewish origin.

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[60] Yaakov Ariel, "The Faithful in a Time of Trial," *Journal of Religion and Society* 3 (2001), http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2001/2001-8a.html, Accessed July 11, 2004.
[61] Ten Boom, 58.
[62] Ten Boom, 134.

In regard to being anti-Christianity, ten Boom bases her characterization of the Nazis foremost on her belief that she was behaving in a manner that was correct for a Christian. That she was arrested and imprisoned with her family for doing so amounted in her mind to persecution of Christians for their faith. In fact, when recalling how a Protestant minister refused to harbor a Jewish child out of fear for his family's safety, ten Boom gives the impression that she felt that his behavior was decidedly hypocritical.[63] The fact that anyone, regardless of motivation, would have received the same punishment, or worse, does not appear to have occurred to her. She also fails to acknowledge that Christians of her particularly philosemitic beliefs were in a minority and that, on the whole, a religion with a long history of persecuting Jews did not appear to mandate that its faithful should risk their lives to save them.

There are two other minor incidents in the book that ten Boom describes to emphasize her perception that the Nazi regime was opposed to Christianity. The first occurred, again, during the raid on her home. As a Gestapo officer was beating her in order to obtain the location of the hidden Jews, she cried out, "Lord Jesus, protect me!" With that, the infuriated officer paused and threatened, "If you say that name again I'll kill you!"[64] The second incident occurred in Scheveningen Prison. Her family had sent her a package with four small booklets containing the New Testament gospels. A cellmate warned her, "They catch you with those and it's double sentence and *kalte kost* [bread ration alone] as well."[65]

Small as these incidents were, they can be pinpointed, by those so inclined, as factual evidence to back up ten Boom's contention that she was persecuted because she was a Christian. It is true that ten Boom took the actions that she did because of her faith, but, if she had hidden or assisted Jews for any other reason, she would have borne the same punishment. Thus, one cannot say that the Nazis were motivated to punish her because she was a Christian. That she "suffered with the Jews," though, is vital to her in exonerating Christianity of blame for the Holocaust. If authentic Christians were victimized, then any faith that the perpetrators professed would be rendered a "sham Christianity."

Although *The Hiding Place* is the memoir of a woman who lived through the Holocaust, it is a story told from the periphery, a universalized "passion play" in which the forces of evil are overcome through faith and courage. It is a tale with a miraculously bottomless medicine bottle and a prayer circle in Barracks 28. There is a purposeful naiveté to the narrative. Questions that might be too difficult to answer are never posed. The story is sanitized and suitable for family consumption. The people that die are old and ill, finding peace before breathing their last. The great trials of the concentration camp come in the form of black lice and overflowing toilets. It is a comfortingly myopic story that Christians can feel good about. Corrie ten Boom's Holocaust almost seems to make sense.

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[63] Ten Boom, 99.
[64] Ten Boom, 129.
[65] Ten Boom, 146.

A few points are worth remembering. Ten Boom herself never saw the fires in the East. She never wore a yellow star. She never experienced the filth of the ghetto. Perhaps her world did make sense to her because she was free to make choices in it. How might she have responded to the cry "Where is God? Where is he?" had she stood beside Elie Wiesel to witness the slow and agonizing murder of a young child?[66] For herself, and for all Christians who seek to understand the Holocaust through her words, would she have answered as Wiesel did, "Where is he? Here he is—He is hanging here on this gallows . . ."? Ten Boom's story is hers alone. Yet, by Christianizing the Holocaust, she has distilled its meaning into a parable about salvation that both displaces the centrality of Jewish victimization and excuses it as an anomaly within Christendom.

THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

To most Americans, the Holocaust Museum is the nation's "Jewish museum." The B'nai B'rith Klutznick Museum, housing the capital city's largest collection of Judaica, is only a few blocks away, but only about fifty thousand people visit there annually.[67] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is where approximately five thousand visitors a day, mostly non-Jews, come to understand what is, in their view, the quintessential Jewish story: a catastrophe. At the same time, however, it is a museum that was created to tell not just of Jewish victimization but also of American virtue. To facilitate maximum inclusiveness and acceptance, the museum has been created in a way that does not appear too "Jewish." This is a place that documents the "Holocaust" rather than the "Shoah."

The museum was dedicated on April 22, 1993, but it had taken fifteen years to become a reality. The President's Commission on the Holocaust was created in 1978, under Jimmy Carter. Carter, an evangelical Christian, was in conflict with many in the American Jewish community at the time because of his perceived lack of support for Israel. Edward Linenthal writes that Carter's staff suggested that the creation of the commission would be an appropriate fence-mending gesture in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of Israeli independence.[68] The museum was chartered by an Act of Congress in 1980, the same year that the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the successor to the President's Commission, was formed. In the two years in between, a struggle began to choreograph the museum's complex dance of "Jewish memory" and "American memory."

As Sara J. Bloomfield, the director of the Holocaust Museum, puts it:

> What makes our exhibitions so powerful . . . is that the history of the Holocaust is fundamentally about human nature and the entire spectrum of

[66] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Bantam, 1960) 61-62.

[67] Stephen J. Whitfield, "Reflections on Peter Novick's Holocaust in American Life: Two Perspectives," *Judaism* 49.4 (Fall 2000): 484.

[68] Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin, 1995) 18.

> human behavior, from unimaginable evil to extraordinary goodness. It is about us and what it means to be a human being.[69]

The contrast between good and evil seems so clear in retrospect. In the United States, World War II has been popularly termed "The Good War." Nowhere is the evil against which this nation fought more clearly defined than in the Holocaust Museum. Yet, the Nazi war against the Jews has only become America's war in hindsight. Like Schindler and Niemöller, America looks back, in this museum, as the righteous bystander who regrets that he did not do enough.

Alan Mintz has suggested that the increasing importance of the Holocaust in American public discourse is partially the result of a changing national paradigm in which events such as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement have led to a culture of self-doubt. He writes:

> The critique of the justness of American society and its use of power opened up the prospect of seeing America not as a shining example to the world but as a country that caused suffering at home and abroad... In this context, it is not surprising, then, that the Holocaust eventually became the ultimate analogy for reflecting on the evils humans have inflicted upon other humans.[70]

If this is true, and the current fascination with the Holocaust is a manifestation of American national angst, than it is a discomfort that is linked, inexorably, with religion and the politics of faith.

One reason for the bond between religious belief and fascination with the Holocaust is that American religious leaders were in the forefront of addressing issues of social justice in the second half of the twentieth century. Jewish leaders, in particular, gained an increasingly authoritative voice in speaking for the conscience of the nation. Emerging from the great wave of international antisemitism that peaked during the War,[71] American Judaism underwent a self-conscious renewal, and Jews asserted their religious identity with increased confidence. The popular recognition of Judaism as America's "third faith" was heralded by the publication of Will Herberg's *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* in 1955. Jonathan Sarna writes that this book "provided a vocabulary, an explanation, and a new set of boundaries for the restructured American religion that had by then been developing for half a century."[72] The relative pluralism of American society made room for a definition of "Jewishness" in a religious context, superceding the secular concept of "peoplehood" that seemed divisive and "un-American." The view that Jews and Christians were linked by a

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[69] Sara J. Bloomfield, "Exhibition Acknowledgement, Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race," 2004, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/deadlymedicine/catalogue/, Accessed February 28, 2005.

[70] Mintz, 10.

[71] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 150.

[72] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004) 276.

common biblical foundation and, therefore, a common value system gave rise to the new conception of the United States as a country with a "Judeo-Christian" heritage.[73]

The 1960's was a pivotal decade for American Jewish empowerment. Although the majority of gentile Americans seemed more comfortable with emphasizing the religious side of the dual nature of "Jewishness," the sense of "peoplehood" among American Jews grew along with an increasing identification with the state of Israel. Of significant impact was the televised trial of Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann that began the decade. His capture in Argentina by Israeli agents and his subsequent trial and execution by Israeli courts for crimes against the Jewish people opened up a discussion of what had been a marginalized subject in the United States: the Nazis' attempted extermination of European Jewry.

In 1967, the victory of Israel in the Six-Day War coincided with the active involvement of Jews in the American Civil Rights Movement. At the same time as the Jewish State appeared to be countering centuries of victimization, American Jews were taking a stand alongside another group with a long history of persecution: African-Americans. The organization of the Civil Rights Movement emerged from the black churches in America and Jewish activism from the synagogue. The most visible Jewish advocate was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who, in a 1961 speech to the national Conference on Religion and Race, "link[ed] the black struggle to the biblical Exodus. . . ." An iconic image of the famous 1965 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama shows Heschel linking arms with his friend Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black activists.[74]

Two trends that shaped the future of American Holocaust memory grew out of the events of the 1960's. The first was a growing acknowledgement of Jewish victimization during the Holocaust. It has been argued that, as opposed to the Jewish inclination to view the Holocaust as the culmination of centuries of antisemitism, most Americans considered it "history's worst act of racism."[75] Jews are more apt than non-Jews to trace the roots of the Holocaust to a history of antisemitism; however, because of the tendency that emerged among non-Jewish Americans in the mid- to late-twentieth century to view "Jewishness" as a religious categorization rather than an ethnic or racial one, I believe that it is more prevalent to consider the Holocaust to have been an act of religious persecution. The main point of contest has become the nature of the persecutors.

The second trend stems from this acknowledgement of Jewish victimization. During the Civil Rights Movement and through the Vietnam years, American Jews cited their own history of persecution as their motivation to advocate for other oppressed groups. In this sense, the Holocaust became the universalized example of "man's inhumanity to man," thus leading to a unique emphasis on its significance among American Christians, based primarily on the contingencies of recent American history. In a nation that now considers itself to be rooted in a

[73] Sarna, 267.

[74] Sarna, 311.

[75] Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5.1 (2002): 96.

Judeo-Christian tradition and that views the Holocaust as an act of religious persecution, it follows that the murder of European Jews can be seen as decidedly "un-Christian." Therefore, the Holocaust Museum, which documents this event of such far-reaching religious significance, walks a fine line between universalization and particularism. The Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust must also be everyone's tragedy. American Christians must be able to own it as well. For this to occur, the museum exhibitions must tread lightly when addressing the religious antisemitism that made this catastrophe possible.

The first thing that the visitor sees upon stepping off the elevator into the permanent exhibition is a large photomural of American troops at the Ohrdruf concentration camp. They are gathered around a pile of charred human remains, and the visitor, as a fellow witness, completes the circle. Perhaps from an impulse to move forward into the exhibition or perhaps because they feel loathe to appear voyeuristic, few people seem to stop and reflect upon this image. It is symbolic, however, of the mandate of the museum: to witness, to remember, and to learn. This mission is evoked in the words of Deuteronomy 4:9 inscribed on the wall of the Hall of Remembrance:

> Only guard yourself and guard your soul carefully, lest you forget the things your eyes saw, and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children.

The act of bearing witness is the core of the museum. Yet, in the representational decisions involved in the exhibitions, current political and social concerns factor into the equation. Because of the prioritization of telling the story of the Holocaust to a great number of people, it is told in a manner that most will be disposed to accept. As Henry Greenspan has observed about chronicling survivor testimony, the substance of the story is sometimes deemed secondary to the act of bearing witness.[76]

One of the many controversial issues that the museum deals with is the role of Christian antisemitism in the Holocaust. In his 1995 book, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum,* Edward Linenthal discusses in detail the debate over how much of the story of Christian complicity should be addressed. He documents that, from its opening, the approach within the permanent exhibition has been one of caution and restraint. The topic is taken up in a brief film, *Antisemitism*, that "traces religious persecution of Jews through the Middle Ages and the Reformation."[77] It locates the source of this Christian hatred toward Jews in the New Testament gospels that charge all Jews, past and present, with responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ in the phrase "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us and on our children."[78] Linenthal also points out, however, that in the

[76] Henry Greenspan, "Imagining Survivors: Testimony and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness," *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, ed. Hilene Flanzbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999) 59.
[77] Linenthal, 226.
[78] *The King James Bible*, Matthew 27:25.

film "that story is historically removed from the present."[79] It is also a story that Christians of the present are able to distance themselves from by referring to late-twentieth-century apologetics such as *Nostra Aetate.*

One component that is specifically lacking in the exhibition is a thorough discussion of both the actions of the Christian churches in support of the National Socialist regime and their failure to act in opposition to it. Another is the fact that the crimes of the Holocaust were largely perpetrated by those who considered themselves Christians, about ninety-five percent of the German population during the Nazi years.[80] References to both of these topics are scarce, appearing only in the "Nazi Society" section that features a photograph of Protestant Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller giving the Nazi salute along with text that reads, "Even the Christian churches fell under Nazi influence, and many Protestant and Roman Catholic officials openly supported the regime."[81] This is a rather ambiguous and cursory acknowledgment of Christian reactions that ranged from the self-serving indifference of the institutional Catholic Church to the enthusiastic collaboration of the *Deutsche Christen*.[82] It fails to make the link between the Christian doctrine discussed in the film *Antisemitism* and the actions of those that adhered to it.

The reasons for these omissions stem from that aspect of collective memory that Maurice Halbwachs said "distort[s] the past in the act of reconstructing it."[83] If most Americans, as I have argued, currently view the Holocaust as an act of religious persecution, then to implicate millions of practicing Christians as perpetrators comes perilously close to implicating the tenets of their faith as well. The danger of alienating the American Christian public was recognized by members of the museum council from early on. Because the museum is a public building built on land donated by the federal government and is supported by a combination of private and government funds, the circumvention of certain contentious issues in its exhibitions has been deemed necessary to maintain public support.

A number of the theologians and scholars who have been most vocally in favor of including information on Christian complicity are affiliated with the museum's Committee on Church Relations and the Holocaust. Among them, Dr. John Pawlikowski of Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, a longtime member of the Museum Council and current chair of the Church Relations committee, has advocated a more vigorous, but sensitive approach.[84] Like other council members, he has been cautious about turning people against the museum and causing it to be perceived

[79] Linenthal, 227.
[80] Steigmann-Gall, 261-262. Also, Robert P. Ericksen, "Assessing the Heritage," *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, eds. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 22.
[81] Linenthal, 226.
[82] Gunther Lewy, "Pious XII, the Jews, and the German Catholic Church," *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*, eds. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999). Also Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 1-4.
[83] Halbwachs, 182.
[84] Linenthal, 226-227.

as "anti-Christian."[85] "You have to remember," he says, "that at first, we didn't know if anyone would come."[86] As museum attendance has proven such a concern unfounded, the politics of funding has become an important issue affecting the content of the exhibitions. As a government institution, the museum is dependent on the goodwill of politicians and bureaucrats who influence the budgeting of resources. According to Pawlikowski, after twelve years, the sheer volume of visitor traffic at the museum has caused it to begin to "wear out," and these resources are becoming even more critical for its maintenance.[87]

An issue that has not been quite so contentious is the emphasis on stories of the rescue of Jews by Christians. The redemptive accounts of these exceptional individuals are highlighted throughout the museum, starting with the name change of the section of 15th Street in front of the museum to Raoul Wallenberg Place. Yet, there have been those who felt that the emphasis on these incidents of rescue is misleading. One of these critics is the British filmmaker Martin Smith, an early director of the exhibition department. Like Pawlikowski, Smith believed that there should be a greater stress on the role of Christians as perpetrators. He objected to the plethora of displays of Christian rescue, saying that it was "much more likely that you would be saved by a communist or a socialist than a Christian."[88]

The exhibition narrative of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is, like *Schindler's List* and *The Hiding Place*, a form of historical representation. It expresses a subjective point of view that is tempered by many factors, but greatest among them is its constituency. The driving force behind its creation was the memory of the murder of six million Jews and millions of others who, as the Commission put it, "as night descended . . . were swept into this net of death."[89] Despite its necessarily universalizing tendencies, this narrative remains the core of the museum's mission as a witness: to remember those victims and to tell their stories. What is sometimes overlooked by commentators is the ultimate goal of any witness: to be believed. In light of this goal, there is another consideration that influences inclusion and exclusion of controversial elements within the museum narrative: Holocaust denial.

It must be remembered that 1993 was not only the year that *Schindler's List* debuted and the museum opened its doors. It was also the year that Deborah Lipstadt published her influential book *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. As a result, she was sued for libel by David Irving, whom she had accused of being a Holocaust denier and a right-wing extremist. Though Lipstadt was vindicated in a judgment that took six years to reach, the incident underscored the reality that, especially regarding the Holocaust, traumatic memory is often contested memory.

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[85] Linenthal, 226.

[86] Interview with John Pawlikowski, March 2, 2005, Kent State University.

[87] Interview with John Pawlikowski, March 2, 2005, Kent State University.

[88] Linenthal, 227.

[89] President's Commission on the Holocaust, "Report to the President," September 27, 1979, Government Printing Office.

In the first chapter of her book, Lipstadt expresses her own concerns, shared by Holocaust survivors and, undoubtedly, by other historians of the Holocaust:

> Denial of the Holocaust is not the only thing I find beyond belief. What has also shocked me is the success deniers have in convincing good-hearted people that Holocaust denial is an "other side" of history—ugly, reprehensible, and extremist—but an other side nonetheless. As time passes and fewer people can personally challenge these assertions, their campaign will only grow in intensity.[90]

The museum is meant to be a bulwark against such denial. Yet, the threat of it continues to loom in the background, especially as American support for Israel remains a religiously and culturally divisive issue. As the creation of the state of Israel is often popularly portrayed as the Holocaust's "redemptive ending," it stands to reason that those who seek to discredit Israel might attempt to do so by discrediting the memory of the Holocaust itself. The inclusion of material that American Christians might find offensive or difficult to accept might well be considered by some to be encouraging disbelief.

Conclusion

Collective memory is difficult to measure. Only its reflection in popular representations and memorials hint at what a culture, as a whole, believes and values. There are also many exceptions, individuals who do not necessarily subscribe to the majoritarian viewpoint. There may be two primary causal factors that precipitate this divergence. The first is the possession of detailed and broad-based knowledge of factual evidence that precludes the acceptance of a core mythology, as is evident in the reluctance of most scholars to accept the dominant Christian narrative of the Holocaust in America. An example is John Pawlikowski, who as a Roman Catholic priest and theologian would seem to have reason to view the event through this lens, yet he does not.[91] A second reason may be that an individual who possesses a strong, contrary belief system would have little motivation to accept a mythology that strengthens a competing metanarrative. The possibilities here are too numerous to catalog, but this group would certainly include most non-Christians.

The facts remain, however, that the majority of Americans identify themselves as Christians and that most have little detailed knowledge of the history of the Holocaust. What they do know is often based on representations tinged with a Christian viewpoint. The power of the Holocaust metaphor has been pointed out by Peter Novick, who gives many examples of interest groups who have employed it. Abortion opponents, animal-rights activists, and gun-control advocates are among many who have equated perceived societal evils with what many people consider its absolute measure.[92] When most Americans use the word "holocaust," they are referring, in fact, to "the Holocaust."

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[90] Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1994) 3.
[91] Interview with John Pawlikowski, March 2, 2005, Kent State University.
[92] Novick, 241.

Novick has also argued that American Holocaust memory may be fleeting for a number of reasons, but he cites one significant factor that would counter this possibility: its institutionalization in the Washington museum.[93] As I have shown, however, factors outside the realm of scholarly inquiry influence the historical narrative of the museum. One may question, then, if there is a danger that the practical-minded exclusion of certain information from the museum will serve to strengthen the popularly "acceptable" history of the event and inadvertently make it more difficult for current and future historians to challenge this narrative. When memory is institutionalized, it tends to become accepted as the definitive version of the story.

One must then ask what it is that Christian audiences are so averse to confronting in the Holocaust narrative. I would argue that it is the roots of antisemitism in the exclusivity of Christian eschatology. The "heroes" of the Holocaust that Christians have chosen to lionize, such as ten Boom and Niemöller, did not oppose Nazi extermination policies because they accepted Jews as moral equals. Rather, they rejected racial classification as an impediment to conversion and salvation. A further example is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant minister who was executed for his role in the von Stauffenberg conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer's convictions stemmed from the same supersessionism, the same belief in the "potential" of the Jewish people. In the 1933 Bethel Confession (*Das Betheles Bekenntnis*), he conveys this clearly:

> God abundantly shows God's faithfulness by still keeping faith with Israel after the flesh, from whom was born Christ after the flesh, despite all their unfaithfulness, even after the crucifixion. It is God's will to complete the salvation of the world, which began with the election of Israel, through those selfsame Jews (Rom. 9-11). ..The church has received from its Lord the commission to call the Jews to repentance and to baptize those who believe in Jesus Christ to the forgiveness of sins (Matt.10:5f.; Acts 2:38ff., 3:19-26).[94]

The exclusivity of the Christian doctrine of salvation necessarily maintains the image of the Jew as the eternal "other." The characteristics attributed to this other have ranged from confusion and ignorance to demonic malevolence. Bonhoeffer's view is one interpretation of scriptures, acceptable to many Christians because it preserves the core of theological identity, the "New Covenant" in which Christians become God's elect. At the same time, it also allows for the continued existence of the Jewish people, with whom Christians share a common biblical heritage. It is not the only interpretation, however. Another maintains that Jews have been witness to the Christian messiah and have rejected him, therefore rejecting God. To those who retain this view, the rejection of God and alignment with evil are synonymous.

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[93] Novick, 276.

[94] Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wilhelm Vischer, "The Bethel Confession," *A Testament to Freedom*, eds. Geffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995) 136.

Daniel Goldhagen claims that the latter view evinced such a potent hatred of Jews in the Christian population of Germany that it led to a widespread fever of "eliminationist antisemitism."[95] It may be more comfortable for Christians to believe Goldhagen's theory than to acknowledge that both views could have played a part in the exploitation of mass insecurity and resentment. A susceptibility to anti-Jewish propaganda did not necessarily require a deep-seated hatred of Jews but perhaps only a suspicion that they were somehow different. In a discussion of the work of three noted scholars of this subject, Christopher Browning writes, "Above all, they accept that the fanatical anti-Semitism of the party 'true believers' was not identical to the anti-Semitic attitudes of the population at large, and that the anti-Semitic priorities and genocidal commitment of the regime were not shared by 'ordinary Germans.'"[96] If these "ordinary Germans" did not, in general, hate Jews in the sense that they desired their physical elimination, then one must ask why they participated in or turned a blind eye to their deportation and murder. It is true that the Jews were made scapegoats for German fears and woes, but was it not also the case that, for some, the "unsaved" were simply not worth saving?

If a Christian were to recognize Judaism as an alternative, equally viable path to salvation, could he then still conceive of himself as a Christian? Herein one finds an irony of looking to the Holocaust for examples of "true Christian" behavior. Though brotherly love may be a key tenet of Christian doctrine, so too is the conviction that salvation can only come through belief in Jesus Christ. Americans look to the actions of Christian rescuers and martyrs to define the righteousness of their faith and yet ignore the complicity of Christian perpetrators that might contradict it. One finds in the New Testament, the sacred text of Christianity, condemnation of the Jews for their unfaithfulness, and the history of Christianity is rife with examples of anti-Jewish persecution. The Holocaust, an event of merely sixty years ago, was the most cataclysmic crime ever committed by Christians against Jews. In light of these facts, do not multiple definitions of the "true Christian" emerge?

It remains to be seen how the American public perception of the Holocaust will shift, if at all, as historians continue to probe such questions. The preservation of the entrenched metanarrative may be too crucial to Christian identity to allow a more critical assessment. What is certain, however, is that as long as the American narrative of the Holocaust is edited, abbreviated, and recast to fit current agendas, it must be consigned to the realm of myth. Perhaps this is inevitable for a memory that has been borrowed from another place and time.

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[95] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Vintage, 1997) 43.

[96] Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004) 388-389.