

The Historical Roots of Antisemitism: Implications for the classroom

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In a seminal essay on teaching methodologies and the Holocaust, historian Henry Friedlander observed that one of the most important reasons we should teach the Holocaust is to “understand the past so that we can explain the present”. Friedlander’s work, one of the most enlightening reflections on the curricular implications of the Holocaust, suggested that the Nazi policy of mass murder provided a meaningful perspective on the nature of human behavior under extreme conditions. Understanding the perpetrators and the intellectual environment which made this genocide possible demanded a certain historical context related to the “causes, limitations and the dynamics of anti-Semitism.”¹

The history of anti-Semitism represents one of the most sensitive and controversial aspects of Holocaust education. Anti-Semitism is defined here as “hostility toward Jews as individuals, toward Judaism as a religion, toward the Jewish people as a group.”² Although not solely responsible for Nazism, Christian anti-Semitism was a critically important long range cause for the Holocaust. Daniel Goldhagen, in his recent book, *Hitler’s Willing executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996) sparked heated debates among historians when he claimed that anti-Semitic hatred, nurtured in the soil of Christianity, was *the* central cause for the Holocaust and that such hatred was deeply imbedded in German culture. Moreover, Goldhagen attacked cherished assumptions regarding traditional German obedience to authority saying that Germans persecuted and murdered Jews out of a power of choice. Like many other institutions under the process of *Gleichschaltung* (coordination of all aspects on institutional life under the state), the churches participated in an already deeply rooted German tendency toward “eliminationist anti-Semitism.”¹ The battle over historical interpretations of the Nazi past continues unabated in Germany and the United States. Goldhagen’s challenging assumptions about the place of anti-Semitism within the larger context of the Third Reich also raises questions about the relative scope of the subject in curriculum formation.

One astute observer of Holocaust curriculum development, the late scholar Lucy Dawidowicz, articulated the highly problematic nature of the subject:

Trying to teach adolescents about the roots of anti-Semitism in Christianity, however, even in the secular schools of a secular state, is like leading a tourist party across crocodile territory. How do teachers who may themselves be believing Christians explain this history to children from believing Christian homes? How will parents react when their children tell them what they learned about Christian

¹ Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Chapel Hill: Knopf, 1996), pp. 383, 484-488. While not discounting the role played by anti-Semitism in the rise of the Nazi state, Christopher Browning, in sharp contrast to Goldhagen, places a much stronger emphasis on the importance of obedience to authority as a critical development leading to the Holocaust. See Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 159-189.

persecution of the Jews? Clearly a desire not to offend is the reason most curricula detour around the subject.²

Amidst this great sensitivity for the subject is the immense difficulty of forming a Holocaust curriculum which does not overlook the facts about Christian anti-Semitism and, at the same time, “preserves the integrity of Christian faith and its doctrines”.³ Just how vast the gap is between this curricular ideal and the reality of most legitimized instructional plans is seen, in part, by a history of omission. Simply avoiding mention of a controversy can be one way of stepping around the inherent sensitivities associated with a topic as explosive as Christian anti-Semitism. The history of omission - leaving out essential elements of the historical context to avoid controversy - brings the inherent risk of sowing illusions and misunderstandings in the minds of the young. Educators and historians may well ask critical questions about any Holocaust curriculum which presents a false historical perspective on the nature of anti-Semitism. Without the proper context, for example, students could develop the impression that Hitler invented anti-Semitism as part of a cultural development consigned exclusively to the twentieth century. At the same time, curriculum writers in Holocaust education face the omnipresent challenge of contextualization in regard to the scope and depth of the Jewish past. Jewish history and culture can not be wholly defined by the Holocaust.

These questions invariably touch on an essential feature of historical empathy while connecting with a deceptively simple, but profound insight at least as old as the printed word. History is first and foremost about people. The liberal arts tradition continues to challenge educators with eternal questions about what it means to be human. How these questions translate in and through the Holocaust, especially in the light of the long-range cause of anti-Semitism, is at the heart of this paper. Although this investigation is not a history in and of itself, certain key elements from the history and literature of anti-Semitism are integrated for the purpose of clarifying the importance of Christian anti-Semitism within the context of long-range causation.

As Dawidowicz intimated earlier, the enterprise is fraught with extreme sensitivities made even more difficult by the history of omission which keeps out of the curriculum issues of a controversial nature. Jean Paul Sartre, the existentialist author of *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946), observed that the prejudice and hatred associated with anti-Semitism holds profound implications for Jew and non-Jew alike. His words came at a time when the images of mass murder and the Holocaust remained fresh so soon after the collapse of the Third Reich:

Anti-Semitism is a problem that affects us all directly; we are all bound to the Jew, because anti-Semitism leads straight to National Socialism. And if we do not respect the person of the Israelite, who will respect us? If we are conscious of these dangers, if we have lived in shame because of our involuntary complicity with the anti-Semites, who have made hangmen of us all, perhaps we shall begin to understand that we must fight for the Jew, no more and no less than for ourselves (p. 151).

Coming to terms with the complex nature of the Holocaust involves an unavoidable struggle over causation, a concept central to the investigation of the past.

² Lucy Dawidowicz, “How They Teach the Holocaust”, *Commentary* 90 (December, 1990): 25-32.

³ Dawidowicz, (1990), p. 28.

The anti-Semitism about which Sartre spoke claims a long and curious history bound up with the dynamics of stereotyping and prejudice.⁴ Moreover, many of the popularized stereotypes about Jews evidenced in the twentieth century are best understood within the larger political, economic and social contexts which spawned them many generations ago. Unfortunately, because religion in history and culture remains largely overlooked in public school curriculum, students who participate in Holocaust studies often approach anti-Semitism and the Holocaust under severely decontextualized conditions.⁵

Such a decontextualization omits a crucial clarification of language and assumptions about sixteen centuries of anti-Semitic hatred of Jews. While there certainly are Christian roots for the Holocaust, one must note that Christianity did not create the Holocaust. Yet, as Dennis Prayer and Joseph Telushkin readily point out, the Holocaust would have been inconceivable without Christian anti-Semitism. A profound difference existed between Nazi and Christian anti-Semitism which demands the close attention of Holocaust educators. First of all, Christian medieval anti-Semitism allowed Jews the choice of conversion or death while advocating the suffering the entire Jewish community and the practice of random killings. By contrast, the Nazis did not allow this kind of choice in the promulgation of its Jewish policy. The Nazi racial state legalized the total annihilation of Jews with the political and technological support of the regime. The sinister nature of Nazism becomes more evident with the realization that the Nazis depended heavily on the values, ideas and policies of Christian anti-Semitism. Significant for this discussion of context is the fact that the Holocaust transpired in a country which held almost equal members of Catholics and Protestants, a quality unique among all of the European powers. Institutionalized mass murder, fueled in part by the fires of anti-Semitism, thus remains the darkest legacy of the Third Reich.⁶

Our purpose in this discussion is not to examine the vast history of anti-Semitism and its effects on the body politic. That work is already the purview of several notable historians in the field.⁷ This essay proposes something much more closely related to the problem of curriculum-making and the Holocaust. Causation, part of the stock and trade of the historian, represents a critical aspect of history education. As alluded to earlier, causation also provides an essential basis for understanding about how the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust came into being. Historical empathy is an

⁴ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Addison-Welsey, 1954), pp. 248, 250-251.

⁵ Karen Shawn, "Current Issues in Holocaust Education", *Dimensions* 9 (1995): 15-18.

⁶ Dennis Praeger and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 96-104. Also see Raul Hilberg's introductory essay, "Precedents" in his *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), pp. 5-24 and Yehuda Bauer, *History of the Holocaust* (Danbury, CN: Franklin Watts, 1982), pp. 3-25.

⁷ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism 1700-1933* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1980); Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* (Urbana, ILL: University of Illinois Press, 1970); George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Leon Poliakov, *A History of Anti-Semitism*, 4 vols. (New York: Vanguard, 1965-1986); Paul Grosser and Edwin Halperin, *Anti-Semitism: The Causes and Effects of a Prejudice*; John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 1983); Leonard Greenspoon and Bryan LeBeau, eds. *Representations of Jews Throughout the Ages* (Omaha, Neb: Creighton University Press, 1996). See a useful collection of documents in Richard Levy, *Anti-Semitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts* (Toronto: D.C. Heath, 1991).

essential link to understanding why human beings and institutions acted within a certain historical context. Decisions by individual citizens or institutions do not exist in a historical vacuum. Political, economic and social factors will come into play in varying degrees. Part of the healthy struggle to create a meaning for the past involves understanding the complex cultural relationships between and among these factors.

Empathy also presupposes a *willingness* to accept ambiguity and the humbling notion that not all questions have definitive answers. Understanding why certain people under the Third Reich chose to become anti-Semitic perpetrators while others became bystanders or rescuers of the victims is but one among many challenging puzzles we have not yet fully grasped. The psychology of human motivation and the power of economic incentives to shape human behavior for good, evil or apathetic political disengagement are also part of the matrix of human empathy and the concept of causation in history education.⁸

The kind of teaching in Holocaust education which honors history as process should enable students to grasp the time-bound nature of causation. Human beings make choices in historical time and the consequences of these choices lie in the future. This observation is further supported by the historian and film-maker Ken Burns who reminds us that we can not really know where we are headed as a society unless we know something about where we came from in time. Just how far educators might be willing to extend this principle in contextualizing anti-Semitism as a principle cause for the Holocaust is reflected in the following brief examination of select curricula.

Curriculum Perspectives

Three widely-known curricula on Holocaust education for secondary schools vary significantly in their contextualization of anti-Semitism as a long-range for the Holocaust. These three curricula are chosen for the investigation precisely because they are exceptions to the general rule of gross distortion or omission which generally characterize the majority of Holocaust curriculum plans.⁹ *Life Unworthy of Life* (1987) from the Center for the Study of the Child in Michigan presented students with a "Brief History of Anti-Semitism". The compact overview reflected a sensitivity to the irrational power of stereotypes in the history of anti-Semitism. The authors were not afraid of articulating the dynamics of the Christian/Jewish relationship since the time of the apostle Paul and how this relationship provided the seedbed for anti-Semitic relationships for generations to come. This student reader was one of the few to inform students about the Jewish roots of the Christian religion. At the same time, the writers were careful not to discuss the controversy regarding what some Christians would later claim was Jewish responsibility over the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. However, another aspect of the blood libel was indeed addressed from the Middle Ages. The invention of a particularly scurrilous myth came into the public mind during twelfth century England in the aftermath of a murdered Christian child. Two church figures insisted that the Jews needed to secure the blood of Christian

⁸ Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon, 1972), pp. 231-264.

⁹ The earlier study by Dawidowicz investigated twenty-five secondary school curricula drawn from thirteen states concluded that only fifteen even suggested that anti-Semitism had a history before Hitler. See Dawidowicz, 1990, p. 26.

children to make unleavened bread.¹⁰ The myth, when placed within the pantheon of other false traditions like the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* from 1905, would have profound consequences for future generations of Jews.¹¹

A no less important contribution by the curriculum writers from the Michigan project came through the delineation of racial, religious and secular anti-Semitism. Unlike most other published curriculum in the field, this piece was careful to denote the crucial development of racial anti-Semitism in the late nineteenth which further legitimized scapegoating and pseudo-scientific theories of racial superiority. The connection is crucial in helping students understand the long view of racial anti-Semitism and its subsequent appeal to Hitler. Therein lies a critical link. The Nazi dictator became the first leader of a modern industrial state to enshrine race as the core of his policy.

By contrast, the authors of *The Holocaust: Prejudice Unleashed* (1994) from Ohio placed a greater stress on religious anti-Semitism stemming in part from what came to be known as “the teaching of contempt” for Jews from the church. The early history of anti-Semitism is highlighted to a stronger degree through brief descriptions of expulsions and massacres in Germany, France, Poland and England. Luther’s anti-Semitism, articulated in his *About the Jews and Their Lies*, receives prominent mention. Luther’s legacy on this question is enshrined with references to his attacks on Jews as killers of Christ, their conspiracy to rule the world and to characterizations of the Children of Israel as brings of misfortune, plague and pestilence.¹²

The role of the Catholic church in this dark history certainly is not forgotten. The Ohio writers offered students a context for understanding the deep roots of anti-Semitism, although the documentary basis for the analysis remained thin at best. The rise of religious fanaticism, the authors noted, manifested itself during the Crusades (1095-1291) contributing to a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism “for both economic and ideological reasons”. Unfortunately for the reader, the authors failed to clarify the nature and influence of these two interrelated factors. Pope Gregory I (540-604) is mentioned because of his opposition to the forceful conversion of Jews. Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) left to history one of the earliest programs forcing non-Christians to wear special badges. Like the Michigan program, the curriculum writers showed how superstition and ignorance provided an impetus for portraying Jews as agents of the devil.

The Ohio program closed the brief readings on the history of anti-Semitism by quoting a pastoral letter by Joseph Cardinal Glemp of Poland (1991). The prelate expressed regret for the legacy of anti-Semitism in Poland saying that it was “contrary to the spirit of the Gospel”. Moreover, a pamphlet published by the Presbyterian Church (USA) on “A Theological Understanding of the Relationship Between Christians and Jews” (1987) used even stronger language condemning the church’s complicity in the “teaching of contempt” which labeled Jews “killers of Christ”. The

¹⁰ Sidney Bolkosky, Betty Ellias and David Harris, *Life Unworthy of Life* (Farmington Hills, MI: Center for the Study of the Child, 1987), pp. 22-25.

¹¹ The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a forgery revealing the profoundly irrational nature of anti-Semitism, promulgated the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy supported by plots to take over governments of Christian countries.

¹² Leatrice Rabinsky and Carol Danks, eds. *The Holocaust: Prejudice Unleashed* (Columbus, OH: Ohio Department of Education, 1994), p. 21.

curriculum writers rightly preserved a most profound statement on long-range causation and anti-Semitism when they quoted the pamphlet's sobering conclusion. The church's teaching of contempt "made possible the monstrous policy of annihilation of Jews in Nazi Germany."¹³ Framing history in this engaging way draws associations between the past and present. Historical empathy brings students into contact with powerful philosophical issues. In this case, the Ohio curriculum courageously challenged young readers to consider an ancient problem on the nature of citizenship and moral responsibility.

The last selection under study, *Teaching About the Holocaust and Genocide: The Human Rights Series* (1985, volume two), is actually part of a series of three teacher guides published by the New York State Education Department. This work represents one of the largest collections of documents on the Holocaust for teachers accompanied by supportive lesson plans.¹⁴ In contrast to the Ohio and Michigan curriculums, the New York collection provides educators with a strong concentration of documentary sources. On the history of anti-Semitism, the authors make the boldest departures from the ahistorical treatment accorded to the subject by a vast majority of curriculums. There is a real sense in this plan of study that history is both controversial and intellectually engaging by its very nature.

In order to provide students with a broad sweep of anti-Semitism in history, the New York volume brings readers into a time line of major Jewish experiences in Europe from the Roman conquest of Palestine in 100 B.C. up to the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1900 and Hitler's rise to power in 1933 (p. 3). No less than twenty pages of key documents and historical readings are supplemented by a map and photographs of former Jewish village life in Poland before the Holocaust. There is an authentic attempt to bring a genuine historical context to the examination of anti-Semitism as an important factor in two thousand years of Jewish culture.

Moreover, at the center of these materials are potentially explosive interpretive questions posed by the curriculum writers for young readers. This articulation of controversial issues within the context of historical anti-Semitism symbolizes one of the greatest contributions from the New York curriculum. Note the language used in the following queries framed in the context of assigned readings (pp. 1-2):

Describe the libel and its source. Predict its impact on European Jewry. Suggest ways that the libel could be logically refuted. (Interpreting Dennis Praeger and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?* 1983).

In referring to the "Christian Roots of anti-Semitism", what connections do the authors make between Nazism and Christianity? Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust? Nazi anti-Semitism and Christian anti-Semitism? (Interpreting Dennis Praeger and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews?* 1983).

¹³ Rabinsky and Danks, (1994), pp. 18-20.

¹⁴ Volume one (1985) from the New York collection introduces students to a rationale for studying the Holocaust and genocide through an examination of the "roots of intolerance and persecution" and "precursors of the Holocaust" along with a case study of the Armenian genocide. The third and last volume (1986) integrates additional case studies on genocide including the forced famine in the Ukraine and the killing fields of Cambodia. See New York State Education Department, *Teaching About the Holocaust and Genocide*, vols. 1-3. (Albany: NYS, 1985-1987). Cited hereafter as NYS.

In referring to the crucifixion of Christ as interpreted by Matthew 27:24-25 (King James version of the *Holy Bible*) define deicide and collective guilt. Tell why Matthew's account of the crucifixion might encourage anti-Semitism.

Vatican II's Declaration on the Church's Relations with the Jews (1965): How does this statement deal with the charge of deicide and collective guilt? Why might the church be opposed to actions and statements against the Jewish people?

Anti-Semitism in Literature: What seems to be the source of anti-Semitism in these selections? How are the Jews portrayed? Why do you think Jews were portrayed in this way? Who was Shylock? What does the word shylock mean? (Interpreting Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, *The Histories* by Tacitus and Karl Marx's *The Anquish of the Jews*).

What is more dangerous: racial anti-Semitism or anti-Semitic components of Christian theology? (Interpreting Gordon Allport, "The Jew as Scapegoat" from *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954).

In referenc to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, why were so many people willing to believe in the alleged call for Jewish world domination? What was Henry Ford's involvement in the "hoax of the century?" How could the *Protocols* be used to teach and reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes?¹⁵

The New York curriculum unflinchingly articulated some of the most controversial issues growing out of the history of anti-Semitism. A more careful reading revealed the same problem of contextualization which challenged the authors of the three curriculums cited in this study. Once again, we are speaking about three curriculums which represented a notable exception to the general rule of omitting any real discussion of historical anti-Semitism from the pre-Nazi time frame. The broad scope of the New York curriculum on anti-Semitism, while a strength in one respect, became the cause for either decontextualizing or omitting two important aspects of historical anti-Semitism. One factor centered on a need to further contextualize Luther's anti-Semitism while the other concerned the lack of attention to the powerful economic influences shaping early anti-Semitic prejudice.

The Power of Context and Economics: Luther, Historical Anti-Semitism and the Emerging Market Economy

One of the bold features of the New York curriculum was the integration of documents from the history of anti-Semitism. Not the least controversial of these documents was Martin Luther's *Von den Juden und ihre Lügen* (On the Jews and Their Lies) published in 1542. In what one prominent historian called one of Luther's "ugliest discourses", the church reformer attacked Jews as "bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom" as well as a "plague, pestilence and misfortune in our

¹⁵ Henry Ford's virulent anti-Semitism appeared in a series of editorials published by the industrialist in the *Dearborn Independent* (1920-1922). The editorial series was reprinted in four volumes under a common theme that Jews were a serious threat to American culture. Years before coming to power, Hitler ordered the translation of the works into German for subsequent distribution by the Nazi Party. See Henry Ford, *Der Internationale Jude* (Leipzig: Hammer, 1922) and *Der Internationale Jude: Ein Weltproblem* (Leipzig: Hammer, 1921). From the collection of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, document N84. See also Leo Ribuffo, "Henry Ford and the International Jew", *American Jewish History* 69 (June, 1980): 437-477.

country". Added to this vitriolic diatribe was the image of the Jew as an agent of Satan, the poisoner of wells, and the bloodthirsty murderer of Christian children, all powerful links to stereotypes later exploited by Nazi propagandists.¹⁶

The pioneering New York curriculum, and more indirectly the Ohio and Michigan curriculums, raised an unavoidable question which continues to vex Holocaust educators. How far does one proceed in order to properly contextualize an historic document or event? In the case of Luther, the New York writers offered the beginnings of a solid context for young readers by informing them that his "ideas were shared by others in this century and that the mode of his expression was the sign of his times". Moreover, "the writing of such a man is not to be forgotten in the unearthing of so crucial a conceptualization as this."¹⁷ Establishing this kind of framework helps students and teachers better understand Luther within the spirit of his times, another feature of historical empathy.

Sometimes, what is left out of the legitimized curriculum becomes more significant than that which appears on the printed page. *Life Unworthy of Life*, the curriculum from Michigan, completely overlooked Luther's role in the history of anti-Semitism, although this same program does take special pains to articulate the blood libel and the evolution of anti-Semitic stereotypes in Christendom.¹⁸ Luther's place in the history of anti-Semitism does receive a brief hearing in Ohio's *Holocaust: Prejudice Unleashed*, but without much context. The authors, to their great credit, refer to the articulation of ancient anti-Semitic stereotypes in Luther's *About the Jews and Their Lies* while linking this development to the teaching of contempt for the Jews.¹⁹ The omission of Luther's anti-Semitism from the Michigan curriculum reflected the vast majority of Holocaust curriculums in the United States. Is this curricular issue indeed too sensitive to even mention much less contextualize for the greater historical understanding of students, many of whom are Christians? Could there be in this great sensitivity similar reasons why curriculums outside the New York example omit Henry Ford from this discussion?²⁰

A sounder contextualization of Luther's anti-Semitism necessarily takes the reader beyond the curriculums under consideration in this study. Steven Katz challenges Holocaust educators to consider the nature of Luther's intentions when reading his *About the Jews and Their Lies*. From this standpoint, high school students could gain

¹⁶ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1, 1994, p. 391; New York Department of Education, *Teaching About Holocaust and Genocide*, vol. 2, 1985, pp. 14-15. For a more complete translation of Luther's *Von den Jüden*, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: New View Points, 1973), pp. 8-9.

¹⁷ NYS, II, (1985), p. 14.

¹⁸ Bolkosky, et al. *Life Unworthy of Life* (1987), pp. 22-25.

¹⁹ Rabinsky and Danks, *The Holocaust: Prejudice Unleashed* (1994), chapter 2, "Foundations of the Holocaust", p. 21.

²⁰ The author vividly recalls a memory stemming from a research project he initiated as a shy seventeen-year-old high school student in Wisconsin during the late 1960's. His paternal grandfather, a man who carried on the family tradition in running the Ford dealership founded in 1916, held great respect for the ingenuity and industriousness of Henry Ford. To his great chagrin, grandfather Wegner discovered that his eldest grandson had completed a research project on the anti-Semitism of Henry Ford as part of his studies in an American History class. Ford's anti-Semitic editorials in the *Dearborn Independent* (1920-1922) provided the documentary material for this initial foray into research. Perhaps without knowing it, the grandfather's stern reprimand over the dinner table for uncovering a dark corner of the Ford experience sparked an even greater intellectual curiosity in his grandson for historical controversy.

a real sense for just how controversial historical interpretations are in establishing a meaning for the past. This again is central to the development of historical empathy. Human beings disagree on many issues, an aspect of culture that is magnified when people debate the meaning of history. From the perspective of Katz, for example, readers are challenged to think about Luther's intentions. Luther, he wrote, "was a great hater, an ecumenical hater, and Jews held a prominent place on his hate list". The historian reminded his readers that Luther was one among several prominent church leaders who hated Judaism and the Jewish people. There is nothing original in this anti-Semitism of Luther. What remains crucial is Luther's orthodox intent to annihilate the Jewish religion, but not to murder the Jews. In contrast to Hitler, Luther did not articulate anti-Semitism in racial terms. One notes, despite the punitive tone of his writings, that Luther remained deadly serious about converting Jews to Christianity. A Jewish rejection of Christianity meant banishment of the Jews to Luther, not murder. Luther's thinking remained

Radically different from the absolute assault against Jews represented by racial anti-Semitism. The latter demands the complete biological extirpation of every Jew. The adversary is not Judaism, but Jewish genes. Nazism inverts the crucial diagnosis: the carrier of pollution is not ideology, religious dogmatics, discrete beliefs in and about God, it is, instead, the carnal being of the Jew, his or her very physical presence, that incorporates the ontological and normative antitheses of history and metahistory.²¹

The differentiation between the religious anti-Semitism of Luther's time and the profoundly racist and biological emphases of Nazi anti-Semitism provides an essential context for studying the dynamics of one of the oldest forms of prejudice. Unfortunately, the critical distinction is lost in many Holocaust curricula. In addition, the formation of this context explains, in part, the subsequent success enjoyed by the Nazis propaganda program in exploiting age-old stereotypes about Jews. Nazi anti-Semitism, although decidedly different in form and intent from medieval hatred of Jews, can not be fully understood without connections with the distant past. At the same time, students can then come to a better understanding of Nazi language and its avowed purpose of masking the truth about the total annihilation of Nazi victims. The Nazi abuse of language in using no less than twenty-five words to obscure the essential meaning of mass murder remained a hallmark of the regime. The well-established anti-Semitic culture in Europe helped make this covert and bureaucratic defamation of language possible.²² We may well challenge students to think about how this legacy of double-speak continues today through relationships between the individual, the state and the economy.

The call for a greater and more thoughtful contextualization of anti-Semitism does not stop with the legacy of Luther. The perspective accorded by economic history

²¹ Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1, 1994, p. 393-394. See also Richard Rubenstein's claim that Luther's thinking was "religiously legitimized incitement to homicidal violence", an assumption called into question by Katz who insisted that never once did Luther call for the murder of Jews. See Rubenstein, "Luther and the Roots of the Holocaust", in *Persistent Prejudice: Perspectives on Anti-Semitism*, edited by Herbert Hirsch and Jack Spiro, (Fairfax, VA: 1988), pp. 31-42 and Katz, pp. 391-392.

²² Harry Fuhrman, ed. *Holocaust and Genocide: A Search for Conscience* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1983), pp. 109-119. See also George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

offers a disturbing insight linking the crucial role played by the emerging market economy to the development of anti-Semitism. This aspect of historical anti-Semitism, even more than the legacy of Luther in this story, remains largely ignored in Holocaust curricula. During medieval times, Jews were not allowed to own land, belong to guilds or to practice certain trades. One of the few economic activities allowed Jews was the lending of money which filled a critical need in support of the emerging market economy. The image of usury, the charging of exorbitant interest for loans, developed into the most potent of all anti-Semitic stereotypes, according to Princeton historian William Jordan.²³

From this medieval economic relationship between Christians and Jews grew a host of related stereotypes portraying Jews as controllers of the banking community motivated by the singular love of money. The implication was that usurers did not earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, but off the economic misfortunes of others.²⁴ There remains a remarkable continuity between the anti-Semitic image of the usurer from the medieval marketplace and the Nazi articulation of Jews in race biology. One prominent race biology curriculum for elementary schools under the Third Reich included teaching charts, one of which portrayed the Jew as a well-dressed banker with a collection of stock certificates in one hand and money bags in another. The author informed the young charges that "the German works while the Jew rests".²⁵

This critical economic development, like the anti-Semitism of Martin Luther, helped to define the relationship between Christians and Jews for centuries. Yet, without appropriate context, students are likely to develop a very ahistorical perception of anti-Semitism as causal agent for the Holocaust. Luther's diatribes against the Jews are but one of many essential features in the dialogue. The Catholic tradition also comes under a painful scrutiny in this regard. Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade in 1095 with the pronouncement that Jews were infidels meriting "extermination from the nations" or the option of adopting the Catholic faith.²⁶ The mass murder of Jews and Muslims by the Crusaders in Jerusalem in 1099 grew out of this religious fanaticism and, like the incendiary rhetoric of Pope Urban II which legitimized the bloodbath, remain part of the history of omission in history textbooks. Would text writers and curriculum makers today accept Edwin Fenton's bold departure some twenty-five years ago with his inquiry-based study of medieval economy? Fenton saw fit to print part of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* which condemned the sinfulness of usury since the practice did not fulfill a life need. More seriously, Aquinas insisted that charging interest for money lent encouraged payment "to satisfy greed" and was intrinsically unjust.²⁷ Jews would pay a price for this moral

²³ William Jordan, *The Middle Ages* (New York: Scribners, 1996), pp. 151-152.

²⁴ Note the character of Shylock in Shakespeare's play, "Merchant of Venice" reflecting the influence of economic relationships and usury in defining potent anti-Semitic stereotypes.

²⁵ Gregory Wegner, "Schooling For a New Mythos: Race, Anti-Semitism and the Curriculum Materials of a Nazi Race Educator", *Paedagogica Historica* 27 (June, 1991): 189-213.

²⁶ Transcript from Public Broadcasting System, "The Longest Hatred", television broadcast from April, 18, 1995.

²⁷ Edwin Fenton, ed. *The Shaping of Western Society* (New York: Holt Rinhart, 1974), pp. 42-48. By 1270, four years before the death of Aquinas, lending money at interest had remained a peculiarly Jewish activity for two centuries. A prominent medieval scholar contended that Aquinas' writings revealed latent contradictions in the Church's teachings on the Jews. Medieval Christians believed that Jews would eventually be saved by Christ. At the same time, many perceived Jews as "dangerous

teaching of the church, a development usually forgotten in what now passes as Holocaust curriculum in most parts of the country.

At the time of this writing, the Vatican announced the long awaited landmark document on the Holocaust called, "We Remember: A Reflection of the Shoah". The essay, eleven years in the making, holds profound implications for the creation of authentic curriculum in relation to the history of anti-Semitism and its place in Holocaust education. The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews called for repentance or *teshuva* in the Catholic church "to express her sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age" including those Christians whose "anti-Jewish prejudices" made them "less sensitive or even indifferent" to the Nazi persecutions of Jews following Hitler's assumption of power.²⁸

The Vatican document, although the subject of mixed reviews from Jews and Christians alike, still represents the most far reaching discussion in the higher levels of Catholic church leadership over the Christian legacy from the Third Reich. At the center of these reflections is the critical importance of continued scholarly study in history, the social sciences and theology regarding the scope and nature of the Shoah. The authors were most insistent that this kind of scholarship take into account "religious and moral memory" among Christians regarding the causes of the Shoah and the role played by anti-Semitism. "We remember: A Reflection of the Shoah" represents a watershed in the history of anti-Semitism and church relations. Just how far educators are willing to integrate its sobering revelations into a serious consideration of the historical roots of anti-Semitism remains to be seen. The potential for opening a meaningful dialogue among students on this critical historical development begs for its inclusion.²⁹

Conclusion

The struggle over the meaning of the past is part of what it means to be human. The development of historical empathy demands careful attention to historical context. Human events do not take place within a vacuum. The Holocaust, like many other historical developments, must be understood within context if there is any real promise of grasping the causal question of why in response to one of the darkest pages

infidels" as well as rejected and punished by God. Aquinas encountered this contradiction by attempting to explain how it was possible for Jews to be both chosen and rejected, ignorant and malicious Christ-killers, damned and destined for salvation. By the late thirteenth century, leading political figures in Christian Europe "accepted the stereotypes theologians like Aquinas had helped developed and perpetuate --- the image of Jews as dangerous infidels, as userers, as Christ-killers --- and acted on them by seeking to remove the Jews from their midst. In the face of such pressures, the more tolerant tradition that Thomas Aquinas represented was simply irrelevant". See John Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 75-111.

²⁸ The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah", *New York Times*, March 16, 1998. The term "Shoah" from the Hebrew means annihilation and is used here instead of "Holocaust", a word originating in the Greek. Holocaust, meaning "burnt offering" in the Old Testament and Jewish religious tradition, is thus seen by some historians and theologians as inappropriate when used in association with the Nazi policy of mass murder leveled against the Jews. This position is advanced since the Final Solution did not grow out of religious intentions.

²⁹ The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *New York Times*, March 16, 1998. For informative commentaries on the Vatican document, note the dialogue between the Rev. Bernhard McGarty and Rabbi Simcha Prombaum in the Catholic publication, *Times Review*, April 2, 1998, p. 8.

in modern history. Inevitably, this ideal holds an inherent risk when anti-Semitism as causal agent for the Holocaust is taken seriously. The Christian churches are central to this tragic story. Western society as a whole still has not come to terms with this legacy perhaps because it remains so explosive in nature. The three curriculums under examination in this study remain exceptional in varying degrees precisely because they brought students into a closer contact with this controversy.

Even with this plaudit, two essential contextual elements from the history of anti-Semitism still demand greater attention by curriculum writers. The Nazi conception of race in defining the relationship between the citizen and the state redefined the nature of anti-Semitism. The transition from religious to racial anti-Semitism remains critical in properly contextualizing the nature of Luther's anti-Semitism as well as the brutalizing practices of the Church during the First Crusades, among other events. Racial anti-Semitism under the Third Reich became even more vitriolic when stirred by hatred engendered by stereotypes originating from the Jew, money lending and the emerging market economy of the Middle Ages. Although these are not the only important elements in teaching about the history of anti-Semitism, they do represent critical parts of the whole.

The admittedly narrow focus of this study could itself be open to criticisms relating to context. Another part of the context necessary in studying the history of anti-Semitism relates to the lone voices in the churches who stood in opposition to Nazism. They too, among others, should be remembered so that students know something of the civil courage which marked their brave actions against the Nazi dictatorship. Among these luminaries are the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the author of the *Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters from Prison* as well as Franciscan friar Maximilian Kolby who gave his life for another prisoner in Auschwitz. Furthermore, there remain the obscure individuals, the priests, nuns and ministers who risked and sometimes lost their lives by hiding Jewish families. Among these notable and largely forgotten figures are Father Bruno, a Belgian from the Benedictine Order who rescued over 300 Jews. Protestant pastors André Trocmé and Edouard Theis in France worked with local villagers to shelter several thousand Jews in and around Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. In January of 1944, the Gestapo arrested Carmelite Friar Jacques de Jésus for providing four Jewish boys refuge in a school in Avon, France.³⁰ Their deeds are not in any way offered as a way to soften the evil symbolized by the concentration camps and the anti-Semitism which legitimized these dark institutions of death. They are mentioned here to remind us that there were human beings, albeit small in number, who courageously said no to the state.

There is yet another development which demands closer scrutiny beyond the scope of this paper. How can students of the Holocaust learn about the history of anti-Semitism without grasping the nature and process of stereotyping? The British scholar Geoffrey Short offers a meaningful insight into a notable departure in Holocaust studies. Short calls for a more ethical approach toward the study of anti-Semitism by

³⁰ A temporary exhibition in memory of Father Jacques was presented by the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum for six months ending in October of 1997. The former headmaster, imprisoned in several Nazi camps, died from tuberculosis several weeks after American troops liberated Mathausen. In 1985, the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Center at Yad Vashem posthumously honored Father Jacques as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations". Two years later, French filmmaker Louis Malle paid tribute to his former headmaster in the film, "Au Revoir les Enfants". The on-line version of the exhibition is available at <<http://www.ushmm.org>>

developing curricula which take into account “the way children conceptualize Jewish culture and identity”.³¹ In this way, the context of the past would be linked to the present by considering how the students themselves articulate and understand their images of Jews.

Summary

How the eternal questions about ‘what it means to be human’ translate in and through the Holocaust, especially in the light of the long-range cause of anti-Semitism? The kind of teaching history in Holocaust education which honors history as process should enable students to grasp the time-bound nature of causation.

G. Wegner examines different curricula on Holocaust education for secondary schools. They vary significantly in their contextualization of anti-Semitism as a long-range cause for the Holocaust.

Key-words: anti-Semitism, Holocaust education, contextualization, history curriculum.

³¹ Geoffrey Short, “Teaching about the Holocaust: A Consideration of Some Ethical and Pedagogic Issues”, *Educational Studies* 20 (1994): 53-67.