

Catholic church's responses to nazi antisemitism

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Antisemitism refers to hatred or prejudice towards the Jews. The Nazi antisemitism started in 1933 and ended in 1945 marking a period of persecution and murder of Jews in Europe by the Nazis in Germany under Hitler's ruling regime (Poliakov, 8). Background information. Hatred against the Jews was prevalent in the modern era especially in the 19th and 20th century. This led to the origin of the word antisemitism which refers to the pogroms, violence and riots propelled by governments against the Jews (Falk, 10).

Pogroms and violence against the Jews were initially instigated by false beliefs that the Jews were using blood from Christian children for their religious rituals. In the 19th century, the prejudice against the Jews intensified with the formation of antisemitic political parties in Germany, Austria and France. This marked the beginning of an international conspiracy against the Jews with the component of nationalism which treated Jews as disloyal and illegal citizens.

In the late 19th century, a political party named as Voelkisch movement which comprised mainly of German philosophers promoted the notion that Jews were not a part of the Germandom. Eugenic theories based on racial anthropology helped to support this notion and from this pseudoscientific ideas, the Nazi party was founded in 1919. The Nazi party which was headed by Adolf Hitler helped to promote theories of racism and hatred towards the Jews which called for their removal out of Germany. In 1933, the Nazi party was elected to power and it immediately ordered for economic boycotts against the Jews with the introduction of anti-Jewish laws.

In the beginning of 1935, the anti-Jewish laws called for a total separation between the Jews and the rest of the citizens thereby legalizing a hierarchy based purely on racism. In November 1938, antisemitic groups embarked on a mission to destroyed synagogues and business establishments owned by the Jews in Germany and Austria in what is now known as the Kristallnacht. This marked the beginning of an era of destruction and mass killing for the Jews. This period is known as Nazi antisemitism and it led to a holocaust which killed millions of Jews and destroyed many more (Learner, 128-134).

The catholic church has in the past faced many rows over claims that it supported Hitler and the Nazis in the racial discrimination against the Jews (Doyle, 120). However, the Roman catholic has strongly denied these claims and in fact, it highly opposed such acts of hatred against the Jews. Though the church has admitted of having failed to do its best to end the war, it has evidently affirmed its opposing stand against Hitler's regime and acts of antisemitism. This paper seeks to establish the response of the catholic church towards the Nazi antisemitism. Biblical views on antisemitism.

The bible and particularly the New Testament has been singled out as having strong hostility and antagonism towards the Jews. The Gospel of John has many antisemitic phrases and episodes which refer to the Jews in a derogatory way. In John 8: 37-40 is one such phrase where Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees of how the Jews were planning to persecute Him since they did not believe in what He spoke to them about God. The book of 1 Thessalonian 2: 13-15 speaks of how Churches in Judea were suffering

under the hands of those people people who persecuted Jesus. It also talks about how such acts by the Jews were displeasing to God and Christians.

The New Testament also adds that while on trial, a Jewish guard struck Jesus on the face for uttering ill words against the Jewish high priest (John 18: 20). Moreover, the death of Jesus preceded by brutal mockery (Matt 27: 24-39) has been entirely blamed on the Jews who mocked and persecuted Him in life and on the cross. Some theology scholars have speculated that the unnamed people who mocked Jesus while on the cross were actually Jews and they have added that though Romans were the lead executors of the prosecution and crucifixion of Jesus, the Jews also played a great role in the events which led to His death.

The chronological events which led to the death of Jesus as stated in the New Testament led to the anti-Judaism perception held by most Christians. After the death of Jesus, the New Testament indicates that the Jewish leaders living in Jerusalem became hostile towards the followers of Jesus forcing them to stop preaching the gospel or die. Stephen who was one of the Jesus disciples was stoned to death by the Jews for going against the Jewish laws and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 7: 51-58 just before his persecution, Stephen spoke to the Jews in an antisemitic way referring to them as " stiff necked, uncircumcised and opposers of the Holy Spirit. " All these instances show how the New Testament which was primarily written by the Jews who became Jesus followers contains many antisemitic passages which led to an anti-Judaism perception in the early Christian churches. The Roman Catholic Church which is one of the

early churches had also had the anti-Judaism belief which has led to its association with antisemitic acts in the Nazi antisemitism.

Catholic church and Nazi antisemitism. Throughout the 19th and the 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church still held on strongly to many antisemitic beliefs and the notion that the Jews led to the death of Jesus as indicated in the New Testament despite efforts to distinguish between anti-Judaism and racially instigated antisemitism. However in the early 20th century, the Catholic church made a clear distinction between good and bad antisemitism to all its followers. According to Kertzer (pp. 2-25), the bad type of antisemitism was unchristian as it advocated for hatred and racial bias against the Jews due to their background while the good type of antisemitism only served to criticize the Jewish conspiracies which sought to control all sectors of the economy in Germany for selfish wealth accumulation. At this time, many catholic bishops wrote articles criticizing such acts but when accused of being antisemitic, the bishops argued that they were strongly against any acts of hatred or destruction plotted against the Jews. The church's response to Nazi antisemitism.

Catholic church and the Christian community as a whole strongly despised the Nazi antisemitism. Kain in his popular book entitled *Europe: Versailles to War-saw* explains that the Nazis acts towards the Jews greatly offended Christians and led to protests by German army chaplains to Hitler in 1937 warning him of a future war in Germany due to his ungodly acts. The opposition by the catholic church response towards the Nazi antisemitism was quite straight-forward and emphatic. Catholic clergy was one of the first

people who stood firmly to declare opposition towards the Nazis despite threats of persecution.

Several Christians also stood firmly to oppose the Nazi antisemitism. For instance, Stauffenberg who was a devout catholic plotted Hitler's assassination in 1944 to depict his strong faith and opposition against the Jews' persecutions and killings. Stauffenberg was later killed by the Nazis after the attempts to assassinate Hitler failed. The catholic church believes on the Christian view of man made in the image and likeness of God and for this reason, every human being deserves enormous dignity regardless of race, state or background.

According to Macrobio a professor at the Regina Pontifical University, Pope Pius XIII who was the leader of the Roman Catholic Church during the period of Nazi antisemitism was strongly opposed to the antisemitism and eugenic theories imposed against the Jews. A decree released by the Holy office in December 1940 by the Pope clearly condemned the killings and the racial laws put forward by Hitler and the Nazi party against the Jews. The decree stated that such killings were wrong and ungodly since they went against the natural law and all the divine precepts as defined by the Holy Bible.

Throughout the war, Pius XII kept on pleading privately for a stop on the continued killings on behalf of the Jews and even after the war, he still condemned the Nazi antisemitism. In 1946 when speaking to a group of delegates in Palestine, the Pope affirmed the Church's stand on its opposition towards the persecutions carried out by Hitler and the Nazis against the Jews with no apologies. Why the church opposed Nazi antisemitism and eugenic

theories. Eugenic theories are aimed at imposing discrimination to a certain group of people.

For the catholic church, all men are equal in the eyes of God since humanity is not defined by neither external capabilities such as beauty nor internal characteristics such as knowledge. Every one be it a saint or a sinner is believed to be a son of God and only the father can judge whom to punish for their sins and whom to bless. Due to this fact, its wrong for the church to support the eugenic theories and antisemitic acts which seem to favor some individuals or racial groups over others.

The catholic church further believes that discrimination of any kind is ungodly and unlawful regardless of whether it occurs in form of verbal racism or holocaust as in the case of the Nazi antisemitism as long as it threatens man's dignity and the church has an ultimateresponsibilityto oppose it by all means. Conclusion. The Pope's reactions towards the holocaust were quite complex but one clear indication is that the catholic church was against these antisemitism acts and it strongly condemned them (Schoenberg, 2).

At times the Pope acted privately with attempts to help the Jews in their escapes out of Germany and he succeeded but on most occasions, the church just chose to remain quiet on issues surrounding the war with the aim of appealing neutral. The reason which might have led to continued silence by the Pope and the catholic church during the holocaust has been attributed to fear of Nazi reprisals, the notion that public speech would have had no significant effect on the war or the feeling that such speeches were likely to harm the Jews more.

However, sources have shown that though the church did not directly support Nazi antisemitism, catholic anti-Judaism played a great role in fostering this hatred against the Jews. The false assumptions that most of the Nazis who participated in the killings and destruction of the Jews were Christians are unfounded and have no empirical evidence to support them. In conclusion, it can be said that the catholic church was strongly against the Nazi antisemitism but just like all other positions of power, there is still more that the church could have done to stop this war against the Jews.