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### **DERNIÈRE PHASE**

## **Pope John Paul II and the Jews: An Evaluation**

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Many Jews admired the late Pope John Paul II but paid little attention to the content of his message. A deeper analysis of his statements offers a better understanding. In his encyclical "Dominum et Vivificantem" of 1986, he seemed to revive the accusation of deicide. Visiting Auschwitz in 1979, he called it "the Golgotha of the modern world" and spoke of "six million Poles who lost their lives during the war." He beatified and later canonized Edith Stein, killed at Auschwitz for being Jewish, claiming she was at the same time a "daughter of the Jewish people" and a "believing Christian." Seemingly he aimed to "Christianize" the Shoah. Following the Rabin-Arafat meeting at the White House in 1993, John Paul II accepted normal diplomatic relations with Israel but maintained a fairly hostile political stance. Many of his statements on Jews were ambiguous at best.

Millions of people around the world watched the funeral of John Paul II. The event had been planned meticulously and the television cameras were positioned to create the grandest of effects. Before his death on 2 April 2005, the Pope had fostered a television image that had more effect on people than his words. Yet he went on making speeches, addresses, and homilies. Far from being a futile effort, the Pontiff's message was aimed at two different publics: the clergy, or the inner circle of the Church who had to be indoctrinated with solid arguments, and the outer circle of the masses. For the young people who came to San Pietro as to a Catholic Woodstock, the friendly gestures, the smile, the television images of the good father were convincing and quite sufficient.

John Paul II understood that in this era television is the most important medium. As Alain Finkielkraut noted: "They loved his image, not his message. The media favors the immediate [event] at the expense of mediations. They were glad of the charismatic presence of John Paul II, without paying attention to what he had to say."<sup>2</sup>

This was true for his believers and also, not surprisingly, for many Jews. One hundred thirty Jewish leaders, rabbis, and cantors came to meet the Pope on 18 January 2005.<sup>e</sup> One of their spokesmen, Rabbi Jacques Bemporad, said: "Pope John Paul II is indeed the Pope of the Jews. He opened his arms to embrace the Jewish people. Pope John Paul II took dramatic steps to improve the Church's relationship with the Jewish people based on mutual respect and genuine affection. He was the first pope to visit the Great Synagogue in Rome. He issued the historic 'We Remember' statement on the Holocaust."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the judgment of some Jews was often superficial and disregarded the Pope's own declarations. The Pope was himself part and parcel of the deep inner contradiction of Christianity, which, while wishing to inherit the legitimacy of Judaism, claims at the same time to be the "new Israel." He also shared the

ambiguity of the Church's language, many of the words it uses having a different meaning than the conventional one. For instance, the word reconciliation can mean the coming together of opposite stances but can also mean the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, as in St. Paul: "For to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."<sup>5</sup>

This is only an example of why the texts issued by the Church and its leader must be carefully scrutinized and not accepted at face value. Many of John Paul II's statements require different interpretations than those commonly accepted at the time they were presented.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Accusation of Deicide**

The Catholic Church's new approach to teaching about the Jews started with Pope John XXIII, who initiated the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). During this Council, the declaration *Nostra Aetate* was approved in 1965 under Pope Paul VI. The main issue was the deicide, about which the document stated: "True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today." Moreover, the Church "deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source."<sup>7</sup>

This marks the only theological revolution that has ever occurred in the Catholic Church since its very beginning, when the deicide accusation was first formulated. However, it does not fully acquit the Jews; it only limits the charge to those Jews who "pressed for the death of Christ."

To explain and implement *Nostra Aetate* in subsequent years, two related documents were promulgated by the Holy See Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: the Guidelines of 1 December 1974 and the Notes of 24 June 1985.<sup>8</sup> The Guidelines "condemn (as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity) all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination, which in any case the dignity of the human person alone would suffice to condemn." The Notes affirm for the first time: "The existence of the State of Israel and its political options, should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law." This would enable some years later the recognition of the state of Israel by the Holy See.

For his part, Pope John Paul II seemingly went back to the Church's traditional attitude in his encyclical of 18 May 1986, "Dominum et Vivificantem."<sup>9</sup> In it he wrote:

When, therefore, during the Pentecost event, Peter speaks of the sin of those who "have not believed" and have sent Jesus of Nazareth to an ignominious death, he bears witness to victory over sin: a victory achieved, in a certain sense, through the greatest sin that man could commit: the killing of Jesus, the Son of God, consubstantial with the Father! Similarly, the death of the Son of God conquers human death: "I will be your death, O death," as the sin of having crucified the Son of God "conquers" human sin! That sin which was committed in Jerusalem on Good Friday - and also every human sin.<sup>10</sup>

In this encyclical, John Paul II also quotes Peter in the New Testament: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."<sup>11</sup> It appears that John Paul II sought to return to the traditional accusation of murder against the Jews, asserting: "If Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next, it is because this 'non-forgiveness' is linked, as to its cause, to 'non-repentance,' in other words to the radical refusal to be converted."<sup>12</sup> Does this mean that the sin of being a Jew "cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next"?

It should be noted that in 1998, the Pope seemed to express a contrary attitude when he said about Jesus' condemnation to death:

Crucify him! The cry is redoubled by the blind passion of the crowd/ Strange liturgy of death/ it echoes throughout history....

So many children denied, prostituted, mutilated. Oh no, not the Jewish people, crucified by us for so long, not the crowd which will always prefer Barabbas because he repays evil with evil, not them, but all of us, each one of us, because we are all murderers of love.<sup>13</sup>

## The Shoah: Maximilien Kolbe

From the very beginning of his ecclesiastical career, Karol Wojtyła, then Archbishop of Cracow and in whose dioceses lay the remains of the Auschwitz death camp, showed great interest in this site. In 1971 as Archbishop, he brought about the beatification of Father Maximilien Kolbe, the priest who was killed in Auschwitz. In a speech to the Vatican radio on 20 October 1971, Wojtyła declared:

It is for this reason [the sacrifice of martyrs] that the Church of Poland since the end of World War II sees the necessity of such a place of sacrifice, of an altar and a sanctuary, precisely in Auschwitz. The beatification of Father Maximilien makes it even more necessary. We are all convinced that in this place of his heroic immolation, a place that will always remain linked to the memory of this sacrifice, a church should arise, as from the first century of Christianity churches were built on the tombs of martyrs, of blessed [persons] and of saints.

Wojtyła had already decided on the erection of a church at the site of Auschwitz, and he linked it first to Maximilien Kolbe's sacrifice and later to that of Edith Stein, the Jewish convert to Catholicism who was also killed there. In the same speech, Wojtyła said: "Thus, like the Polish church, the churches of all the European countries, whose sons and daughters have equally known the Golgotha of the Auschwitz camp, where millions of people lost their lives in a gigantic sacrifice, confronted the same problem."<sup>14</sup>

In Wojtyła's first visit to Auschwitz as Pope on 7 June 1979, he gave an important speech officially titled "The Homily of Brzezinka."<sup>15</sup> He again referred to Father Maximilien and to Edith Stein "from a Jewish family living in Wrocław," and said: "I come and I kneel on this Golgotha of the contemporary world."

Regarding this association of Auschwitz and Golgotha, Pier Francesco Fumagalli, a Catholic priest dealing with dialogue with the Jews, suggested the Pope was referring to the Polish Christians such as Father Kolbe who were killed there.<sup>16</sup> Fumagalli also quoted what the Pope said to Jewish leaders in Warsaw at a meeting on 14 June 1987: "This is your mission in the contemporary world before the peoples, the nations, all of humanity, the Church. And in this Church all peoples and nations feel united with you in this mission. Certainly they give great prominence to your nation and its sufferings, its Holocaust, when they wish to speak a warning to individuals and to nations; in your name, the Pope, too, lifts up his voice in this warning."<sup>17</sup>

However, a different interpretation is possible. A parallel may be drawn between Auschwitz and the Jerusalem Golgotha, where a Jew was crucified to give birth to a new religion, Christianity; thus the killing of so many Jews in Auschwitz was in effect a strengthening of Christianity. This author sought an authorized interpretation of this comparison with Golgotha from Cardinal Franciszek Macharski on a visit to his office, the Curia Metropolitana<sup>18</sup> of Cracow in 1987. He declined to give an explanation and instead turned the conversation to other subjects.

In his entire speech in June 1979, the Pope did not mention Auschwitz by its well-known German name, but called it by its Polish name *Oświęcim*. Moreover, he only referred to the Jews indirectly and even then connected them to Christianity, saying:

In particular, I pause with you dear participants in this encounter, before the tombstone in the Hebrew language. This inscription awakens the memory of a people whose sons and daughters were doomed to total extermination. This people originated with Abraham, who is the father of our faith as was expressed by Paul of Tarsus. This very people who have received from God the commandment "Thou shall not kill" has felt upon itself in a particular manner the meaning of killing. It is not permitted for anybody to pass in front of this tombstone with indifference.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Pope did not use the passive voice, saying, for instance, "the meaning of being killed," but instead, "has felt...the meaning of killing." Thus he hinted that the Jews, too, could be considered responsible for killing others.

The Pope went on: "There are six million Poles who lost their lives during the Second World War: the fifth part of the nation." In this way the Jews, who were not considered part of the Polish nation while they lived, are assimilated to it after their death. More important, this is yet another instance of the appropriation of Jewish symbols by the Church, which goes back many centuries.

## **A Monastery at Auschwitz**

Archbishop Wojtyla's project of creating a new church at Auschwitz was partially realized in 1984 when a Carmelite monastery was founded on the premises of the so-called "theater" adjacent to the camp, which was used for storing the lethal gas Zyklon B. Jewish organizations ultimately obtained a commitment that the monastery would be relocated, but only after several years of discussions as well as the personal intervention of Pope John Paul II. In 1993, the monastery was transferred from the "theater" to some five hundred meters away. Nevertheless, a cross more than seven meters high remained on the spot.

In 1999, hundreds of smaller crosses were erected near the previous site of the monastery. This again led to lengthy discussions, and in May 1999 Polish president Alexander Kwasniewski signed a bill giving the areas around Auschwitz a protected status. The small crosses were removed by the Polish government, but the large one remained.

## **Edith Stein's Beatification**

On 1 May 1987, John Paul II beatified Edith Stein in a speech delivered in Cologne, Germany.<sup>20</sup> He stated: "With God's help and the sacrifice of her own life, Esther rendered a key contribution to her people's salvation." The comparison to the biblical Queen Esther is strange, since Esther was Jewish whereas Stein converted to Christianity. Stein herself wrote on 31 October 1938: "I am confident in the fact that the Lord has taken my life to the advantage of all [the Jews]. I think more and more about Queen Esther, who was taken from her people for the express purpose of standing before the King for her people. I am a little Esther...."<sup>21</sup>

The question, however, remains: how could Edith Stein have helped the Jewish people? The only possible answer is via the example of conversion. The Pope also said in the same speech: "As a great daughter of the Jewish people and as a believing Christian, among millions of innocent tortured brothers, she saw the inexorable approach of the cross."

The Pope continued: "In the extermination camp she died as a daughter of Israel 'for the glory of the Most Holy Name' and at the same time as Sister Teresa Benedict of the Cross." Thus, the Pope invoked the Jewish expression *al kidush ha-Shem* (for the glory of the Most Holy Name), which large numbers of Jews preferred to die saying rather than convert to Christianity, for a woman who did convert, a grave offense to Jews.

One more insult from a Jewish standpoint concerns the story of her life. The Pope also said in this speech: "Receiving baptism did not mean for Edith Stein breaking with the Jewish heritage." According to the Pope, Stein herself said: "after coming back to God, I felt myself Jewish." "Coming back to God" means here to convert, and one wonders whether the Pope was implying that one can be a Christian and a Jew at the same time. The same question arose when Cardinal Lustiger claimed that he was still a Jew even after he was appointed as Archbishop of Paris.

On the same day that he gave the above talk, 1 May 1987, the Pope also addressed the members of the Jewish Central Council at Cologne and called Edith Stein "a daughter of Israel who remained united as a Catholic with Jesus and as a Jew with her people." Seemingly, he again wanted to stress that one can be a Jew and a Christian simultaneously. Moreover, when the Pope said to the Jews of Cologne that Stein "reminds us all, Jews and Christians alike, of the call of the Holy Scriptures" he was referring to her as an example for the Jewish community of conversion to Christianity.

## **Appropriating a Legacy**

The notion that one can concurrently be a Jew and a Christian was inspired by the Catholic Church on several occasions. In 1962, a Catholic priest from the Carmelite Stella Maris Monastery in Haifa, Daniel Rufeisen, went so far as to sue for legal recognition as a Jew from the state of Israel. He lost the case when the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that being both a Catholic priest and a Jew was impossible.

More recently, in July 2005, another Catholic priest born a Jew, Romuald Weksler-Waszkineł, a professor of philosophy at the Catholic University of Lublin, visited Canada at the invitation of the Canadian Jewish

Congress. He said in an interview to Elias Levy: "I have never denied my Jewish roots. The faith in Jesus reunifies Catholics and Jews. I am a faithful member of the synagogue of Jesus. I do not understand why I should choose between Catholicism and Judaism."

On the issue of Edith Stein, the American rabbi Leon Klenicki asked in an article published in 2000: "Why [should Catholics] canonize her as a victim when she was taken because she was Jewish?" For some Jews, Stein was a woman who betrayed her people by abandoning her faith and then offering herself as atonement to God so that her people would accept what she considered to be their Lord. However, Stein's beatification and later canonization can also be viewed as part of a larger project of Pope John Paul II, that of Christianizing the Shoah.

The Church's appropriation of anti-Jewish persecutions began at a very early stage. Already in 1939, the "missing" encyclical, which Pius XI did not manage to publish before his death, stated: "anti-Semitism was an excuse in order to attack the Messiah...and it started the war against Christianity."

The canonization of Kolbe and the beatification of Stein set in motion an appropriation of the Shoah, a substitution of the Christian identity for the Jewish one. In a 1992 visit to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Cardinal O'Connor of New York said the murdered Jews had given humanity "a great gift," which Paul Blanquart characterized as "the gift of being able to inscribe this terrible sufferance and these deaths in the Catholic figure of redemption, therefore in the Christian martyrology and by doing so to reaffirm the Church's will to domination." He added: "Is not saying that while attacking Jews, Nazism was aiming at Christians, a way of making the Church benefit from the horrors of Auschwitz?" According to Blanquart, exploiting the calamity abets the Church's endeavor to regain its old social and cultural power.

The idea of the Church as a victim of the Nazis was first raised by Pope Pius XII in a speech on 2 June 1945. As a victim, the Church could escape the questions about the actions and omissions of its leaders during the war and about the protection given to former Nazis after it. Moreover, the Shoah could be made part of the spiritual heritage of the Polish Catholic people rather than connoting the tragic massacre of the Jews. The many churches or chapels erected at extermination camps, even ones where all the victims were Jews, the building of the monastery at Auschwitz, the large cross remaining at Auschwitz, the canonization of Edith Stein - all these manifest an ongoing policy of "de-Judaization" of the death camps by the Church as well as by the Polish Communist governments, as also pointed out by Gerhart Riegner.

## **Anti-Semitism**

The declaration *Nostra Aetate* deplored "the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and from any source," and repudiated "all persecutions against any man."

In November 1988, the report "Church and Racism" stated:

Among the manifestations of systematic racial distrust, specific mention must once again be made of anti-Semitism. If anti-Semitism has been the most tragic form that racist ideology has assumed in our century, with the horrors of the Jewish "holocaust," it has unfortunately not yet entirely disappeared. As if some had nothing to learn from the crimes of the past, certain organizations, with branches in many countries, keep alive the anti-Semitic racist myth, with the support of networks of publications. Terrorist acts which have Jewish persons or symbols as their target have multiplied in recent years and show the radicalism of such groups. Anti-Zionism - which is not of the same order, since it questions the State of Israel and its policies - serves at times as a screen for anti-Semitism, feeding on it and leading to it. Furthermore, some countries impose undue harassments and restrictions on the free emigration of Jews.

On 6 September 1990, at a meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in Prague, the Australian cardinal Edward Cassidy said: "The fact that anti-Semitism has found place in the Christian conscience and practice requires an act of teshuva ["repentance" in Hebrew] and reconciliation," and he called anti-Semitism "a sin against God and humanity."

Anti-Semitism was also condemned in the 1993 Fundamental Treaty between the Holy See and Israel. Nevertheless, all these Catholic condemnations are weakened by the fact that the Church considers itself totally innocent as an institution that cannot be responsible for its believers' acts, even though they followed the Church's teaching of hatred against the Jews. Moreover, according to the latest documents of the Church, some

Christians could be affected by anti-Judaism but not by anti-Semitism, which it now considers a pagan, non-Christian sentiment. Whereas pagan anti-Semitism, according to the Church, could go so far as killing Jews for racist motives, the religious anti-Judaism of some Catholics did not involve killing people.

On 25 February 2004, Mel Gibson's film *The Passion* was first screened to the public. It was the day of Ash Wednesday on the eve of Easter. The film garnered a huge audience, so that many were exposed to its anti-Semitic content and excessive violence. The authorities of the Catholic Church did not condemn the film, nor object to it on the ground that it contravened *Nostra Aetate*. On the contrary, on 3 October 2004, Pope John Paul II beatified Ann-Catherine Emmerich, whose visions had been used as the basis for the movie, thus indirectly giving it his blessing.<sup>32</sup>

### **"We Remember"**

For more than ten years, Jewish organizations active in the dialogue with the Church asked that it put forth a document on the Shoah. In a statement of 31 October 1997, the Pope said: "In the Christian world - I do not say on the part of the Church as such - erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility toward this people. They contributed to the numbing of many consciences."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the Pope presented the Church as innocent even though for two thousand years it spread the "teaching of contempt," according to which the Jews were punished with eternal exile for not recognizing Jesus and allegedly killing him. Whereas the Church's believers are held responsible for being "hostile" toward the Jews, they were merely following its own teachings.

On 16 March 1998, the Vatican published a document titled "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah." It includes many conciliatory paragraphs but is still considered far from satisfactory by many Jews. Most interesting is the Pope's letter attached to the main document, in which he admits that the Shoah "remains an indelible stain on the history of the century that is coming to a close." However, the Church still seems to shift the blame to the Christians at the time of the war, who ostensibly should have raised their voices and opposed the Nazis even though their "Pontifex Maximus," Pius XII, said nothing.

Hitler, a Catholic all his life, was influenced by the Church's doctrine. Yet "We Remember" proclaims: "The Shoah was the work of a thoroughly modern, neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity." The document only admits that Nazi persecutions "were made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudice imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts."

Thus, those who hoped the Church would recognize its responsibility for the spreading of anti-Semitic hatred remained disillusioned. Moreover, although the Pope had condemned anti-Semitism several times, in this document he maintains that according to the Church, the anti-Semitism it exhibits is to be considered as "anti-Judaism," whereas the anti-Semitism under discussion is typical of "neo-pagans" only. In other words, the Pope is condemning pagans and not the Church itself.

The document, in recognizing that the Shoah "is a major fact of the history of this century, a fact which still concerns us today," is an answer to the deniers and those who are "tired" of hearing about the Holocaust. But one seeks in vain for any mention of the Church's own responsibility.

### **A Whitewash of Pius XII?**

"We Remember" mentions Pope Pius XII, whose character and conduct are the subject of bitter debate, in the same breath as Pius XI, who did oppose Nazism to a certain extent in 1937. The document notes that Pius XII came out against racism in his first Encyclical Letter in 1939. He is also said to have rescued "hundreds of thousands of Jews," personally or through his emissaries. To prove this, "We Remember" points to letters of thanks he received from Jewish organizations. Such letters, however, do not constitute historical documents since they were written in general terms stating no details.

Furthermore, "We Remember" makes use of a meeting between Pius XII and Dr. A. Leon Kubowitzky of the World Jewish Congress on 21 September 1945. According to the official Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano*, Kubowitzky came to thank the Pope "for the efforts of the Catholic Church on behalf of Jews"<sup>34</sup>

during the war. But Kubowitzky himself wrote that the two issues he raised during the meeting were obtaining a declaration of the Church's position toward the Jews and, most important, securing the Pontiff's assistance in the restitution of Jewish children who had been hidden by Christian institutions during the war.<sup>35</sup> The Pope's only response was to ask for a memorandum on the problem of the children - many of whose lives, apparently, were saved only at the price of their souls.

In addition, "We Remember" praises Pius XII and says: "During and after the war, Jewish communities and Jewish leaders expressed their thanks for all that had been done for them, including what Pope Pius XII did personally or through his representatives to save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives." But this is a controversial point, since many researchers have concluded that Pius XII did very little to help the Jews. What concerned him above all was fighting Bolshevism, and it was widely believed that Jews were the spearhead of Bolshevism.

"If National Socialism does not succeed in defeating Bolshevism, then Church and Christianity in Europe too are finished,"<sup>36</sup> Hitler told Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich in November 1936, after making it clear that Bolshevism and Judaism were one. This message, it seems, was not lost on Pius XII, whose many years in Germany before his election to Pope, persuaded him of the dangers of Communism.

Nevertheless, Pius XII is now a candidate for beatification by the Church, a process that ought to be stopped in the same way the beatification of Isabella, the Catholic Queen of Spain, was brought to a halt. Even if the Church is unwilling to denounce a former Pope's silence and indifference toward the extermination of the Jews by the Nazi regime, the Church could refrain from remembering him so fondly. John Paul II adopted a clear line in this regard: defending the Church and Pius XII at all costs, even if this meant praise for German bishops who are believed to have cooperated with the Nazis.

Indeed, the Church in "We Remember" is guilty of a double offense: it grants official recognition to controversial figures while overlooking those who genuinely helped the Jews, such as Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the apostolic delegate in Constantinople, and Angelo Rotta, the papal nuncio in Budapest, who was named a Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem in Israel.

"We Remember" does mention Bernhard Lichtenberg, provost of Berlin Cathedral, who was sent to Dachau after holding public prayers for the Jews,<sup>37</sup> probably on his own initiative. But he is adduced only to claim, regarding Pius XII's silence during the war, that public declarations could not have done any good and might even have caused greater harm. Georges-Elia Sarfati has argued that the aim of references to Christian martyrs such as Lichtenberg is to enlarge the Shoah to include Nazi persecutions, and that Edith Stein's 1998 canonization was carried out for the same purpose.<sup>38</sup>

Lichtenberg publicly stated: "Outside the synagogue is burning and that is also a House of God." German bishops, however, remained silent in the face of the burning synagogues.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, "We Remember" praises German bishops such as Cardinal Bertram of Breslau and the abovementioned Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich, who did not object to the Nazi policy, but does not mention Konrad von Preysing of Berlin, the only one to protest the Nazi persecutions in any way. He wrote to Pius XII that it would be better to recall the papal diplomatic representative in Berlin, Cesare Orsenigo, because he was incapable of his task, and better not to be represented at all in Berlin while Jews were being persecuted.<sup>40</sup>

The Nazi regime was always attentive to messages from the Vatican and valued its contacts with its leaders, indicating that the Vatican could have done more to stop the persecutions. As early as March 1933, Hitler spoke in parliament "of the great importance attributed by his government to the continuation of 'cultivating and developing' friendly relations" with the Holy See.<sup>41</sup> On 20 July 1933, Eugenio Pacelli, then secretary of state of the Holy See - and soon to become Pope Pius XII - brought about the signing of the Concordat, an agreement between Nazi Germany and the Holy See that granted the Nazis an important, coveted, international recognition.

### **John Paul II and the State of Israel**

The first reference to the state of Israel in a Catholic religious document appeared in the Notes of 1985, as cited above. This new approach allowed eventually for proper diplomatic relations between the Church and Israel that resulted directly from the 1991 Madrid Conference of Israel and Arab states.

In its relations with Israel, however, the Holy See complied to the letter with the PLO's attitude toward the Jewish state. Thus, the Vatican signed a Fundamental Treaty with Israel on 30 December 1993, but only after the Declaration of Principles was signed by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat a few months earlier on 13 September. Similarly, the Vatican-Israeli exchange of diplomatic representatives took place only after the Cairo Agreement of 1994.

In October 1998, Msgr. Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, presented the Holy See's position on Jerusalem. He said that while the Holy See saw this issue as part of multilateral talks (and therefore outside the scope of bilateral relations with Israel), it favored a "special internationally-guaranteed statute" and rejected "the forcible occupation by one of the parties of an area of the city of Jerusalem." He also criticized Israel for its "lack of respect for certain UN Security Council Resolutions" and for "the annexation of a part of the city of Jerusalem."<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, on the question of Jerusalem the position of the Holy See and that of Israel are incongruent. This was evident in the agreement between the Holy See and the PLO signed on 15 February 2000. Without actually mentioning Israel by name, the document stated that: "unilateral decisions and actions altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable."

The Vatican's position on Jerusalem stemmed from its wish to obtain "guarantees for the sanctity of Holy Places covering inviolability, maintenance, freedom of access, and freedom of worship in accordance with the status quo of 1852."<sup>43</sup>

### **The Visit to Israel**

In March 2000, John Paul II became the first pope ever to make an official visit to Israel; Pope Paul VI had made an unofficial one in 1964. This was stressed when he subsequently sent a cable of thanks to "Mr. Shazar" without his title of president, and to an address in Tel Aviv even though the president resides in Jerusalem.

John Paul II's visit was indeed important, but again the myth superseded reality, and the gestures, so convincing on television, were not always accompanied by congruent words.<sup>44</sup> Jerusalem Post columnist Amotz Asa-El expressed a more positive view than this author's:

Yes, many - led by Ambassador Sergio Minerbi - rightly mention lesser-known caveats in John Paul's gestures toward the Jewish state. However, his standing at attention to the sounds of [the Israeli national anthem] "Hatikva," in the Holy Land, under an Israeli flag, in the presence of a Jewish president, prime minister and armed soldiers has etched in the world's mind images that no future document can erase, and no counter-revolution can fully undo. A taboo had been broken. A 1,600-year-old insistence that Christian revelation is impossible without Jewish humiliation, and that Jewish humiliation demands Jewish wandering, was shattered in a manner that may have disappointed the mind, but could only overwhelm the senses, of both Christian and Jew.<sup>45</sup>

Enthusiasm, however, must be mitigated by several facts.

Shortly before the Pope's visit, on 15 February 2000, the Holy See signed its first agreement with the PLO. Among other things, it calls on the PLO to recognize "that Palestinians, irrespective of their religious affiliation, are equal members of Palestinian society," meaning that Palestinian Catholics should enjoy equal rights with their Muslim compatriots.

The Preamble deals at length with the question of Jerusalem, and neither the Holy See nor the PLO recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the city. The Vatican may believe it has found an ally in the PLO in opposing what it considers dangerous Israeli actions in Jerusalem. The Preamble, already quoted above, calls for a "special statute for Jerusalem, internationally guaranteed."<sup>46</sup>

When he came to the Synod of the Bishops in Jerusalem on 25 October 1998, Tauran said: "East Jerusalem is illegally occupied. It is wrong to claim that the Holy See is only interested in the religious aspect of the City and overlooks the political and territorial aspects. Both aspects are closely linked."<sup>47</sup> He thus clarified that the Holy See is not only concerned with holy places but also with political matters involving Jerusalem.

On other occasions, the Holy See has criticized the "Judaization" of Jerusalem. The same Msgr. Tauran stated in 1999 that:

the Popes, as also the international community, have never accepted, and it still remains true today, the annexation of territory by force. . . . The Holy See has absolutely not abandoned its principles: the peaceful resolution of differences, rejection of the forcible occupation by one of the parties of an area of the City of Jerusalem and the request for an internationally guaranteed statute for the most religious parts of this unique city.... Since 1947, the Popes have made themselves the defenders of the preservation of the unique and sacred character of that City.<sup>48</sup>

Another issue raised during the Pope's visit was Israeli authorization for the building of a new mosque in Nazareth in front of the Basilica of the Annunciation. The Pope, during his stay, sent the Israeli government an official note protesting this. This was a strong act of censure, unusual in international relations, which apparently could not wait for the Pope's return to Vatican as would have been customary between friendly states.

### **The Pope at the Western Wall**

The Pope's most conspicuous act during his visit was inserting a note into the Western Wall, today Judaism's holiest site. For centuries Christian pilgrims have come to look at the ruins of the Jewish Temple, finding in them proof of Jesus' prophecy that "not one stone here will be left on another."<sup>49</sup>

The Pope's visit to the Wall is now the subject of an Israeli stamp. When cabinet minister Dalia Itzik went to Pope Benedict XVI to present him with this stamp, she said John Paul II had inserted in the Wall a letter asking forgiveness for acts committed against Jews by Christians throughout history.<sup>50</sup>

But what did the note actually say?

Some days before the Pope's visit to Israel, there was a ceremony of confession of sins and request for pardon at the Vatican. On 12 March 2000, the fourth prayer of the day was the "Confession of Sins against the People of Israel":

Cardinal Edward Cassidy started by saying: "Let us pray that, in recalling the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history, Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the Covenant and the blessings, and in this way will purify their hearts." [Silent prayer.]

The Holy Father: "God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations: we are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant. We ask this through Christ our Lord. . . ." <sup>51</sup>

A copy of the original note, in English, that John Paul II put in the Wall was distributed to the press in Jerusalem by the Holy See's spokesman. Some Catholic authors assert that it was identical to the prayer in Rome. But this is only partially so. The preamble read by Cardinal Cassidy was omitted, as well as the last words "We ask this through Christ our Lord." The abovementioned priest Fumagalli, who did notice the second omission, said it was done on purpose so as not to offend the Jews of Jerusalem.

Even if that was so, however, the elision of a whole paragraph at the beginning must have a reason as well. Gone is the title, "Confession of Sins against the People of Israel." Gone are "the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history." What remains and was put in the interstice of the Wall is the part read by the Holy Father at the Vatican, a text not directed to the Jews but to the descendants of Abraham, who could just as well be the Arabs or the Christians according to the Church. Also the phrase "genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant" is ambiguous, since Catholic doctrine states: "But the Prophets accuse Israel of breaking the covenant and behaving like a prostitute. They announce a new and eternal covenant. 'Christ instituted this New Covenant.'" <sup>52</sup>

The Pope did not directly ask for forgiveness; he was only "deeply saddened" by the fate of "these children of yours" in history. There is no mention of acts committed by Christians against Jews, only the suffering of the children of Abraham at the hands of unnamed perpetrators.

When the preamble and the note are read together, as they were in Rome, clearly the object of both is the Jewish people. When the preamble is purposely removed, along with the ending, it must be asked why. Above all, each text must be read as it is, without adding any wishful thinking, even if the implications for Church-Jewish relations come out the worse.<sup>53</sup>

### **Anti-Christian Prejudice?**

In his address at Ben-Gurion Airport immediately after arriving in Israel, the Pope stated in front of then president Ezer Weizman and then prime minister Ehud Barak: "Christians and Jews together must make courageous efforts to remove all forms of prejudice."<sup>54</sup>

To the chief rabbis, the next day in Jerusalem, the Pope said: "We must work together to build a future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews."<sup>55</sup>

On the same day, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Pope reiterated: "Let us build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Jewish feeling among Christians or anti-Christian feeling among Jews."<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, the abovementioned "We Remember" stresses a symmetry between anti-Judaism and "anti-Christian sentiment among Jews." History, however, presents a different picture: for centuries the Catholic Church denigrated the Jews, claiming that their mission had expired and they had been replaced by the new "people of God." Catholic leaders enclosed the Jews in ghettos, made them wear special signs, burned their holy books in the streets, and accused them of ritual murder. The Jews were obliged to listen to Christian sermons in church and sometimes were forcibly converted.

The Jews, however, never carried out persecutions of Christians, nor could have given their inferior social and economic position. Yet the notion of symmetry seems important to the Catholic authorities and emerges often. In its July 2004 meeting in Buenos Aires, the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations took the strange step of accepting an obligation also to examine the Jewish prejudices.

Clearly, it is important for the Catholic Church to establish a symmetry between Christians and Jews and deflect the reproach of anti-Semitism from the Jewish side. But the fact that the supposed Jewish prejudices played no role whatsoever in Jewish-Christian relations was ignored in Buenos Aires, as elsewhere.

### **Recent Developments in Relations with Israel**

>From the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, the Holy See, under Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano, took a stance that was clearly anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian. This attitude reached its apex on 2 April 2002 when about two hundred armed Palestinians, including well-known terrorists, forced their way into the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and occupied it for thirty-nine days. Yet the Holy See's reaction to this blatant violation of international law and profanation of a Christian holy place was to launch a worldwide campaign of hate propaganda and denigration against Israel.

During the thirty-nine days, Israeli troops never once entered the Basilica. Nevertheless, the Franciscan priest Ibrahim Faltas propagated lies from inside the structure, saying that during the Israeli siege a priest was killed named Jacques Amateis who in fact was not killed, and that there was no food for the monks whereas after the Basilica's liberation it appeared there was enough food for many more days.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, in Rome the spokesman of the Franciscan Custodia of the Holy Land, David Jaeger, claimed Israel had violated "the most elementary laws of humanity and civilization."<sup>58</sup> Once again the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, found an opportunity to lambaste Israel, and asked the heads of other churches in Jerusalem to sign an appeal to President Bush in which he wrote: "Only this morning the Israeli tanks have reached the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the City of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is wanton indiscriminate killing. Very many people are deprived of water, electricity, food supplies and basic medical needs. Many of our religious institutions have been invaded and damaged."<sup>59</sup>

On 2 April, the first day of the crisis, Secretary for Relations with States Tauran wasted no time in summoning the Israeli and American ambassadors to the Holy See to discuss the "dramatic situation of Bethlehem." The Holy See's position included an "unequivocal condemnation of terrorism," and also a

"disapproval of the condition of injustice and humiliation imposed on the Palestinian people, as well as reprisals and retaliations, which only make the sense of frustration and hatred grow."60

Months later, on 12 December 2002, the Pope received Israeli president Moshe Katzav, and the spokesman of the Holy See, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said that the Vatican favors the coexistence of two states, Israel and Palestine, and desires a prompt settlement of the conflict.61

Later, regarding the separation fence erected by Israel, the Pope said: "We need bridges, not barriers." Navarro-Valls recalled in July 2004 the ruling of the International Court of Justice at The Hague, and said Israel was obliged to guarantee "freedom of access, of visit and transit" to the Holy Places "without any distinction of nationality," but omitted to say that in the same ruling freedom of access is linked to "national security and public order."62

Some observers think that with the appointment on 14 August 2003 of Father Jean-Baptiste Gourion as auxiliary bishop to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who in the meantime passed away, and in 2004 of Pierbattista Pizzaballa as the new Custos, the chief of the Franciscan Custodia of the Holy Land in Jerusalem, the Catholic Church sought to somewhat balance the strongly pro-Palestinian character of the Church in Israel.

## Conclusion

The late Pope made some noteworthy gestures toward Jews; he met with Jewish communities all over the world and gave friendly messages on television. But a deeper look into his written and spoken words reveals a strong will to Christianize the Shoah and to introduce many ambiguities rather than reach clarifications. If one overlooks all that is deficient in this relationship and the many omissions, the Catholic Church will reasonably conclude that Jewish representatives can be made happy with very little indeed.

That is not the way, however, to build a true dialogue - one that, for instance, would not include hopes on the Church's part to convert participants on the other side to Christianity. Jews should learn to read better the Church's texts and should comment on them in the frame of a

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## Notes

1. He was born Karol Wojtyła on 18 May 1920 in the Polish town of Wadowice, and was elected Pope on 16 October 1978.
2. Alain Finkielkraut, "Esprit Saint Contre Esprit du Temps: Un Hommage à Joseph Ratzinger," *L'Arche*, No. 566 (June 2005) (French).
3. [www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0500285.htm](http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0500285.htm), "Rabbis, Cantors Plan to Meet Pope, Thank Him for Efforts with Jews," Christian News Service, 17 January 2005.
4. [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org), "The Pope of the Jews," Catholic Online, April 2005.
5. "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians," 2:15-16, in *The New Testament* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1935).
6. See the following articles on the subject by this author: "John Paul II and the Jews: An Assessment on the Eve of the Papal Visit to Israel," *Policy Dispatch*, No. 48, Institute of the World Jewish Congress, Jerusalem, March 2000, pp. 1-8; "The Visit of the Pope to the Holy Land," *Israel Information Center*, Jerusalem, September 2000, pp. 5-18; "John Paul II's Attitude towards the Jews," *Mahanaim*, December 2003, pp. 20-33 (Hebrew); "The Vatican and the Standoff at the Church of the Nativity," *Jerusalem Viewpoints*, No. 515, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 15 March 2004; "The Passion by Mel Gibson: Enthusiastic Response in the Catholic World, Restrained Criticism by the Jews," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 119-33.
7. "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4, 28 October 1965.

8. "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4," 1 December 1974, "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church," in *International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, Fifteen Years of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, 1970-1985* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988).
9. "Dominum et Vivificantem, Lord and Giver of Life, Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Entire Church on the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit," 18 May 1986.
10. *Ibid.*, #31.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, #46.
13. "Papal Meditation on the First Station of the Cross," prepared for the pope's proclamation by Olivier Clément, Rome, 10 April 1998.
14. Jean Paul II, Maximilien Kolbe: Patron de notre siècle difficile (Paris: Lethielleux, 1971), pp. 34-35 (French).
15. <http://www.vatican.va/>, Pope John Paul II, "Omelia di Giovanni Paolo II al Campo di Concentramento di Brzezinka," Brzezinka, 7 June 1979 (Italian).
16. Pier Francesco Fumagalli, "Karol Wojtyla: Papa Giovanni Paolo II e gli Ebrei," edizione ampliata dell'intervento alla Comunità Ebraica di Milano, 10 December 2003 (Italian).
17. Pope John Paul II, address to Jewish leaders in Warsaw, 14 June 1987, English translation by Boston College.
18. Similar to the Papal Curia at the Vatican, which is the government of the Church, the Bishop Curia is composed of the clerks who assist the Bishop. Metropolitana means linked to the town, in this case Cracow.
19. Author's translation, which differs from the version given by Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), p. 6. Fisher writes: ". . . itself experienced in a special measure what is meant by killing." The official text is in Italian: "Ha provato su se stesso in misura particolare che cosa significa uccidere."
20. Pope John Paul II, "Homily for the Beatification of Edith Stein," 1 May 1987, in "Un esempio di eroica sequela," *La Traccia*, Vol. 8, No. 5 (June 1987), pp. 532-35.
21. Maria Cecilia del Volto Santo, *Edith Stein: Un-ebrea testimone per la Verità* (Milan: San Paolo, 1996), p. 140.
22. David Twersky, "The Strange Case of 'Brother Daniel,'" *Jewish World Review*, 5 August 1998.
23. Elias Levy, "Peut-on être Juif et Chrétien en même temps?" *Canadian Jewish News*, 14 July 2005 (French).
24. Eloise Resenblatt, "Edith Stein's Canonization: Acknowledging Objections from Jews and Catholics," in Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, and Irena Steinfeldt, eds., *The Holocaust and the Christian World* (London: Kuperard, 2000), p. 224.
25. G. Passelecq and B. Suchecky, *L'Encyclique cachée de Pie XI* (Paris : éditions la Découverte, 1995), p. 292, n. 147 (French).
26. Paul Blanquart, *Le rêve de Compostelle: Vers la restauration d'une Europe Chrétienne* (Paris: Centurion, 1989), pp. 208-09 (French).
27. Gerhart M. Riegner, *Ne Jamais Désespérer* Les Editions du Cerf, Paris 1998 (French), p. 437. Riegner wrote: "What happened explains the policy of de-Judaization of old camps, which was for a long time the official line of Communist governments in Poland."
28. "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4, 28 October 1965.
29. In the original text there is a reference to the speech of John Paul II at the Great Synagogue on 13 April 1986.
30. Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, President of the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, "The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society," 3 November 1988.
31. "Statement by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee," Prague, 6 September 1990, in *Information Service of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, Vol. 75, No. 4 (1990), p. 176.

32. Minerbi, "The Passion by Mel Gibson," p. 119.
33. "Discorso del Santo Padre ai partecipanti," in *Radici dell'Antigiudaismo in ambiente Cristiano: Atti del Simposio teologico-storico* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), p.15 (Italian).
34. Sergio I. Minerbi, *Un Ebreo fra D'Annunzio e il Sionismo: Raffaele Cantoni* (Rome: Bonacci, 1992), p. 169 (Italian).
35. A. L. Kubovy (Kubowitzky), "Pope Pius XII and the Jewish Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 6 (1967), pp. 18-23.
36. Quoted in Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 207.
37. According to the Catholic German writer Henrich Böll, in *Lettre à un Jeune Catholique* (Paris: Editions Mille et une nuits, 1996) (French), Lichtenberg and other priests did not act according to orders given by the Church. Böll adds: "A short time after the conclusion of the Concordat between the Vatican and Hitler, it was very fashionable to appear at the communion table dressed in the uniform of the SA" (pp. 29-30).
38. Georges-Elia Sarfati, *Le Vatican et la Shoah: Ou comment l'Eglise s'absout de son passé* (Paris : Berg International, 2000), p. 31 (French).
39. Lewy, *Catholic Church*, p. 284.
40. *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Libreria editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1975; Vol. 2, No. 26. pp. 39-40 (French). See also Vol. 9, no. 26, January 23, 1943, pp.93-94 (German).
41. Lewy, *Catholic Church*, p. 38.
42. Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, "The Question of Jerusalem," address of 26 October 1998, the Vatican, 4 November 1998.
43. H. Eugene Bovis, *The Jerusalem Question 1917-1968* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), p. 46.
44. Minerbi, "The Visit of the Pope." See also *Visit to Israel of His Holiness Pope John Paul II: Speeches and Addresses* (Jerusalem: Israel Information Center, 2000).
45. Amotz Asa-El, "Middle Israel: What Next for the Papacy?" *Jerusalem Post*, 8 April 2005.
46. "Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization," Vatican, 15 February 2000.
47. Tauran, "Question of Jerusalem."
48. Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, "The Holy See and the Holy Land: Justice and Charity," address to the United Nations during a symposium commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the Pontifical Mission, 25 October 1999.
49. Mark: 13:2.
50. As part of the observance of Jubilee 2000, Pope John Paul II asked the Lord's forgiveness for the sins of the Church's sons and daughters during a special Mass. The confession of sins and request for pardon, in the form of a solemn prayer of the faithful, occurred after the homily. There was a confession of sins by categories by representatives of the Roman Curia, followed by a papal prayer and the chanting of "Kyrie eleison." Subsequently the Pope kissed the crucifix as a sign of veneration and the imploring of pardon.
51. *Il Papa chiede perdono, Purificare la memoria* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2000), p. 14 (Italian). For the official English translation, see: <http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/>, Boston College.
52. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, An Image Book* Doubleday, New York, April 1995, No. 762, p. 218.
53. Letter by the author to the *Jerusalem Post* 24 July 2005.
54. "Address by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, 21 March 2000," in *Visit to Israel*, p. 8.
55. Greetings by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, 23 March 2000, in *ibid.*, p. 12.
56. Address by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, 23 March 2000, in *ibid.*, p. 20.
57. Giuseppe Bonavolontà and Marc Innaro, *L'assedio della Natività*, Ponte alle Grazie, Milano 2002.
58. Minerbi, "The Vatican and the Standoff."

59. Ibid., p. 3.

60. Ibid., p. 2.

61. www.oessh.ch, "Le Saint-Siège souhaite la coexistence pacifique de deux états en Terre Sainte," 12 December 2002, Zénit Agency (French).

62. www.ZENIT.org, "Portavoce vaticano: sentenza 'di peso' del Tribunale dell'Aja contro il muro

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### **Jewish Political Studies Review**

In addition to the following article, we would like to draw your attention to the following book reviews:

David R. Parsons on *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* by Eli N. Evans (Jewish Political Studies Review 18:1-2, Spring 2006), which was recently posted on the JCPA website at the following link: <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-parsons-s06.htm>

Manfred Gerstenfeld on *Élèves sous influence* by Barbara Lefebvre and Ève Bonnivard (Jewish Political Studies Review 18:1-2, Spring 2006), which was recently posted on the JCPA website at the following link: <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-gerstenfeld-on-lefebvre-s06.htm>

Françoise Ouzan on *Les frontières d'Auschwitz: Les ravages du devoir de mémoire* by Shmuel Trigano <<http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-ouzan-06.htm>> (Jewish Political Studies Review 18:1-2, Spring 2006) which was recently posted on the JCPA website at the following link: <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-ouzan-06.htm>

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