

The Contexts of Religion and Violence

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Deliver Us From Evil

Genocide and the Christian World

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Introduction

[1] The twentieth century saw an unmatched scale of systematic and intentional mass murder coupled with an unprecedented efficiency in the mechanisms and techniques of state-sponsored terrorism, or genocide. All told, it is estimated that 60 million men, women, and children were victims of genocide in the last century alone, and the dawn of the twenty-first century brings little light to that darkness. In Darfur, since the violence started in early 2003, more than 2.5 million people have been forced from their homes, many of whom have become prisoners in transit camps and towns due to repeated attacks, looting, and arson by Arab militias, allegedly armed by the Sudanese government. According to recent estimates, at least 300,000 people have died in Darfur since the genocide began. The ongoing conflict-related mortality rate is expected to be between 10,000-15,000 deaths per month, though – if the security situation continues to deteriorate and humanitarian aid continues to decline – the mortality rate could rise to as high as 100,000 per month.

[2] There have been notable cases where religious institutions stood and resisted the power of such state-sponsored terrorism. These have been the scattered exceptions, though, to the more general rule of recent history in which religious institutions have been notoriously silent, or even complicit, in the face of genocidal violence. This paper specifically focuses on the role of indigenous Christian institutions in contexts of genocidal violence. In this

analysis, I am looking at the church from an institutional, rather than theological, framework. I am approaching Christian institutions as real, formal organizations – worldly (as opposed to divine) social structures that govern the behavior of individuals within them. As institutions, Christian churches have a mission and purpose; they shape individual human lives and intentions just as they are, in turn, shaped by human lives and intentions. Institutions are birthed by individuals and it is as inappropriate to separate the two. I do not regard institutions, Christian or otherwise, as an instance of emergence in which they arise beyond, or transcendent of, the conscious intentions of the individuals involved. Rather, I regard institutions, Christian and otherwise, as social constructions whose combined effect, in a synergistic relationship, is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

[3] In such an analysis, we cannot, of course, artificially separate Christian institutions from their underlying theological frameworks and, in fact, those frameworks play a significant role in institutional direction and decision-making. Neither can we disentangle Christian institutions from the culture in which they have been shaped and which they have, in turn, shaped. The overarching interest of this paper, though, is in the church as an institution, with institutional actors, and how it shapes a culture in which genocidal violence may occur and how it responds to such a culture both during and after the genocidal violence. This interest leads to several compelling questions: Why do Christian institutions that should exemplify the human face of God in a suffering world fail to live out their founder's highest ideals? Why do those who should recognize the human face of God in their persecuted brothers and sisters fail to do so? What are the historical and ethical implications of Christian institutions' response to genocide – particularly in respect to fostering future periods of tolerance?

Case Studies

[4] This paper summarizes preliminary research from genocidal case studies of the Holocaust (1939-1945), Rwanda (1994), and Bosnia (1992-1995). In each of these genocides, Christian institutions, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox, were present – in large numbers and steeped in history with considerable influence – as the seeds for destruction were sown, the killings unfolded, and the societies began to reconstruct themselves after the slaughter had ended. The moral exclusions that led to mass murder in these three case studies were grounded in cultures dominated, not simply in a nominal sense, by Christianity. Many of those perpetrating the killings did so with the blessing and support, even the active participation, of church leaders. After the killings ended, churches have been at the forefront of reconciliation efforts – though most often without any direct acknowledgment of their complicity in the process of destruction.

[5] When Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933, it was with the aim of incorporating the Germanic peoples into one nation-state. To do so meant the employment of an aggressive foreign policy to expand German “living space” as well as the development of domestic social and racial policies that defined those to be included in the superior Aryan race and those to be excluded. Among those to be excluded (including the Roma population, homosexuals, the “hereditary asocial,” those with mental or physical handicaps), one group – the Jews – was specifically targeted for extermination. Between 1939 and 1945, nearly 6 million Jews (two out of every three of Europe's Jews) were victims of the Nazi process of

destruction. The Holocaust occurred throughout a Europe in which well over 90% of Europeans identified themselves as Christians. In Germany particularly, Christianity was pervasive and religious concerns prominent. More than 95% of Germans were baptized, tax-paying members of an established Christian church. It is no exaggeration to say that Germany was one of the most Christian nations in the world, if judged by the usual indices of church membership, church presses, theology students, etc.

[6] In Rwanda, beginning in April 1994, Hutu extremists murdered over 800,000 people in a hundred day period. Of these, the vast majority belonged to the Tutsi minority (indeed, it is almost impossible to find a Tutsi family who did not lose a member to the genocide), but more than 50,000 moderate Hutus identified with opposition parties also were slaughtered. At the time of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was the most Christianized country in Africa, where at least 65% of the population were Roman Catholics and 15% were Protestants. Catholic and Protestant churches were multi-ethnic (including both Hutu and Tutsis). Moreover, much of this Christianity was of a strong evangelical, even charismatic, persuasion, fed by the East African Revival of the 1930s and a spontaneous “movement of the Holy Spirit” throughout many Roman Catholic churches in the 1970s.

[7] In 1992, to achieve his ideal of an ethnically homogenous state, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic turned to ethnic cleansing to remove any trace of the other ethnic communities who had previously cohabited with Serbs in the coveted territories. Serbs created conditions of comprehensive oppression; systematically raped, tortured, and murdered civilians; appropriated and pillaged civilian property; used detainees as human shields on front lines and in minefields; and threw Muslims into concentration camps. In 1993, emboldened by Milosevic’s campaign of terror against the Muslims and his support for a Greater Croatia, the Croats entered the war against their former Muslim allies, using many of the same methods of ethnic cleansing as the Serbs. War in the region would not end until November 1995, with more than 102,000 killed (about 70% of those being Muslim) and as many as 1.8 million displaced.¹ Religion is a central component of identity in Bosnian culture and there is a strong correlation between the ethnic identities of Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks with corresponding religious identities.² Most Bosnian Croats (making up about 15% of Bosnia’s current population) are associated with the Roman Catholic Church; most Bosnian Serbs (31% of the population) with the Serbian Orthodox Church; and most Bosniaks would identify themselves as Muslim and today constitute about 40% of the population.

Stages of Institutional Christian Response to Genocide

[8] As a social psychologist, my disciplinary bias is to look for patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in human interactions. In that spirit, this paper focuses specifically on a descriptive analysis of patterns of institutional Christian response to genocide. While certainly subject to occasional exceptions, my preliminary research suggests that there are

¹ The figure of 102,000 deaths is based on recent research by Sarajevo’s Investigation and Documentation Center (IDC).

² Bosnia is a shorthand reference to the modern-day sovereign state of Bosnia-Herzegovina in southeastern Europe. “Bozniak” is now replacing “Muslim” as an ethnic term to avoid confusion with Muslim as a religious term, meaning an adherent of Islam.

three stages of institutional Christian response to genocide. *Pre-genocidal responses* include the fusion of religious belief systems with ethnic, national, and political identities that provide theological justifications for “us-them” thinking by constricting the churches’ universe of moral obligation. *Genocidal responses* include sins of omission (silence and denial) as well as sins of commission (active participation in killings). Finally, *post-genocidal responses* include the accentuation of the church’s persecution and resistance (marked by the appropriation of the victim groups’ suffering as well as the glorification of individual heroes and martyrs) and official declarations of contrition that avoid direct acknowledgment of institutional guilt. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research and an examination of the capacity for Christian institutions to redeem themselves – and the world – by being involved in post-genocidal reconciliation.

Pre-Genocidal Responses

[9] Christian institutions often lay the groundwork for intergroup tensions by fusing religious belief systems with ethnic, national, and political identities. Most often, this fusion is not a joining of equals; generally, the ethnic, national, or political identities co-opt religion and, eventually, neutralize it. The church loses its critical role as a prophetic voice of the voiceless and becomes, instead, married to other social identities that privilege it among powerholders and mobilize the church to preserve, rather than challenge, the status quo. It is, as Miroslav Wolf describes, an “idolatrous shift of loyalty” in which faith is “employed” as a weapon in an ethnic, national, or political struggle.

[10] A consequence of this fusion is the churches’ role in providing a theological justification for “us-them” thinking. The roots of “us-them” thinking run deep in our human psyche. Human minds are compelled to define the limits of the tribe. Kinship, however defined, remains an important organizing principle for most societies in the world. Knowing who is kin, knowing who is in our social group, has a deep importance to species like ours. We construct this knowledge by categorizing others as “us” or “them,” a tendency that many scholars have called one of the few true human universals. Once these boundaries are established, we tend to be partial toward “us” and label “them” – those with whom “we” share the fewest genes and least culture – as enemies. We have an evolved capacity to see our group as superior to all others and even to be reluctant to recognize members of other groups as deserving of equal respect.

[11] In Christian institutions, “us-them” thinking constricts the churches’ universe of moral obligation and leaves the church unwilling to curb the ethnic and national ethnocentrism, or political divisions, to which it has become fused. In this way, Christian institutions help build the scaffolding for moral sanctions, or exclusions, that heighten intergroup tensions and may, ultimately, “excommunicate” the victims of genocidal violence from the perpetrators’ moral community. The danger, and historical reality, of such exclusions makes Sigmund Freud’s famous dictum seem more true than exaggerated: “Cruelty and intolerance to those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion” (quoted in Atran: 115).

[12] During the Holocaust, the institutional identities of the Catholic Church and Protestant churches were compromised by their decision, motivated by self-interest to retain their prominent place in society, to maintain some degree of independence by entering into various “agreements” with the Nazi regime. While it could be argued that such arrangements

ensured institutional independence from Nazi control, it is equally clear that there was a fusion of identity that neutralized the churches' voice and negated most forms of public institutional criticism of Nazi policies and practices (see Barnett).

[13] Moreover, the groundwork for the moral exclusion of Jewish victims was laid in the centuries preceding the Holocaust as Jews were regarded as aliens who were on the remote fringes of Christian Europe's universe of moral obligation. The historical stigmatization and exclusion of the Jews meant that the traditions, habits, images, and vocabularies for extreme dehumanization were already well established. The centuries-old image of the vile and diabolical Jew was woven into the fabric of German, and European, culture. The deluge of racist and anti-Semitic propaganda ribboning throughout Germany society during the rise of Nazism was thus profoundly effective in placing, and keeping, the Jews entirely outside the realm of moral obligation for perpetrators.

[14] In Rwanda, the churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, had historically reinforced "us-them" thinking and behavior both in public life and in the church itself.³ As early as 1957, the Catholic Church in Rwanda had supported the creation of a Hutu identity and nationalism.⁴ As radical Hutus gained power after the social revolution of 1959-1962, the Catholic Church found itself with well-placed connections at all levels of government and with unimpeded access to the centers of power. Similarly, many within the hierarchy of the Protestant churches in Rwanda had also developed intimate ties with the Hutu regime over the years. While several Rwandan bishops made statements urging unity, justice, peace, and harmony between 1990 and the start of the genocide in 1994, such admonitions came too late to reverse decades of religion-entrenched "us-them" thinking in Rwandan society.

[15] So, in 1994, as Hutu extremists began to dominate the government and plan the genocide, it was easy for the church – both Catholic and Protestant – to fuse its identity, and interests, with the ethnic, national, and political identities and interests, of the genocidal regime. As Gary Scheer writes of the church in Rwanda: "Staying on the good side of the local mayor became as important as staying on the good side of God (sometimes more so)" (326). As early as August 1994, within weeks after the end of the genocide, a World Council of Churches team that had visited Rwanda concluded that both Catholic and Protestant churches alike had ". . . betrayed their beliefs by aligning themselves far too closely with the former Hutu-dominated regime and its tribal politics" (*Christian Century*, 24 August 1994: 778). Clearly, the blood of tribal, ethnic ties ran deeper than the waters of baptism in Rwanda.

[16] Similarly, Michael Sells explores the role of Christian mythology in the fusion of religion and ethnicity in Bosnia that makes the two identities virtually indistinguishable – one "ethnoreligious" identity (1996). Central to the ethnoreligious identity of Bosnian Christians was the historical construction of Bosnian Muslims as "the other." Sells traces centuries of religion-based Serb ideology in which Muslims are portrayed as Christ killers, heretics,

³ This is consistent with much of African history in which the actions of missionaries, and colonizers, created the deep divisions that are at the root of most ethnic conflict on that continent (see Vail: 1-19).

⁴ An even more accurate analysis would go back to the introduction of Christianity during the colonization of Rwanda as helping to shape the "us-them" thinking that would be foundational to the 1994 genocide.

perverts, and sadists. He labels the ideology as “Christoslavism,” meaning the notion that Slavs are Christian by nature and conversion to another religion is ethnic or racial betrayal. Sells argues that such Serbian mythology provided the ideological fuel to motivate and justify the genocide of the Bosnian Muslims in pursuit of an ethnoreligiously pure state.

[17] In this vein, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been particularly criticized for its role in the Bosnian genocide. The church’s episcopate is dominated by hard-line nationalists with visions of a traditional, patriarchal society. As Sells points out, there was a close relationship of Serb bishops to war criminals, massive Serb funeral processions of war criminals, and repeated church attacks on the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as an anti-Serb plot (2003). In 1995, Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, said he personally believed that “much of what we are seeing in the Serbian Orthodox Church” could be criticized in terms similar to those in which the ecumenical movement criticized pro-Hitler Christians in Germany (*Christian Century*, 27 September 1995: 881).

[18] While Bosnian Serb extremists were responsible for about 90% of the war crimes committed during the conflict, Bosnian Croats also were impacted by a similar religious-based ideology that fostered anti-Muslim stereotypes and depicted them as enemies of Christianity. While the role of Catholicism in the Bosnian genocide has been less acknowledged, and the crimes of Bosnian Croat extremists were fewer, they were no less in intensity. Sells has chronicled, for instance, the activities of Bishop Ratko Peric and Franciscan friars in the Mostar region of Bosnia in supporting Catholic militias’ involvements in mass killings, expulsions, annihilation of the sacral heritage of other traditions (“triumphal shrines of exclusion”), and imprisonment of Muslims in concentration camps where prisoners were starved and tortured regularly (personal correspondence to Pope John Paul II, dated 27 October 1995). A 1992 article in a popular Catholic magazine rejoiced that the cross of Christ stood next to the Croatian flag, a Croatian bishop next to the Croatian minister of state, and “guardsmen wore rosaries around their necks” (cited in Sells 1996: 103).

[19] Ultimately, the product of such mythologies and ideologies that define “us” and “them” is an “excommunication” of victims from the perpetrators’ moral universe. In Sells’ words: “Religions in their ideological manifestations have traditionally been strong at promoting an interior identity in opposition to the religious other than in affirming identity in affirmation of the other” (2003: 329). This is a moral exclusion, with theological backing, that can have disastrous consequences. As Helen Fein writes: “A church holding out the possibility of conversion to all must assume a common humanity, and therefore may not sanction unlimited violence. But a doctrine that assumes people do not belong to a common species knows no limits inhibiting the magnitude of permissible crime” (30).

Genocidal Responses

[20] During the genocide itself, churches are often guilty of both sins of omission (silence and denial) as well as sins of commission (active participation in killings). In the former, there is a resignation of institutional agency in the face of mass murder and, in the latter, a functional involvement in the process of destruction.

[21] *Sins of Omission.* During the genocide itself, institutional responses most often center around silence. In the Holocaust, as previously pointed out, church hierarchies followed their own narrowly defined best interests, particularly that of protecting their own institutional autonomy within a totalitarian state. Such interests were best advanced by silence, rather than by protest or heroism. In Rwanda, church hierarchies also remained mostly silent. When churches spoke, their words were seldom direct calls for institutional action but were most often public displays of “theologically-correct” hand-wringing. In May 1994, for instance, in the midst of the Rwandan genocide, Catholic and Protestant leaders issued a joint letter calling for an end to the killing; yet failing to condemn the atrocities or to describe the mass murder as genocide. Likewise, Pope John Paul II called for a general end to the violence, but made no specific, overt plea to Rwandan Catholic Church leaders to use their authority to do so. Similarly, the Pope’s numerous pronouncements to end the violence in Bosnia unfailingly called for international intervention, but seldom for institutional leadership from the Catholic churches in the region.

[22] While it borders even more on a sin of commission, we also often see silence take the form of active denial as an institutional response during genocide. For instance, even after the revelation of Serb-initiated atrocities at the beginning of the Bosnian genocide, the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Serbian Orthodox church distributed a document in response to the “false accusations against the Serbian people” in which they denied the existence of such atrocities. “In the name of God’s truth,” the document read, “and on the testimony from our brother bishops from Bosnia-Herzegovina and from other trustworthy witnesses, we declare, taking full moral responsibility, that such camps [concentration and killing camps] neither have existed nor exist in the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina” (Sells 1996: 84). Unfortunately, at the time this document was composed in May 1992, thousands of non-Serbs were being raped, driven from their homes, and killed – all before the eyes of local Serbian Orthodox priests and bishops.

[23] *Sins of Commission.* Perhaps most chilling are the sins of commission in which individual actors, laity and clergy of Christian institutions, actively participate in – even organize – the killings. While present in the Holocaust (clergy members were even found in the membership of the Einsatzgruppen killing units) and Bosnian genocide, these sins of commission are most extensively documented in Rwanda (see Waller: 67). It was in Rwanda that many of the worst massacres occurred in churches and mission compounds where Tutsis had sought refuge. It is very likely that more people were killed in church buildings than anywhere else in Rwanda (see Longman). From the beginning of the genocide, human rights groups charged that some church leaders from various denominations used their authority to encourage the massacres and join in the killing. Ian Linden also contends that there “. . . is absolutely no doubt that significant numbers of prominent Christians were involved in the killings, sometimes slaughtering their own church leaders” (50).

[24] Unfortunately, the reality of such charges are now undisputed as we have a sad litany of well-documented cases. For example, in June 2001, a Belgian court convicted two Benedictine nuns, Sisters Gertrude Mukangango and Julienne Kisito, who were found guilty of having participated in the massacre of more than 7,600 people at the Sovu convent in Butare. Despite the convictions, the Vatican has taken no steps toward excommunicating the nuns and, indeed, a Vatican spokesperson could not understand why the court singled out

the two nuns “seeing the grave responsibility of so many [other] people and groups involved” (Hennig).

[25] Rwanda also saw the head of its Roman Catholic Church, Archbishop Thaddee Ntuhinyurwa, accused of abetting the murder of Tutsis by ordering at least 600 people out of the Nyamasheke Cathedral, in which they sought to seek refuge, and into a local stadium, where they were killed. Other Catholic priests presently under indictment or facing trial include Athanase Seroma, Hormisdas Nsengimana, Emmanuel Rukundo, and Guy Theunis (Belgian).

[26] An Anglican Bishop, Samuel Musabyimana, was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) for the crime of genocide, specifically “for killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the Tutsi population with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a racial or ethnic group” (a copy of the indictment can be found on the ICTR website). The indictment claims that, while Musabyimana publicly stated that he did not oppose the killing of Tutsis, he did not want killings at the Diocese and that the Tutsis should be taken to Kabgayi to be killed. The indictment further alleges that Musabyimana participated in, or facilitated, the killings by specifically instructing subordinates to assist soldiers and militias, and by directly or indirectly providing firearms to civilians, under circumstances where he knew, or should have known, that Tutsi civilians would be killed.

[27] Accusations against clergy of the Free Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist Churches are equally well-documented. According to an August 2001 report by *afronews*, Bishop Aaron Ruhumuliza, head of the Free Methodist Church in Gikondo, Kigali, helped the militia carry out a massacre in his own church on April 9, 1994. Michel Twagirayesu, the President of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda and a former vice-president of the World Council of Churches, is alleged to have betrayed parishioners and fellow-clergy alike in Kirinda, Kibuye (Hennig). Seventh-Day Adventist pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana was the first church leader to be brought to trial at the ICTR. In February 2003, the ICTR found it proven beyond reasonable doubt that Ntakirutimana had transported armed Hutu killers to a church and hospital in the Kibuye region of western Rwanda, where they killed hundreds of Tutsi refugees who had been encouraged by Ntakirutimana to seek refuge there. At his trial, a British prosecutor stated: “Dressed in his customary suit and tie, Pastor Ntakirutimana watched as people were shot and beaten to death, encouraging the killers to ensure no one survived” (Reuters new report, 19 September 2001; accessed at cnn.com that day).

Post-Genocidal Responses

[28] Christian institutions should be credited with decisive humanitarian efforts that provide physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance following genocidal violence. Just as decisive, though, is a pattern of Christian institutional post-genocidal responses to accentuate the churches’ persecution and resistance and make official declarations of contrition that avoid direct acknowledgment of institutional guilt.

[29] *Accentuation of Churches’ Persecution and Resistance.* The accentuation of the churches’ persecution and resistance is done by appropriating the victim group’s suffering and inordinately, and sometimes inaccurately, accentuating the exceptional individual actions of

Christian heroes and martyrs in the face of mass destruction. Both of these responses allow the Christian church to reallocate its resources (cognitive, rational, and otherwise) away from self-critical analysis of their institutional response to genocide. The problem is not a cognitive simplification or ignorance, but rather a willful hemorrhaging off of attention elsewhere.

[30] Following genocide, Christian institutions often will accentuate their own persecution by appropriating the victim group's suffering. Such appropriation is a deliberate act of acquisition in which the victim group's suffering is borrowed, or co-opted, by Christian institutions to accentuate their own persecution. In this way, Christian institutions, and their actors, distract attention from the victim groups' suffering by reallocating that attention to their own suffering.

[31] For example, what many Christians throughout the world know of the Holocaust is what they know through the story of Corrie ten Boom. As recounted in her bestselling book *The Hiding Place*, ten Boom's story is a moving testament to a family of devout Protestant Christians who offered their home as a refuge and hiding place for fugitives and those hunted by the Nazis. The efforts of the ten Boom family are reported to have saved the lives of an estimated 800 Jews. Eventually betrayed, Corrie and her sister were sent to Ravensbruck camp, where Betsie (the sister) later died.

[32] One cannot take issue with the heroic activities of Corrie ten Boom and her family. At issue, though, is the way in which Christian institutions have appropriated the victim group's suffering (specifically, Jews) as their own through a widespread embrace of *The Hiding Place* as their point of interface with the Holocaust. In this instance, what matters is the representation of an event, rather than the event itself, and the representation of the Holocaust as an event of Christian suffering to generations of Christian readers is problematic – particularly to Jews, the targeted group of the Nazi extermination policies. (This partially explains why ten Boom's story is so little known among American Jews and has been virtually ignored by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.)

[33] We see a similar appropriation of the Jews' suffering in the Catholic Church's response following the Holocaust. Rather than engage in self-critical analysis of their institutional response (which many have described as complicity) to the Nazi process of destruction, the Vatican's primary response was to appropriate the Jewish victims' suffering by taking quick steps to ensure that the Nuremberg Trials also included the persecution of the Christian church, particularly the Catholic Church in Germany and the Nazi-occupied territories. While choosing, on the grounds that the "universal religious mission of Church would be compromised" (from the papers of Edmund A. Walsh, Georgetown University Archives; dairy entry dated 22 May 1945), not to cooperate with the Nuremberg Tribunal in preparing a list of war criminals (and even advocating that war criminals be given clemency), the Vatican readily supplied the tribunal with "an important collection of documents dealing with the persecution of the Church [Catholic] by the Nazi regime" (quoted in Gallagher: 169).

[34] This appropriation of the victim group's suffering is complemented by a tendency to inordinately, and sometimes inaccurately, accentuate the exceptional individual actions of Christian heroes and martyrs in the face of mass destruction. Alongside the continued

pursuit of the beatification of Pope Pius XII and the glorification of Christian martyrs such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bernhard Lichtenberg, Kurt Gerstein, Martin Niemöller, or Corrie ten Boom, there is a misdirection of attention away from the complicity of the dominant social structure of an *institution* (the Church) and to the exceptional actions of *individuals*. At issue here is not necessarily the veracity of their lives and witness. Rather, at issue here is how the Christian church has used the lives and witness of exceptional individuals to deflect attention from a self-critical analysis of the churches' institutional response during genocide. Rather than focusing on the silence and neglect of the many and, particularly, the institution, there is a glorification of the individual actions of the few.

[35] Most recently, this has been seen in Pope Benedict XVI's May 2006 visit to Auschwitz. Visiting Auschwitz as "a son of the German people," Benedict was silent on the collective guilt of the German people, the biblical and Catholic roots of anti-Semitism, the role of the Catholic Church under Pius' leadership during the Holocaust, and his own personal experiences during the war as a member (involuntarily conscripted) of the Hitler Youth. He was not silent, however, in continuing a Papal tradition of extolling the virtues of the exceptional Catholic individuals who stood up in the face of Nazi tyranny. Benedict's address at Auschwitz highlighted the lives of two Auschwitz victims – both now Catholic saints – who have become a source of tension between Catholics and Jewish groups: Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest accused of editing anti-Semitic tracts, and Edith Stein, a convert from Judaism who entered a convent in a failed bid to escape Nazi persecution. In this example, the accentuation of exceptional individual actions is coupled with a gross appropriation of the victim group's suffering. As Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League pointed out, Benedict did not make "one explicit acknowledgment of Jewish lives vanquished simply because they were Jews" (Meichtry).

[36] *Official Declarations of Contrition*. Following the Holocaust, the initial work on statements of contrition came from individual Christian theologians, not institutional leaders. Such individual statements of contrition, however admirable, avoided directly shining a spotlight on the dark recesses of Christian institutional actions before and during genocidal violence.

[37] So, it was with much anticipation that the world received the post-Holocaust statement, *Nostra Aetate* (Latin for *In Our Time*), issued by the Catholic Church in 1965. While the Vatican heralded the document as a significant change in Jewish-Christian relations, critics assailed it for its brevity ("much too little and much too late") and its lack of acknowledgment of the Holocaust as a reference point. In response, this Conciliar declaration was followed in 1975 by the *Guidelines for Implementing Nostra Aetate* and in 1986 by the *Notes on the Correct Ways to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*. Despite the Catholic Church's efforts, however, many still expressed dissatisfaction. So, in 1998, the church issued *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* as yet another addition to the ongoing dialogue in Jewish-Christian relations. Like the declaration and implementing documents that preceded it, *We Remember* found its critics. Many took the document to task for the continuing failure of the Catholic Church to acknowledge its complicity in the Holocaust; others expressed concern that the conciliatory tone in the document was weaker than many of Pope John Paul II's public statements; still others criticized the footnoted tributes to Pope Pius XII and the document's attempt to defend the validity of a distinction between theological anti-Judaism and social anti-Semitism.

[38] Over the next several decades, post-Holocaust declarations of contrition emerged from a wide range of Protestant denominations around the world. As Peggy Obrecht points out, most of these statements shared two important similarities. First, they affirmed God's continuing covenantal relationship with, or election of, the Jewish people as the people of God. Such affirmations, often couched in dual covenantal or "partners in waiting" language, were meant to reverse centuries of theological supersessionism as Christian doctrine. Second, most of the statements affirmed the responsibility of the church to teach about Judaism from Judaism's own texts. In so doing, it was hoped that the misleading stereotypes that lay at the root of "us-them" thinking in Jewish-Christian relations would be ameliorated.

[39] In Rwanda, reactions of contrition, although varying in degrees of accountability, came from many Christian churches. In May 1995, the archbishop of Canterbury, speaking for the Anglican Church, went to Rwanda himself and apologized. In December 1996, Protestant and Catholic Christians – laity and clergy, Rwandan and European – came together in Detmold, Germany to "confess their own offense and to humbly ask forgiveness of their victims." That same month, the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda became the first denomination to confess the failure of its leaders to provide the moral and spiritual strength to denounce and oppose the genocide. Other Protestant congregations asked pardon for the atrocities committed by their members and even excommunicated members alleged to be organizers of the genocide.

[40] An official denominational response from the Seventh-Day Adventists did not come until two years after the genocide and, even then, the response, given by General Conference president Robert S. Folkenberg during a sermon in Kigali, only addressed broad issues of Christians' responsibility for forgiveness and reconciliation with no clear mention of a need for accountability (see Kukolja). The Catholic response has been no more concrete. In May 1996, Pope John Paul II wrote in a letter to the Rwandan people: "The Church . . . cannot be held responsible for the guilt of its members that have acted against the evangelic law; they will be called to render account of their own actions. All Church members that have sinned during the genocide must have the courage to assume the consequences of their deeds they have done against God and fellow men" (Hennig).

[41] In Bosnia, stopping short of directly acknowledging institutional responsibility, Catholic bishops haltingly asked "for forgiveness from all those who feel in some way hit by the injustices of sons of the Catholic Church" in a February 1996 pastoral letter. In the same letter, they also were quick to pledge to "forgive all who have done injustice and evil to us" (Malcolm). Responses from the Serbian Orthodox Church have even more fully evaded responsibility and, instead, have stressed that all sides and religious factions in the region – including Catholic Croats and Bosniak Muslims – are guilty. In addition, the Serbian Orthodox Church expressed "deep concern" about the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement between the Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian governments (*Christian Century*, 3 January 1996: 8).

[42] What is missing from nearly all of the official declarations of contrition following each of these genocides is full acknowledgment of the guilt of the churches as institutions. At the institutional level, there has been little confrontation with their own sin; a gaping void where there should be a call for sincere repentance. Where guilt has been confessed, it has been

inevitably confessed at either the level of individuals or with a global abstractness that offers no concrete restructuring of doctrine, ecclesiology, or church hierarchy so as to ensure that such an event will not be repeated. This resonates with the work of Michael Emerson and Christian Smith who contend that, in terms of race relations, evangelical Christians most consistently call for changes in *persons* that leave the dominant social structures, institutions, and culture intact. To challenge the very foundations of a larger *system* has simply never been part of the evangelical worldview.

Conclusion

[43] In his analysis of the role of Christian churches in the Holocaust and in Rwanda, David Gushee argues “. . . that the presence of churches in a country guarantees nothing. The self-identification of people with the Christian faith guarantees nothing. All of the clerical garb and regalia, all of the structures of religious accountability, all of the Christian vocabulary and books, all of the schools and seminaries and parish houses and Bible studies, all of the religious titles and educational degrees – they guarantee nothing” (28).

[44] This paper has sought to understand how a force, religion, that has wielded such a tremendously civilizing effect on human society, can foster institutions that “guarantee nothing” in the context of genocidal violence. In describing the patterns of institutional Christian response to genocide, we are now poised to make prescriptive recommendations of how Christian institutions might function differently in a context of genocidal violence. To do so most effectively, continuing research in this area has at least three compelling questions to address.

[45] First, we have to ask if the Christian churches’ response to genocide is any different than other institutional – political, social, educational, etc. – responses to genocide. Perhaps the recurring pattern of response described in this chapter is less about the Christian church *specifically* and is more about the nature of institutions *generally* (for example, institutions act in their own narrowly-defined self-interests, are not self-critical, etc.).

[46] Second, we should also learn from the challenge of the *exceptions* of Christian defiance and resistance in the face of mass murder. Rather than inaccurately holding up these men and women as typical of institutional responses, we should be asking how institutions can foster cultures that encourage such voices and protect the integrity of religious identity. For example, the identity of Hutu Muslims centered more on religion than ethnicity. For them, religion was not fused with or co-opted by ethnic or national identities. Rather, religion was the primary identity and other allegiances fell secondary to it. During the genocide, Hutu Muslims – living together in the Biryogo neighborhood of Kigali – stood up to the militias and most Muslim Tutsi were spared. The fact that mosques never became the killing sites that many Christian churches and compounds became, helps explain why Islam is the fastest growing religion today in Rwanda – already claiming about 15% of the population (Lacey).

[47] Thirdly, we must ask to what degree can Christian institutions redeem themselves – and the world – by being involved in post-genocidal reconciliation? As Wolf points out, too often the social agenda of the church is isolated from the message of reconciliation. There are moral moments, however, when both Catholic and Protestant Churches are active in reconstructing their societies torn by genocidal conflict. Following the Holocaust, Jewish-

Christian organizations, with significant Christian institutional leadership, are operating around the world to foster interfaith dialogue. In Rwanda, Christian clergy and laypeople have joined Kagame's "Government of National Unity" in preaching and fostering unity among the Rwandan people. In Bosnia, Sarajevo's Cardinal Vinko Puljic has become one of the most prominent, and active, spokespersons for tolerance and multicultural coexistence.

[48] To do reconciliation most effectively, however, we can no longer avoid asking tough questions of why the church was silent, or complicit, in the face of mass destruction. We can no longer avoid asking why, in the name of God, Christianity has been at the front of defining the "other" throughout human history. It is only in facing such questions that Christianity can begin to fulfill its promise and foster periods of tolerance.

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