

# ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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## Numbers 21:4-9

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# Some definitions

- Anti-Judaism: antipathy toward the Jewish religion or toward Jews primarily because of their religion
- Antisemitism: antipathy toward Jewish people because of their “race” (itself a false category)
  - Result: Jews, some of whose ancestors had converted to Christianity, were still considered Jewish by German law (1935); grounds for deportation to death camps
- *Shoah* (Hebrew): the systematic murder of Jewish people, one after another, until ~6 million were dead.

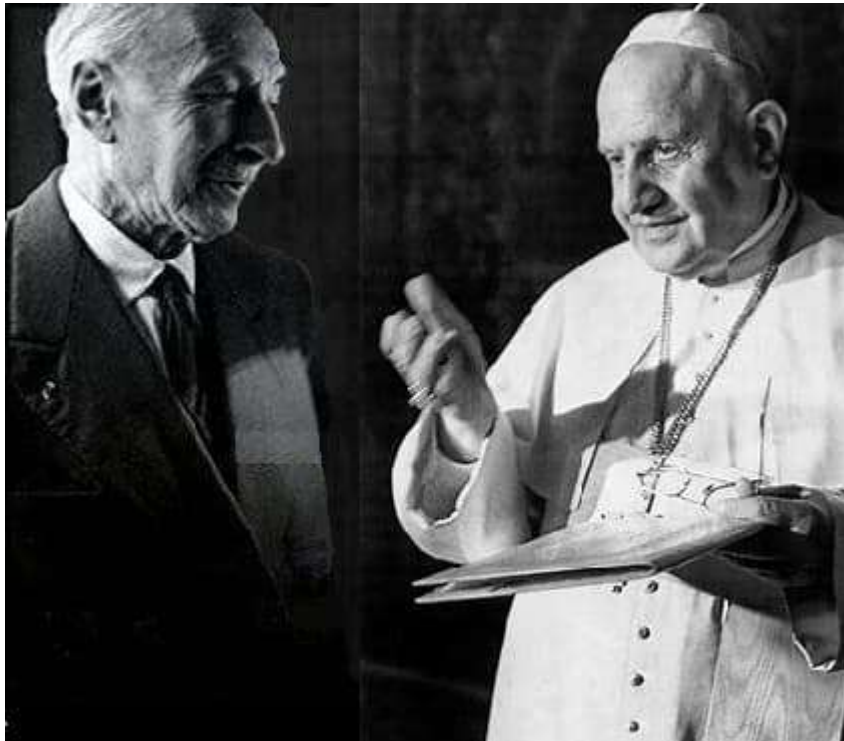
Nazi rally, 1934: “There cannot be two Chosen People. We are the Chosen People.” A. Hitler



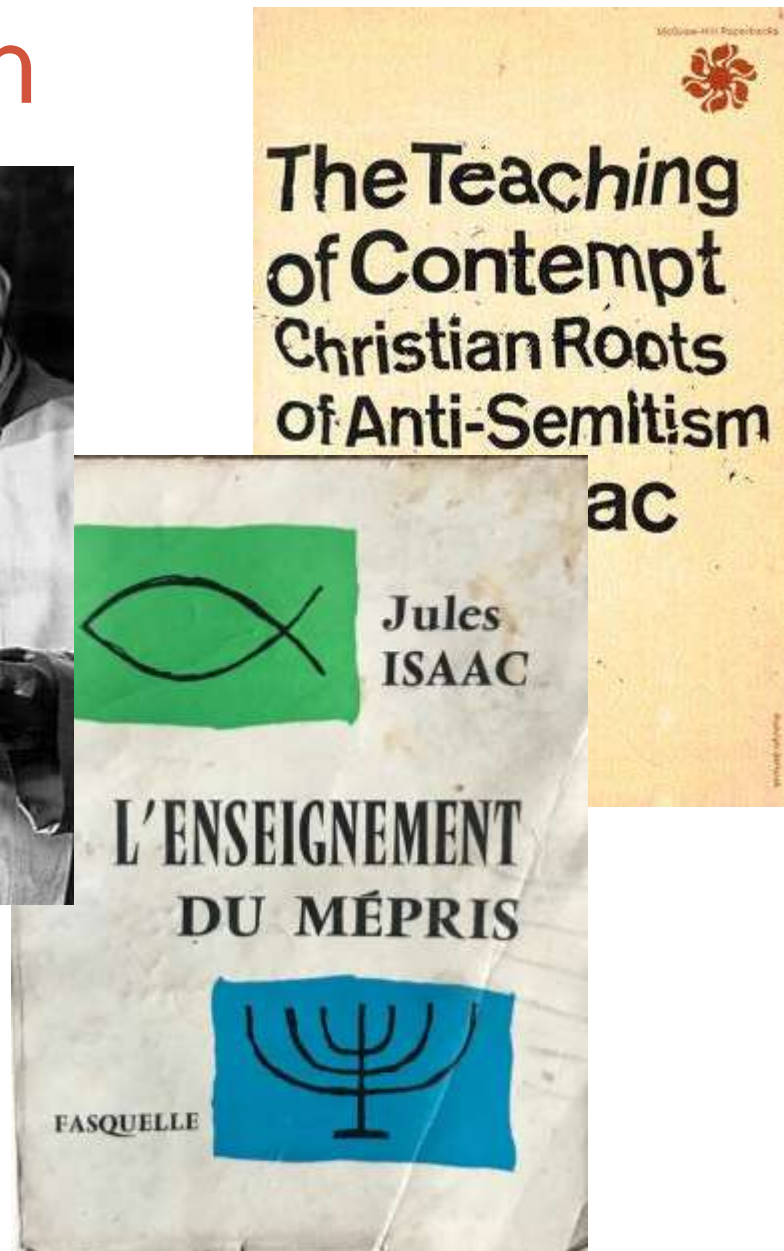
# Christian anti-Judaism and the *Shoah*

- Most Germans were Lutheran or Catholic. Most saw no conflict between their religion and the antisemitic policies of their government.
  - Example: Euthanasia & forced sterilization were carried out in Catholic hospitals, under rules meant to avoid “conflict of conscience,” but the rules were ignored -- no conflict
  - “Ordinary Men,” police reservists in *Einsatzgruppen*, carried out mass murders during the week, went home on leave on weekends. No coercion required.
  - Thousands of civil servants and church officials helped identify Jews, producing lists of “passengers” for transport, etc.
- Theological anti-Judaism was a “necessary, but not sufficient” cause of the *Shoah*.

# Post-war reaction



Jules Isaac 1877-1963 (left) and John XXIII 1881-1963; pope, 1958-1963 (right)



## Gospel of Matthew, ch. 23, ca. 85 c.e.: “sibling rivalry”

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them....

27 ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.’”



## Christian (“New”) Testament, ca. 100 c.e.

John 8: “[The Jews] said to him, ‘We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.’

[Jesus said to them] ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say?

It is because you cannot accept my word. **You are from your father the devil**, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.’



# I Don't Wanna Be a Pharisee

A children's song with a serious truth



Trip Kimball  · [Follow](#)

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“The Pharisees were considered spiritual elitists. Their religiosity was so elevated only a select group could attain to it. They viewed themselves as superior to others and others saw them this way in matters of their religion.

“Jesus didn't see them this way and this bothered them.”



“I don't wanna be a Pharisee  
Don't wanna be a Pharisee  
'Cause they're not fair you see  
I don't wanna be a Pharisee”

## Christian (“New”) Testament, ca. 100 c.e.

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# Supersessionism

- Christianity's own "Replacement Theory"
- Destruction of Temple (70 c.e.) and Jerusalem (120s c.e.) = divine judgement on "Jews" for rejecting Jesus as Messiah, even though the Romans killed Jesus
- God's favor now rests on children "by faith" not inheritance
- But: early church accepts Hebrew Bible ("Old") as *valid*; continued existence of Jews as *necessary*
  - Validity: prophecy → fulfillment
  - Necessary: "witnesses" (through suffering) to God's justice

# Barriers to change: #1, Hierarchy

- Jewish-Christian relations emerges as scholarly field after the *Shoah*, after Vatican encyclical *Nostra Aetate (In Our Age)*, 1965
- Other denominations follow – slowly
- High-level teachings are often ignored. Vatican, Lambeth, the General Convention: not always understood locally, much less implemented.
- 2000 years of practice

## Barrier #2: Lectionary; liturgy

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John 3:14-21 [Jesus said to Nicodemus, a Pharisee] And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God....’

## Barrier #3: Doing what's easy

- Assuming that the Gospels are literally “what Jesus said”
  - Resisting sermons or teaching that suggest otherwise (comfort food, not real “meat”)
- Preaching *against* hypocrisy, legalism, hardness of heart
  - Even preaching linking us to “hypocritical Pharisees” uses them as comparison group
- Blaming biblical “Jews” for not accepting Jesus; assuming we would have behaved differently
- In sermons or in teaching, playing **Us vs. Them**
- Assuming that we aren't conditioned by 2000 years of tradition
- Confusing Judaism, Jewish values with the Israeli government

# Change?

- Nationalism, authoritarianism, antisemitism reinforce each other – then and now. We must be outspoken allies.
- Christianity without Jewish **roots & challenge** = deformed, impoverished, false
  - God wills the salvation of all, is faithful to God's promises
    - God of Hebrew Bible is Jesus' God; no saving God, no saving Jesus
  - Orthopraxy (ethical analysis → right action) vs. Orthodoxy (belief)
    - “The true response to God is in the deed.”
- Study the Hebrew Bible for its record of God's love
  - Read the Book of Jonah (Yom Kippur)
  - Don't rely on lectionary snippets
- Take responsibility: read, think, question *more*
- Challenge lazy assumptions: pulpit, Bible study, etc.



## Numbers 21:4-9 – How does this apply to us?

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