

»Against Catholics«: *Kristallnacht* and its Aftermath in the U.S. Catholic Press

A Speech on the Occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day (2019) at the University of Notre Dame

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The following address was presented at the Hesburgh Library, University of Notre Dame, on January 25, 2019, to mark the launch of the University's participation in the »Holocaust Unfolded« Project sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. In attendance were volunteers from the local Jewish community, as well as professors, students, staff, and librarians from the university, which reports a student body consisting of 80% – and a faculty of at least 50% – Catholics. The publication of this speech is offered as an invitation to explore a still compelling topic from a somewhat uncommon perspective. The more familiar matter with respect to Catholics and the Holocaust is surely the failure of the Vatican to adequately and forcefully condemn the genocide at a time when it was sufficiently informed to do so. This topic first erupted into controversy with the production of Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* (1963, *The Representative*) in Berlin, a play that itself made history with its indictment of Pius XII, and that prompted numerous historical studies including, most recently, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (2000), by Susan Zuccotti. The focus here is quite different, namely, the Catholic press in the United States in 1938–39 – a point in time already deep into Nazi antisemitic policies, but still prior to the Holocaust itself. A time, as Erich Kästner insists, when Nazi policy might still have been successfully confronted, and the genocide possibly avoided.

1. Overcoming Catholic Defensiveness: »Remembering« What We Perhaps Never Quite Knew

»Against Catholics« is the title of one of the earliest articles to appear in the American Catholic press in the wake of the Nazi pogrom widely known as *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass, and it captures *in nuce* both a dominant and fatally flawed

strain in the Catholic response.¹ But before we consider in detail some of the material from the first tranche of reporting turned up by the impressive team of volunteer researchers, I want to recall what I hold to be the best autobiography ever written by a Holocaust survivor. In *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (1992) Ruth Klüger tells the story of her improbable escape from Auschwitz.² It is the last year of the war and she, her mother, and sister somehow make it to Eastern Bavaria. They have managed, for a while at least, to disguise themselves as Germans. They shed their tell-tale striped uniforms for civilian clothes, and join a group of German onlookers as they line a village road while concentration camp inmates, who are being herded into town, pass them by. The young Ruth Klüger, along with all those Germans, is witnessing a »Todesmarsch,« a death march, conducted in order to evacuate the concentration and extermination camps in the East. Not, let it be noted, to rescue the inmates; quite the contrary. The retreating Germans wanted to erase any evidence of the genocide, and therefore often burned and bombed the camps and forced tens of thousands of malnourished and poorly clad Jews and others into the bitter winter of 1945, mostly on foot. Their guards were of course armed and motorized, and typically shot anyone who could not keep up with the inhuman pace demanded of them.

The young Ruth Klüger, who by all odds should have perished at Auschwitz, watches this spectacle of malnourished camp inmates being driven through this picturesque German town, knowing how close she came to sharing their fate, and how precarious her own disguise is. Then – and this is the real genius of the book – the adult memoirist takes over and observes the following: After the war, none of these German townspeople, the ones standing shoulder-to-shoulder with her watching this parade of unfortunates, will remember what they saw. Of course they won't. Who, the adult autobiographer asks, could possibly bear that psychic burden? Without sardonicity, she simply allows that this is a »knowledge« to which many could admit no access. What Klüger is proposing is an astonishingly generous and humane insight, and one that the field of memory studies would wrangle with for years thereafter: Denying knowledge of the Holocaust is not necessarily a matter of conscious deception, or malignant deceit. Klüger seems momentarily to include herself in this phenomenon of traumatic forgetting. It is a show-stopping moment in a book that, on the whole, vigorously insists on the authenticity and veracity of survivor testimony. And this too is something I admire about Klüger: she appreciates, as few others do, the antinomies of memory – its vulnerabilities and its gifts.

1 »Against Catholics,« *The Pilot*, December 3, 1938, p. 4.

2 Ruth Klüger: *weiter leben. Eine Jugend*, Göttingen: Wallstein 1992. An expanded, English language version (to which the author referred as a »parallel memoir« rather than as a translation) appeared as *Living On. A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: Feminist Press 2001).

Today we mark Holocaust Remembrance Day (or are just about to do so, in a couple of days). For academics, the salient question has been: »What did the Germans know, and when did they know it?« This is a difficult question to answer, in terms of assessing historical evidence. But it is not so hard emotionally, at least not for most of us. As non-Germans, or Germans of a younger generation, we don't have the intimate familial connection to the events that can trigger the numbing of memory that Klüger writes about. Years ago, I asked my friend, Richard Levy, who was an eminent historian of antisemitism, to address my students on this topic in a class called »Germany Confronts the Holocaust.« The answer, he said, can perhaps be boiled down to this: While we can never be sure how much the »average German« knew of the extermination camps in the distant East (in what is now Poland), we can know this much: First, »hundreds of thousands of Germans« (as Raul Hilberg first demonstrated) were involved in the genocide in some way, and we know that many wrote about it in letters and postcards, and talked about it while on leave. Some even bragged about it. It was not a well-kept secret. But the second point is the one that really hits home. Levy said that what the average German would have noticed was the disappearance of neighbors from apartment buildings and neighborhoods, of colleagues at work, of teachers and pupils at school, of acquaintances in local businesses. And those who moved into those »vacated« apartments, and took over those »Aryanized« businesses would most certainly have known the source of their good fortune. Early in the pogrom against German Jews, before the beginning of the War, and long before the onset of the Holocaust per se, »everyday Germans« would have witnessed the suspension of civil rights and the removal of their erstwhile neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens. They knew, in other words, at a time when something might still have been done to prevent the catastrophe to come – at a point in time when the *Catholic Union and Times* confidently reports to its American Catholic readership that »No one seems to think that war with Germany is remotely possible« (29 December 1938; p. 4).

They knew. But so did we. Americans, and American Catholics in particular, appear to have been fairly well-informed about the emargination, expropriation, extortion, vilification, incarceration, and forced emigration of German Jews. We knew all this at a time before the great catastrophe, the Shoah, the genocide itself, even begins. But what did we *do* with this knowledge? This is perhaps the more uncomfortable question for us, because it strikes closer to home. And it gets to the heart of today's gathering. With its vast and unrivaled holdings of U.S. Catholic newspapers, the University of Notre Dame, and the Hesburgh Library in particular, is a treasure trove for the »History Unfolded: US Newspaper and the Holocaust« project of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), an initiative that seeks to understand how the Holocaust of European Jewry was covered in the American

press.³ As we begin to make sense of this data, which is my undertaking here, it will be important to acknowledge that Jewish suffering and Jewish persecution were seldom the central concern, except insofar as they served to frame Catholic victimhood and vulnerability. The focus of my remarks today will be on a sliver of the events covered by this ambitious project, namely the reporting in US Catholic newspapers on the pogrom of November 9, 1938, almost a full year prior to the beginning of WWII, and three years prior to the commencement of the genocide itself.⁴

But first let us note that this assessment of press coverage is not an utterly new undertaking. Those who care about this question owe a huge debt to Deborah Lipstadt, whose 1986 study, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust (1933–45)*, paved the way for this kind of analysis.⁵ Lipstadt got us off to a good start, establishing without a doubt that the quality papers of the day provided readers with fairly extensive coverage of the German campaign against Jews that would culminate in the Holocaust. Over a dozen years later, Peter Novick's, *The Holocaust in American Life*, takes up this inquiry (alongside others) by investigating the publications and documents of American synagogues and Jewish Community Centers to understand better what was being reported about the genocide and its aftermath by Jewish groups.⁶ But these two path-breaking – and to some extent still controversial – studies leave plenty of room for further work. In fact, they only scratch the surface. »History Unfolded« holds out the possibility of getting a denser, richer, and finally more accurate picture of the Holocaust in the American press of this era.

Here at Notre Dame, this means scouring American Catholic publications for relevant reporting. As we do this work – and here I want to thank the volunteers who will stare into microfiche readers for hours as they immerse themselves in these papers – we may need to challenge ourselves, our preconceptions, as well as those assumptions made by contemporaneous editors and authors who cast their reporting in a manner that today will need both to be contextualized historically and called

3 Cf. <https://newspapers.ushmm.org>.

4 The actual prosecution of the genocide of European Jews begins with Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and continues through 1944. Thereafter many thousands will continue to die on the notorious death marches and as a result of the war itself. In retrospect, we tend to refer to the entire process of Nazi-era anti-Jewish persecution and emargination as part of the »Holocaust,« even though the genocide itself does not begin until well after WWII commences. The distinction may be important insofar as it reminds us that prejudice and persecution may, but do not inevitably, lead to genocide. Students and lay readers will find the USHMM online *Holocaust Encyclopedia* invaluable, online at <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org>.

5 Deborah Lipstadt: *Beyond belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945*, New York: Free Press 1986.

6 Peter Novick: *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin 1999.

into question. The Naturalists worried that too much understanding leads to uncritical acceptance – »tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner« – but this need not be our fate.

Let me frame this inquiry with reference to Ruth Klüger's implicit reminder that an examination of our own perspective on and proximity to the material matters greatly. Where you stand, as she well knew, determines what you see. I know that we are joined today by numerous members of the South Bend Jewish Community eager to help document Catholic reporting on the Holocaust. With your help, we (Catholics) may learn to see not just the Holocaust, but ourselves and our forebears differently. For the challenge is not merely to gather relevant articles, but to interpret them. And this may well be harder for those of us inclined to be defensive about our Catholic parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. This is »our« potentially intimate, familial connection that may make it difficult to see matters clearly. In this spirit, allow me to challenge my fellow Catholics not to rush to those assuring headlines that seem to affirm solidarity with Jewish victims. Those can surely be found, and they deserve due consideration. But we will need to attend to the fuller picture, even when those details are not flattering, complimentary, or uplifting. For this archive, we can safely assume, will reveal little that is factually new about the genocide itself. But it does shed a great deal of light on American Catholics' engagement with the topic.

2. The Hesburgh Library Archives: Preliminary Findings

Allow me at last to summarize, ever so briefly, the picture that emerges from the first »sprint,« that first batch of articles discovered by volunteers like you, and now, because of your good work, are in the hands of the USHMM. If one is seeking a clear statement of Catholic solidarity with German Jews, as I confess I found myself silently doing as I read through these articles, one can do no better than Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, who less than a month after *Kristallnacht* (on November 9, 1938), or The Night of Broken Glass – the first major pogrom in Germany and Austria that resulted in the incarceration of some 30,000 Jews in Dachau – forthrightly implores Catholics to pray for Jews as victims of religious persecution. In this pre-Vatican II era, when anti-Judaic religious rhetoric was common, Sheen admirably (to my way of thinking) declares that:

Jewish blood has a claim to dignity which no other people can claim, for it was of the Jews the Redeemer came. It was Jewish blood that flowed through the veins of the Son of Man and the Blessed Mother. This is their greatest glory, and even if they rejoiced in it not, we Catholics would still protest as vehemently against their

persecution, for as human persons they are endowed with inviolable rights which no power may take away without surrendering the right to govern.⁷

I can remember my own mother, who was a great fan of Bishop Sheen, taking this same line. She liked to remind people that Jesus was a Jew whenever she sensed even an inkling of antisemitism, and to my child's mind, that was enough. That was the final word.

But to my adult mind, this kind of philosemitism is problematic. First, we see the good Bishop problematically endorsing the notion of »Jewish blood,« a conception one encounters quite frequently in these newspapers, and one rooted not in Nazi but rather in American eugenics that was respectable and widespread in the 1930s. In this the Bishop is hardly distinctive. And even while Sheen seems to be endorsing universal human rights in that last eloquent sentence quoted above, he introduces the thought by reminding his readers that the Jews' greatest distinction hails from their function as progenitors of Christianity, and of Catholicism in particular. Now, you might object that I am imposing a post-Vatican II insight on a churchman speaking twenty-five years before the Second Vatican Council would officially renounce the teaching on Judaism as superannuated and on Jews as Christ-killers. And you'd be right. But still it is worth noting that while relatively welcoming and supportive, Bishop Sheen is by no means ahead of his time.⁸

And what Sheen states tactfully and implicitly, others will trumpet with much less finesse. In the Christmas 1938 issue of the *Catholic Union and Times*, »Published,« as its motto proclaims, »For and By the 393,000 Catholics of Western New York,« we read this about the Jews' proper place vis-a-vis Christians:

7 »Prelate Cites Great Pride of Jewish Race. Recalls our Lord's Blood was Jewish,« *The Pilot*, Saturday, December 3, 1938, p. 12.

8 Indeed, if we were to immerse ourselves properly in the Church's contemporaneous pervasive anti-Judaism, the humanity of Sheen's views might stand out all the more. The caesura marked by Vatican II in this respect is illuminated by historian John Connelly, who observes in this regard: »A second pioneer in the Christian-Jewish dialogue, the American Paulist Father Thomas Stransky of Milwaukee, who helped draft *Nostra Aetate* as an advisor at Vatican II, makes the point more radically. The Declaration signaled a 180 degree turnabout,« he said in a speech of 2006, reversing all that the church had thought about Jews since its early days, a time when teachings about Christ's divinity or the Trinity had yet to be formulated. From the third century at the latest, church authorities taught that the Jews' destiny was to wander the earth suffering retribution from God for rejecting Christ, serving in their destitution as the most direct evidence that the church's claims to God's favor were correct. By acts of discrimination passed by councils through the centuries, the church then created conditions calculated to keep the Jews destitute. This situation was supposed to endure until the end of time when the Jews finally turned to Christ.« See John Connelly: *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965*, Cambridge: Harvard UP 2012, p. 2.

They [Jews] will learn that the star symbolic of the House of David is *our* star; that it is the religious property of *our* Church which the Son of David established; that it is as rightly of the possession of the Catholic Church as is the Old Testament in which Balaam foretold the appearance of the Star of Jacob at the time the scepter, the regal power and sovereignty of Israel, should be broken. ... They [Jews] may share in its glory by following logically the teachings of the Old Testament ... [that is, by recognizing] that it symbolizes the fulfillment of the law by the coming of the Messiah; that He is Jesus the True Star Who fills the world with His eternal brightness.⁹

Promulgated in the »Official Newspaper, [of the] Diocese of Buffalo,« the message could hardly be clearer: Jews can find their real value in testifying to the truth of Christ.

In point of fact, one looks far and wide in the Catholic press of the day for any substantive account of *Kristallnacht*. It is often referred to in passing, obliquely, in summary fashion, euphemistically, or just in code. Even Bishop Sheen, our most compassionate informant, characterizes it as »Germany's invasion of Jewish homes and the exile of the Jews themselves.« Yet, this pogrom, which in its violence was so chaotic that it actually upset Nazi officials, was far more than a series of »home invasions«; and the »exile of the Jews« almost sounds poetic when compared to the facts of razed synagogues, destroyed shops, brutal beatings, murders, threats, and the removal of thousands to concentration camps. Not to mention the wave of suicides that this night of terror provoked among German Jews.

Suffice it to say that nowhere in the Catholic press of the day – at least not in the articles I read – does one find a substantial and candid account. In the vast majority of cases, the persecution is fundamentally mischaracterized as religious intolerance, which inevitably arouses envy among Catholic commentators, who repeatedly complain that in all this attention to Jews, intolerance toward Catholics and other Christians – in places like Russia, Spain, and Mexico – is being overlooked.¹⁰

9 Stars as Symbols—Christian and Non-Christian.« In: Catholic Union and Times, December 22, 1938, p. 23.

10 The occasional acknowledgment of racial antisemitism (as in the article »Anti-Semitism« by N.C.W.C. News Service, *Catholic Union and Times*, Thursday, November 17, 1938, p. 4), does not appear to make a dent in the larger picture of Jewish persecution as prologue to and metaphor for Catholic oppression, which is here typically conceived of as religious in nature. But here too the matter is more complex, as historian John Connelly shows. Contrary to widespread assumption, the Church did not always oppose racism (and racial antisemitism), but at times in fact abetted it. See Connelly: *From Enemy to Brother*, op. cit., pp. 6–9 and 11–35 (»The Problem of Catholic Racism«); and 36–64 (»The Race Question»). The overcoming of this pernicious legacy was largely made possible, Connelly demonstrates, by the intervention of Jewish converts to Catholicism, who influenced and helped write the key sections of *Nostra Aetate* (the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions).

This front page story from the *The Catholic Sioux Herald*, a little over a month after *Kristallnacht*, illustrates the point: »While it is true that foreign citizen Jews resident in Germany were disparaged and expelled, it is likewise true that many social impediments were placed in the pathway of Catholic and Protestants by the Nazi government ...« (December 15, 1938).¹¹ The US-Catholic interpretive frame at the time is perhaps best epitomized by this set of headlines from reporting published quite close to the events of »Kristallnacht«: »Noted Catholics Protest Against Attacks on Jews« is the large print header at the top of the story, indicating Catholic concern and solidarity; yet it is supplemented tellingly by this subtitle: »Prelate Cites Surprising Lack of Sympathy When Catholics Persecuted.«¹²

You might object that these writers, close to the events as they were, should be forgiven for lacking the clarity we possess in hindsight. But as Lipstadt showed over thirty years ago, *The New York Times* and other quality papers reported forthrightly and accurately about the pogrom and related events. Perhaps you cringed, as I did, at the description of Jews being merely »disparaged,« as if this were simply a matter of unpleasant criticism or slander. But the greater error to be found in the *Sioux Herald* is the astounding formulation referring to »foreign citizen Jews resident in Germany.« This obscures the fact that the vast majority of victims were in fact German nationals, whose citizenship and civil rights had already been egregiously eroded three years earlier by the Nuremberg Laws (September 15, 1935), which in turn had been inspired in no small part by Jim Crow legislation in the American South.¹³

Is it wrong, then, to wonder if this myopia was in any way driven by anti-semitism? Sadly, we needn't speculate; we simply need to read on to the passage in the same piece quoted above where the author identifies Jewish »racial tendencies« – including »aggressiveness« – that have »carried their sons to the pinnacle of success in journalism, in radio and in finance.« Elsewhere in the Catholic press the accusation is less explicit. But when we encounter repeated complaints that some

11 »Persecution: Jewish and Christian.« In: *The Catholic Sioux Herald*, vol. 7, no. 24, December 15, 1938, p. 1/front page. It is clear from the reporting that the Church is following the Nuremberg Race Laws (and the successor legislation) rather closely, but remains concerned principally for the violation of the Concordat. See: »Vatican Views Marriage Laws With Concern. Fascism Forbids Inter marriages,« *The Pilot*, Saturday, November 19, 1938, which includes this telling conclusion: »The wound inflicted on the Concordat is undeniable.« The focus is on the restriction of the Church's prerogatives.

12 *Catholic Union and Times*, vol. 66, no. 47, Thursday, November 24, 1938, p.1/front page.

13 See James Q. Whitman: *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, Princeton: Princeton UP 2017. The whole paradigm of an »American model« for core elements of Nazi antisemitism is, in my experience, foreign to American students. For example, Henry Ford is known and celebrated in the US as a pathbreaking industrialist, but rarely as seen as the towering antisemite who financed anti-Jewish publications, promulgated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and in this way served as a model for Hitler himself.

powerful but unidentified group appears to be controlling the press to keep the story of oppressed Christians out of the news, the implication is clear – to me at least – that Jews are to blame.

Indeed, the overwhelming impression the naive reader would get from this coverage is that Catholics are under siege by the Nazis at the time of *Kristallnacht*. Jewish suffering, even when taken seriously (as it sometimes is in these pages), is typically treated as a prelude to the real story, which is the targeting of Catholics. Even the urbane Father Edmund A. Walsh, founder of Georgetown's August School of Foreign Service, exhibits this tendency when he breezes by the Jews to get at his real concerns, the Catholic victims.¹⁴ Like so many other Catholic authors of the day, he takes time to personally name Cardinal Innitzer of Vienna, Bishop Faulhaber of Munich, and even the Protestant Pastor Niemoeller, who is already at this point incarcerated in a concentration camp.¹⁵ But the thousands and thousands of Jews, who are the principal targets, remain nameless, referred to only in summary fashion.

You may at this point be growing impatient, wondering if I have lost my bearings entirely, having perhaps forgotten that we are speaking of the late 1930s, a time of still undisputed »WASP« (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) cultural and political domination in the United States. This is after all a minority Catholic press; of course these authors are likely to showcase their »own« heroes and to lament their own victims. This is a time in American history – long before John Kennedy's presidency, of course – when Catholics were a more segmented, somewhat isolated and emarginated minority. Why should we be surprised at these tribalist tendencies? Perhaps the Catholic press felt the need to compensate for the lacunae in the dominant secular papers and to defend against perceived distortions, bias, and condescension.

All true enough. Yet the fact remains that we – or the Catholic press of the time – got it wrong. Wrong about the principal victims of the pogrom and the anti-Jewish legislation; wrong in mischaracterizing the violence as religiously rather than racially motivated; wrong in promoting some anti-Jewish stereotypes; and wrong in elevating ourselves – Catholics – as the chief victims.

14 See »Declares No Compromise with Totalitarian States. Dr. Walsh, S.J. Addresses Mass Meeting on Freedom.« *The Pilot*, Saturday, December 10, 1938, p. 8.

15 For another example, see »Archbishop of Vienna Denies Accusations. Thanks Bishops of U.S. for Message.« In: *The Pilot*, vol. 112, no. 48, Saturday, December 3, 1938. P. 1/front page, where Theodor Cardinal Innitzer sonorously intones: »If indeed in the discharge of my Episcopal office I must bear calumnies and misrepresentation I shall not refuse to walk the dolorous way of Christ Our Lord.«

Fig. 1: »Target of Nazis,« Catholic Union and Times, Thursday, November 17, 1938, p. 1/front page.

Catholic

Published For a

Subscriber in
N. C. W. C. News Service

Target of Nazis



Cardinal Von Faulhaber

Always a staunch supporter of the rights of the Church in Germany and a fearless critic of the Nazi regime, Michael Cardinal Von Faulhaber, Archbishop of Munich, was the target of Nazi outbreaks Saturday. His residence was stoned and considerable damage done by Nazi mobs. This picture of the Cardinal was taken at a recent ceremony.

See Violations Of Concordat in Italy's Race Law

New Marriage Regulations Conflict With Catholic Practices.

Marrriages of Jews, Catholics Banned

Even Converted Non-Aryans Are Ineligible to Marry Under New Law.

Vatican City, Nov. 17 (NC). — Violation of the Concordat between Italy and the Holy See is seen by ecclesiastical authorities in the new "Law for the Defense of the Race" just promulgated by the Italian Government.

It is expected that the Vatican will protest certain provisions of this new law as violative of the Concordat, but as yet there has been no official pronouncement on the subject.

The very first article of the new law declares that marriage between an Italian citizen belonging to the Aryan race with a person belonging to other races is prohibited, and, therefore, marriage contracted in the face of this prohibition is null.

Article Six of the new law says marriages, contracted in the face of the aforementioned prohibition have no civil effect, and, therefore, cannot be entered in the civil register.

Cannot Be Recorded

"A marriage performed in violation of Article 1 cannot produce civil effects," says Article 6, "and must not, therefore, be inscribed in the registers of the civil status (vital statistics), in conformity with the dispositions of Article 5 of the Law of May 27, 1929, Number 947."

The section adds that "it is forbidden to the minister of religion before whom such a marriage is performed to fulfill the obligations of the first clause of Article 8 of the above-mentioned law."

The clause referred to above says: "The minister of religion before whom the marriage is performed, must explain to the parties the civil effects of marriage, reading Articles 120, 131, and 132 of the Civil Code."

Church Will Not Compromise With Reds or Fascists

The caption refers to Cardinal von Faulhaber (Munich) as »a fearless critic of Nazi regime,« and »the target of Nazi outbreaks Saturday.« There is no visual or textual counterpart when it comes to Jews.

Fig. 2: *The Michigan Catholic*, April 21, 1938, p. 10.



The image, which shows Jews being warmly received, while the foregrounded Catholic refugees are on their own, appears under the article with the headline: »Nazi Leaders Continue War on the Church; School Prayers Abolished and Youth Societies Suppressed.«

And all this without even getting to Father Coughlin, that notorious anti-semitic priest who broadcast his hate speech from the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan.¹⁶ Don't worry. I know my time is up, and that we could easily spend an hour just on Coughlin. But as you browse the titles of the articles carefully curated

16 Charles E. Coughlin | Holocaust Encyclopedia.

by our volunteer researchers, do not, I urge you, take comfort too quickly in headlines that seem to reassure the reader that Coughlin is being censored by Church authorities. A more careful reading, though one I can't fully give here, will reveal a press quite willing to give Coughlin wide berth to defend his ideas, to run his self-serving ads, and to publish both news stories and commentary that promote anti-Jewish stereotypes. And the Church hierarchy's jesuitical distinction – the bishop gave Coughlin *permission* to broadcast his anti-Jewish diatribes, but withheld official *approval* – proved to be such a fine one as to evade the understanding even of the vice president of one of Detroit's major broadcasters, WJR, »The Great Voice of the Great Lakes.«¹⁷ For a while, at least, the Church was having it both ways. When it comes to Fr. Coughlin, the Church's alleged rebuke was hardly an unambivalent moral stance – at least not at this crucial point in history.

But our task is not merely to stand in judgment of our forebears. »History Unfolded« is, I hope, as much about the present as it is about achieving a clearer understanding of the past. Without wishing to polemicize unduly, I think one can say that Fr. Coughlin's hate speech, his spurious identification of Communism with Judaism and Jews,¹⁸ is precisely analogous in its wild generalization and undifferentiated indictment of a whole people, to the calumny currently being hurled at Mexicans and other Hispanics from Central America by the president of the United States (Trump).¹⁹ And what about the quasi-official endorsement of anti-Black racism in the wake of the 2017 »Unite the Right« rally in Charlottesville? How will we respond?

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- 17 Coughlin, and coverage about him (supportive and sometimes critical), bulk large in this phase of reporting. The author of the article »Jewish Leaders Alarmed at ›Mistakes of Fact‹ in Fr. Coughlin Sermons« – note the quotation marks around »mistakes of fact« – finds that »Jews in America have overreached themselves« in their effort to organize opposition to Hitler. In: *The Tidings*, December 2, 1938, p. 4 (continued from p. 1). See also »Father Coughlin Gives Own Views States Cardinal,« in which Cardinal Mundelein (Chicago) walks the fine line between saying Coughlin does not speak for the Church, but has a right to speak his mind as an American (In: *Catholic Union and Times*, Thursday, December 15, 1938. Front page/p. 1), which however he does as a Catholic priest using the radio venue at the Shrine of the Little Flower, a parish he founded and led until 1966. He did not cease antisemitic and sometimes pro-Nazi broadcasts until 1940. Relatedly, the Archbishop of Detroit, Mooney, distinguishes between Coughlin's »permission« to speak (which he has) and »approval« of his speech by the Holy See (which he doesn't) in »Detroit Prelate States Stand on Father Coughlin,« *ibid*.
- 18 See for example Christopher Browning: *The Fake Threat of Jewish Communism.*« NYRB, February 21, 2019: *The Fake Threat of Jewish Communism | Christopher R. Browning | The New York Review of Books.*
- 19 The »Weimar analogy,« the debate regarding the way in which the Weimar period illuminates the US slide into fascism under Trump, took off among American intellectuals mainly after the presentation of this talk, with the exception of Browning's »Suffocation of Democracy,« which appeared already in 2018 (see below). Here are a few of the more prominent voices in what became a salient national debate: Timothy Snyder: *Essay The American Abyss*; Samuel Moyn: *The Trouble with Comparisons*; Jason Stanley: *Why Fascism in Post-Trump*

Will we be numbed by the trauma of hate-filled politics and pretend not to know or notice? Will we look away from this inglorious practice, or will we learn from our own problematic past with the toleration of bigotry?

America Isn't Going Away (podcast – 43 min): Vox Conversations on Apple Podcasts; and Christopher Browning: The Suffocation of Democracy | by Christopher R. Browning.

