

Honors 290: Philosophy and the Holocaust

Franklin Littell, "The Meaning of the Holocaust," from The Crucifixion of the Jews (1975)

A. Why there is a post-Holocaust crisis in Christianity

1. Christians participated in and enabled the Holocaust, without seeing any conflict between their Christian beliefs and their enabling/participation [70]. 95% German Christians continued to be members of their churches (Catholic and Protestant)
2. Top Nazis were privately contemptuous of Christianity, and had plans to suppress it if they won the war
3. However, Nazism in practice was religious and drew on Christian themes [69]
4. "German Christianity" (a formation within German Protestantism) went beyond existing European anti-Semitism (of both "theological" and "cultural" forms) in heresy [76], but the earlier anti-Semitism prepared the groundwork for this
5. Because of this history, Christians have to be able to reestablish their credibility with humanity

B. The Holocaust is a challenge to belief in God. But don't want to take Rubenstein view that God was absent, nor that God brought about the Holocaust; but want to retain Jewish-Christian view that God is active in history.

C. How Christians must deal with this crisis of Christianity

1. Acknowledge anti-Semitic dimensions of Christianity, both theological (similar to, but not exactly the same as, what Langmuir calls "anti-Judaism" [79]) and cultural (including contemporary, even post-Holocaust forms, e.g. in American Christian journal, *Christian Century*)
2. Repudiate anti-Semitism, as not merely an ethnic prejudice but a heretical belief (for Christians)
3. Acknowledge the Jewish dimension of Christianity
4. Acknowledge and value Jewish people—their specific history and religious tradition (this goes beyond 2)
5. Support the state of Israel

D. wrong and right ways to understand Judaism and Jewish religion

1. religion vs. peoplehood
2. abstraction vs. historical
3. Judaism as "counterculture" (77)

E. Against assimilation (i.e. expecting Jews to assimilate)