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Review Article

From Syllabus to Shoah?

Katholicizismus und Antisemitismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich.

By Olaf Blaschke. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.

pp. 443. DM 78.00. ISBN 3-525-35785-0 kart.

Why have Catholics have gotten off so lightly when guilt for German antisemitism has been assessed? Their demonstrably high levels of immunity to the siren calls of National Socialism during the Weimar Republic's last elections have made them look good, at least in comparison to other groups. The harassment and at times persecution of their clergy under the Nazi dictatorship underscored the incompatibility between the Catholicism and this most antisemitic of regimes. And finally, most historians of Germany are aware that the representatives of the Church had, long before the movement's triumph under Hitler, vehemently denounced "antisemitism." In this study of antisemitic discourse within German Catholicism, Olaf Blaschke has knocked the props out from under that last piece of evidence.

In a brilliant piece of Begriffsgeschichte, Blaschke reminds us of the pejorative connotations that adhered to the term "antisemite," which was, after all, a neologism, indelibly associated with the radical, vulgar, obviously

disreputable, and usually anti-Catholic rabble-rousers whose activities in the 1880s stamped the term with their own image. No respectable person, and certainly no Catholic, wanted to be associated with these louts, who were, moreover, competitors of the Center Party. It is no surprise that every effort was made to keep them at arm's length. A smaller, but significant point: since Catholic social organizations were by definition for Catholics, they have been spared the scrutiny and censure that has fallen on their non-confessional counterparts when the latter (as was the case of student fraternities) moved to exclude Jews.

The missing scrutiny and censure have now been made good. In a work that was initially more than 1,000 pages long, Blaschke has scoured a heterogeneous mass of Catholic writings and found that topoi we would unhesitatingly call antisemitic--from negative connotations associated with the word "Jew," through assumptions about the deleterious role of Jews in the economy and their unfair political power, to (on occasion) willful misreadings of the Talmud and accusations of ritual murder--were taken for granted ("selbstverständlich") in the Catholic world. The "shaming judgment of historical scholarship," which Catholics "will have to learn to live with," is that far from being a bulwark against racist antisemites, Catholic antisemitism was "in many aspects their avant guard" (128). Comparisons--between regions within Germany and, outside Germany, with nineteenth century America and France's "Second (sic) Republic" (153)--lead to a single conclusion: "Not to put too fine a point on

it: not all antisemites were committed Catholics...but almost all loyal Catholics were inclined to antisemitic prejudice, from 1870 at the latest" (158). Blaschke's "resumée": Catholics shared an aversion to Jews not because they failed to live up to their religious principles. "Rather, Catholics were antisemitic precisely because they wanted to be good Catholics" (282).

Blaschke acknowledges that Catholic organs vigorously condemned racism--but only because it contradicted their own ideology. He acknowledges that Catholic hostility to Jews was typically less intense than that of "confessing antisemites" (Bekennnisantisemiten)--but only because "vehement Jew-hatred was considered un-Christian" (102). He acknowledges that, unlike these same confessing antisemites, Catholicism did not present antisemitism as a universal panacea (Allheilmittel)--but only because it had its own universal panacea (102). Catholic denunciations of antisemitism were never "authentic" (motivated by concern for the Jews), but always "egoistic" and "autistic" (the terms are used synonymously): that is, done to protect the faithful and the faith. In the extremely broad way that Blaschke conceives self-protection, the characterization of Catholic motives as "egoistic" seems true.

Jews never loomed large, Blaschke says, on the Catholic horizon. Even in Austria, where antisemitism was more salient, it was subordinate to other issues on the Catholic agenda (151). But the Catholic "milieu" instrumentalized prejudice against Jews on behalf of issues that it did care

about. In the very process of "immunizing" the faithful against a "pure" racism that would have threatened its own foundations, Catholicism "infected" its adherents with aversion to Jews, "incubating" its own version of antisemitism in the population (281), with fatal consequences. Had Catholics felt solidarity with their Jewish neighbors, the Nazi project would have been impossible. "It was not 'hatred' alone that led to the Holocaust, but rather the indifference and antisemitic disposition of Germans of all confessions...." (282), the same conclusion Ian Kershaw reached in 1983, when he stated that "the road to Auschwitz was built by hate, but paved with indifference."¹

Blaschke's achievement is to have made a persuasive case both for the ubiquity of topoi hostile to Jews within the nineteenth-century Catholic milieu and for the relative unimportance of Jews and the "Jewish Question" to the milieu itself--and to insist that these two findings belong together. Herein lies his originality, for most historians have tended to see either the first or the second as overriding the other. To hold both of these elements together in a single picture is not easy--and the author himself does not always succeed.

Blaschke makes much of antisemitism's "function" for Catholicism, which he treats under five headings: Coherence maximization (enforcing conformity), Complexity minimization (encouraging simple people to think simply), Compensation (for Catholics' "dramatic inferiority" [115]), Competition-

¹Public Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich.

control (dismissing challenges from within and without as "Jewish"), and our old friend Counter-modernization. Except for the alliteration, none of this seems new. What the five C-words offer is mostly scapegoat theory and cultural code. The latter was a good idea when Shulamith Volkov--who is mentioned only once in the body of this work--first proposed it in 1978, and it has lost none of its cogency since.

More original is Blaschke's argument that the course of Catholic antisemitism in the Empire is explained by crises within the Church rather than by developments in society. He trains his lens on the culture of ultramontanism, the current within the Church that became dominant from roughly 1850 to 1950. Pugnacious and uncompromising, concerned above all to preserve "right doctrine" (and therefore encouraging the centralization of teaching authority in a much-embattled Holy See), ultramontanes were at the same time often willing--for instance, in questions of miracles and popular piety--to meet folk beliefs half way. The latter element, especially, makes them plausible candidates for the most superstitious forms of antisemitism, and some historians might have left it there, as a fruitful suggestion. In Blaschke's hands, however, ultramontanism becomes what the Kondratieff cycle was for Hans Rosenberg: the key term in a new algorithm. "The higher the degree of ultramontanization, the greater the tie to the church, and the harder the struggle against modernisation, the more intensive its antisemitism" (158). But while we have measures for the business cycle, how can we measure degrees

of ultramontanization--especially once the Kulturkampf had forced almost all of Germany's Catholics to accept the pejorative label out of self-respect?

Blaschke's attempt to test his hypothesis against a "control group" of anti-ultramontane Catholics is not convincing. For one thing, the numbers of those who broke with Rome in 1870 over papal infallibility and formed their own Old Catholic Church, as well the other quite marginal circles who remained in communion, are so small that central tendencies are not measurable with any security. Some of Blaschke's contrasts, moreover, seem arbitrary. Thus we see the anti-ultramontane historian, Ignaz Döllinger, who attacked antisemitism in a speech in 1881, played off against the ultramontane Alois Müller, whose book expressing a "similarly fundamental" opposition to antisemitism appeared "only late:" 1882 (97). The "control" becomes even more questionable when one remembers that what made Döllinger's break with Rome the longest-running newspaper story of 1870-71 was the fact that the priest had once been a poster-boy for ultramontanism.

Over time, Blaschke's control group actually undermines his argument. Thus the "only" Catholic deputy in any of the Empire's antisemitic parties (166), Oswald Zimmermann, the head of the Reform Party in 1893, turns out to have been not a Catholic at all, but an Old Catholic, as Blaschke admits: that is, part of his control group. It was Zimmermann, not Döllinger, who pointed to the future, as the Old Catholics became increasingly infected with racism and eventually

Nazism. Since strong German feeling had always been central to their makeup, it is no surprise that as German nationalism became increasingly antisemitic, so did they. But Blaschke tries to argue around the fact that his control group proves worse than the ultramontanism that is his explanation by saying that--like Protestantism--it was "not afraid of a plurality of opinion," a plurality "not possible" within ultramontanism (169). That judgment depends upon the kind of plurality you mean. If you are looking at ideas about the economy, you will probably find a much broader range of opinion within mainstream (i.e., "ultramontane") Catholicism than within Blaschke's "liberal" groups. If you are looking at ideas about race, on the other hand, Catholicism's range was indeed narrow, and for the very reason that Blaschke excoriates: the Church protected its "dogmas"--which is simply a technical term for the propositions of faith, one of which is the unity of humanity created in the image of God.

About the specifically historical element in his story--that is, how things develop over time--Blaschke has little to say. He measures peaks and troughs of anti-Jewish feeling by counting Catholic writings devoted to antisemitic themes. By this method, the nineties, which produced the same number of such publications as the seventies (twenty-one), is judged equally antisemitic (126). Had he controlled for the rapidly rising Catholic population (and thus, potential authors), he would have found that Catholic antisemitic writing dropped proportionately. We learn that the twenty-six year old Franz Hitze published an article in 1877, at the height of the

Kulturkampf, that included antisemitic topoi, but nothing about the subsequent forty-four years of his activist career. Inattentiveness to time also marks Blaschke's treatment of the Volksverein für das katholische Deutschland, one of the largest organizations in prewar Germany, and one that endured until 1933. The Volksverein, we are told again and again, was antisemitic, an important discovery if true, since, as Blaschke notes, it is "even rated as liberal" (216). Yet every one of his references to the Volksverein's antisemitism (pp. 60, 87, 100, 126, 216, 223, 244-45, 259-60) comes from a single issue of a journal published in 1893, three years after its founding. It is not surprising that "from the old to the new syllabus,² from Pius IX to Pius XII..." (282) Blaschke discovers little change.

Why is Blaschke so reluctant to acknowledge that the Catholic hierarchy was less hostile to Jews in the twentieth than nineteenth century? That the Weimar Center Party, one of whose deputies sat on the board of the Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus and which ran a Jewish candidate in Berlin in 1930, had improved in the half-century since its miserable performance in the Prussian Landtag debate of 1880? One reason is that his internalist theory demands it: if religion did not change, and Catholics remained within its orbit (i.e., within the "milieu"), then antisemitism--the dependent variable--remained functional. More important, however: to give due weight to improvement would undermine the trajectory

²Blaschke means the Vatican's eight theses attacking racism, sent to Catholic universities in April 1938, which "even contemporaries," he says (280), "saw [as]..."

--"From Syllabus to Shoah," as the sub-title of his conclusion puts it -- that gives his topoi their poignancy.

If one were interested primarily in the topoi of the nineteenth century, then one might note not only that myths about Jesuits circulated as vigorously as those about the Talmud, but also that petitions against them attracted hundreds of thousands more signatures than those against Jews. While no rabbi was expelled because of the latter, the Society of Jesus was indeed banished. (Not to worry: the "cunning Jesuits" went underground, Blaschke reassures us [45].) As late as 1905, Rudolf Mosse's Berliner Tageblatt, whose daily circulation exceeded that of all of the Catholic newspapers in Blaschke's table (283) put together, complained that Germany was being overrun with Jesuits.³ The empire saw vandals attacking synagogues, notably in Pomerania and West Prussia in 1881; it also saw roughly twenty-five percent of Catholics' houses of worship in Prussia simply put out of business by the government. That Catholics felt besieged was not -- pace Blaschke -- simply a consequence of the unmet challenges of the "Moderne." Nor was it "encirclement-phobia" that "came close to paranoia" (262; also 63, 111). Defensiveness was a response to a reality that consisted not just of the slurs of fellow citizens but of attacks by a state that proclaimed them its "enemies." Blaschke knows all of this, and even refers to some of it (mostly in footnotes),

above all a continuation of the fight against modernity...."

³Quoted in Róisín Healy, "The Jesuit as Enemy: Anti-Jesuitism and the Protestant Bourgeoisie of Imperial Germany, 1890-1917" (dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 1999), 237.

but he is not interested, because -- his title notwithstanding -- what happened in the Kaiserreich does not much interest him. For it is not the topoi of the nineteenth century, but the murder of the Jews in the twentieth century that gives Blaschke's portrait of German Catholicism its explosive force. Absent that, this would be just a collection of nasty stereotypes documenting man's inhumanity to man -- and would certainly not have gone immediately into a second printing. But although we know about these murders, the Catholics who are his subjects did not.

Whether Blaschke's portrait is superior to its competitors will be judged to a considerable extent on his claim to being a better, more subtle reader than his predecessors. These, he argues, have naively taken the assertions of Catholics (and the testimony of Jews) at face value. "Only insight into the rules and boundaries of Catholic discourse" allows one to determine not only what people said, but also what -- because of these rules -- they could not say (301n. 12). Yet his own analysis of Catholicism's Nachlaß often lacks precisely this kind of sophistication, as I found when comparing Blaschke's reading of Georg Emanuel Haas's unsigned 1887 article on "Austrian Antisemitism" with the thing itself.⁴ Haas attacked racism as un-Christian and denied the truth of the blood libel. He also dealt with the more familiar stereotypes. Alluding to medieval charges that Jews had desecrated the host, he

⁴"Der Österreichische Antisemitismus," Historisch-Politische Blätter, Bd. 100 (1887): XXVI, 358-379. Haas wrote at least thirty articles for this journal, whose

insisted that whatever Jews may have done a half a millennium ago, religious arguments against them now were invalid. Yes, Jewish journalists mocked their Christian fellow citizens; but so had Voltaire, the enemy of Jews. Yes, Jews have used free markets, especially in the East, to get the upper hand; but the economic incompetence of Poles and Hungarians was equally to blame. In any case, in their business practices ("Smartneß"), the Jews were no different from other Western businessmen, such as the Italians, the French, the British -- and certainly no worse than Yankees. Haas's conclusion came close to accusing his countrymen of "eliminationist antisemitism," as he warned desperately against "the danger of wild outbreaks of passions and popular hatred" against the Jews if such talk continued. In Blaschke's hands, however (207, 321n. 32), Haas's cri de coeur becomes an example of "consensus-antisemitism" (96), "the better, Catholic antisemitism" (146) that he sees as ultramontanism's answer to (rival) antisemitic movements, and thus another proof of the central argument of this book. Curiously tone deaf, Blaschke does not hear Haas's subjunctive, nor does he register Haas's use of a classic move in the rhetorician's repertoire: the initial acknowledgment of a skeptical audience's concerns before refuting them (a remarkable oversight on the part of someone who makes such generous use of the "Zwar...aber" ploy himself). In fact, the "disclaimer" rhetoric that Blaschke imputes to Catholic discourse generally -- an initial statement that "disclaims"

editor, Edmund Jörg, is one of Blaschke's chief examples

antisemitism in order to shield the speaker from criticism when he follows with antisemitic remarks himself -- is precisely the reverse of the rhetoric that Haas so carefully deploys. Blaschke makes short work of historians who cite the antisemites' attacks on the Center Party's "philosemitism" as proof that the Center defended Jews: for confessing antisemites, he points out, no one else was ever antisemitic enough. For Blaschke, on the other hand, as his treatment of Haas's impassioned warning against hatred shows, no other critic of antisemitism is ever critical enough.

If one is going to be attentive to silences, as Blaschke wishes, then one might listen even harder. Why is it that the classic Catholic study of the Kulturkampf, Johannes Kissling's three volume work published in 1911, "eschews antisemitism, even in dealing with sensitive themes....," as Blaschke concedes in a footnote (313n. 43)? Might it not be that in 1911 things looked different to Catholics than they did in 1886, when the polemicist Paul Majunke wrote an account of the Kulturkampf burdened with antisemitism? Why does the 1907 Catholic Encyclopedia's article on Abraham a Sancta Clara, that prolific seventeenth century friar whose popularity among Catholics during the Empire is proof, for Blaschke, that they shared his antisemitism, note his influence on an admiring Schiller and Jean Paul, but say nothing about his views on Jews? Could it be that these views were not something that the encyclopedia's editors thought would edify either the faithful or the wider public?

of antisemitism.

I came across a similar silence in my own research on Mission-Vicar Eduard Müller (1818-1895), a man so revered for his social work among the Catholic poor of Berlin that a church was built in his honor and a street given his name. Yet the Center Party, which he represented for twenty years, kept him quiet (he spoke in the Reichstag only once); and during more than half century as a priest, he never advanced beyond chaplain. Only when one reads his writings can one see why. They drip with maniacal antisemitism -- a complete surprise to me when I stumbled upon them for the first time. His two hagiographic biographers, writing in 1898 and in the mid-1930s, never mention it. On the contrary, the latter author (who hid Jews during the war) makes a point of mentioning Müller's friendship with a schoolmate named Cohn, and Cohn's financial support for the priest's philanthropic projects. What can only be called the unofficial cover-up of their hero's judeophobia demonstrates how little such views were thought -- as early as 1898 and as late as the Third Reich -- to become a man whom the little people were mentioning for canonization. "Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue"--that is, an implicit acknowledgement of virtue's claims. Blaschke's understanding of human motivation might have benefited from more of La Rochefoucauld and rather less of Voltaire.

These are deep and difficult interpretative issues, about which honest people can differ, just as they can differ about whether Jews and Catholics were divided by real conflicts -- and about the various ways we might define

"real." But precisely this assumption of good faith, upon which all scholarly exchange rests, Blaschke denies. The ugly slur "apologist" and its derivatives appear at least eighteen times in this relatively short work. Base motives are imputed as freely to fellow scholars as they are to the historical actors who are Blaschke's subjects (e.g., 301n. 14); their "interests," we read, are "all too transparent" (14).

Blaschke's reference to a "katholizismusnahen historiography" induces the same queasy feeling as the Frankfurter Allgemeine's remark in spring 1998 that Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, as a Jew, was writing "in seiner eigenen Sache." Those who speak this way are not trying to convince their opponents, but to bully them.

That Blaschke is very smart, no one can doubt who has read his numerous articles and acid reviews, and he does not hide his light under a bushel here. Katholizismus und Antisemitismus demonstrates wide research, great intellectual energy, and even greater forensic brio. Writing with molten indignation against Catholicism then and now, but even more against historians who have understood Catholicism differently, it invites comparison with Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners in its moral purpose; its desire to reach beyond an audience of academics (and, on a smaller scale, its success in doing so); its coining of new phrases by which its theses can be readily identified (Goldhagen's "eliminationist antisemitism,"

Blaschke's "better antisemitism" and its confusing synonym, "double antisemitism"); its dismissive treatment of previous scholarship; and its neglect of historical change in favor of the prosecutor's brief. Both occupy the moral high ground, so that anyone who dissents from their explanations must risk appearing to deny the subject itself.

Unlike Goldhagen, however, who sees a radical discontinuity between past and present, Blaschke is not shy about drawing a direct line between the evils of his own period and those of today--invoking academia's current boogie-man, "fundamentalism," at least thirty-one times. As with that equally fashionable buzz-word of the fifties, "totalitarianism," the requisite social science machinery gets rolled into view to demonstrate how oranges can -- once we move to a high enough level of abstraction -- be recognized as apples (308n. 28). The genuinely common features, however, lie not in what the word denotes, but in its always pejorative connotations. Just as it was salonfähig in the late nineteenth century to attach "Jewish" to whatever was felt to be threatening in modern society, regardless of its connection with real Jews,⁵ it has recently become acceptable to attach "fundamentalist" -- the self-designation of those American Protestants committed to premillennial dispensationalism and Biblical literalism -- to romtreuen Catholics, Muslims, any and all American evangelicals, and

⁵E.g., In 1881, Edmund Jörg wrote in the Historisch-Politische Blätter 87/I: 16, that "we have always preferred to use the more general term of "Geldjudentum,

lately, orthodox Jews (only the latter go unmentioned by Blaschke): groups whose institutions and histories are unlike and whose ideologies are in many respects in direct conflict. From a student of speech rules, one expects better.

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which unfortunately applies to many baptized Christian Germans, on into the aristocracy...."