

John Cornwell: Constantine's Sword

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When John Cornwell's book *Hitler's Pope*[\[1\]](#) was released in the United States in 1999 it generated intense media coverage. Cornwell painted Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) as virtually a silent collaborator in the face of Nazi Germany's "Final Solution." While the alleged "silence" of Pius XII was central to media coverage, Cornwell's thesis went deeper than that. There was a reason for the "papal silence" that had little to do with fear or even anti-Semitism (though he broadly hinted that Eugenio Pacelli was at best unsympathetic to Jews throughout his life).

According to Cornwell, Pope Pius XII willingly sacrificed the lives of Jews on the altar of papal power: "Pacelli's failure to respond to the enormity of the Holocaust was more than a personal failure, it was a failure of the papal office itself and the prevailing culture of Catholicism. That failure was implicit in the rifts Catholicism created and sustained – between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the secular, the body and the soul, clergy and laity, the exclusive truth of Catholicism over all other confessions and faith. It was an essential feature of Pacelli's ideology of papal power, moreover, that Catholics should abdicate, as Catholics, their social and political responsibility for what happened in the world and turn their gaze upward to the Holy Father and, beyond, to eternity."[\[2\]](#)

Critics generally dismissed Cornwell's book as sensationalism with little serious or original scholarship. Ronald J. Rychlak in *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*[\[3\]](#) effectively rebutted most

of Cornwell's major assertions. Cornwell's aim was to discredit Pius XII, and through him, his successor, Pope John Paul II. Cornwell wrote that Pope John Paul II "has reinstated the ideology of papal power. Pluralism, he believes, can only lead to centrifugal fragmentation; only a strong Pope, ruling from the apex, can save the Church...Pacelli's monolithic pyramidal model of the Church has once again reasserted itself." [\[4\]](#)

It was striking that little attention was given to this important conclusion. Cornwell was using the Holocaust to advocate and argue for a particular position within the Church on the role of papal authority. His book was written as an advocacy paper against the leadership of Pope John Paul II within the Church and in favor of a particular so-called liberal vision of how the Church should function. It was surprising that few were struck, particularly Jewish commentators, by this use and abuse of the Holocaust for internal Church debate. In retrospect, it appears blasphemous to the memory of the millions slaughtered by the Nazis.

Similarly, Garry Wills in his recent book *Papal Sin* uses the Holocaust to score points in an attack on papal authority. [\[5\]](#) Wills' book is a wide-ranging screed in opposition to myriad Catholic beliefs. [\[6\]](#) *Papal Sin* refers to what Wills calls the "structures of deceit" that he contends are inherent to the papacy. Wills charges that the Catholic Church exists in a system of lies, falsifications, and misrepresentations meant to artificially prop up papal authority. The whole structure and belief system of the Church, from sacramental and moral theology, to ecclesiology, Marian beliefs and the essential understanding of Christ's death as atonement for the sins of mankind, are part of a fabricated "structure of deceit" according to Wills. In discussing the Nazis and the Holocaust, he essentially regurgitates Cornwell's thesis. Wills argues that all the actions of Pope Pius XII during the years of Nazi power were

calculated responses meant to defend papal authority. Again, like Cornwell, he uses the Holocaust as a means to put forth a particular anti-papal perspective within the Catholic Church. The horror of the Holocaust is utilized as a tool to make points in an internal Church debate.

The latest author to enter the field of the Church and the Holocaust is James Carroll. A former Paulist priest and award-winning novelist, Carroll's new book is *Constantine's Sword*.[\[7\]](#) Carroll's stated goal is to present a "history" of the Church and the Jews to show the linkage between Catholic belief and the Nazi Holocaust. "Auschwitz, when seen in the links of causality, reveals that hatred of Jews has been no incidental anomaly but a central action of Christian history, reaching to the core of Christian character. Jew hatred's perversion of the Gospel message launched a history, in other words, that achieved its climax in the Holocaust, an epiphany presented so starkly it cannot be denied...Because the hatred of Jews had been made holy, it became lethal. The most sacred 'thinking and acting' of the Church as such must at last be called into question."[\[8\]](#)

Cornwell, Wills and Carroll all state that they are practicing Catholics, and such is no doubt the reason all three books found publishers. It is not likely that mainstream publishers would have handled such works that evidenced what in a non-Catholic's hands would have appeared to be anti-Catholic diatribes. The Catholicity of the authors, to the publishers, gives all three works legitimacy, if you will, that would not exist if the authors were non-Catholics. (And makes the charge of anti-Catholicism, on the surface, easy to refute: how could a book be anti-Catholic if the author is Catholic?). But more to the point, the authors' Catholic identity gives a fundamental agenda to the collective works. In all three works, the essential issues dealt with are used to lay out an internal agenda within Catholicism. While Cornwell and Wills focus primarily on the role of papal authority, Carroll both

includes and expands on that theme to question fundamental Catholic beliefs.

Carroll's thesis is that the anti-Semitism, which resulted in the Holocaust, is central to Catholic theology and derived from the earliest Christian expressions of belief, namely the Gospel accounts themselves. He concludes his book with a call for a third Vatican Council to make a series of changes in basic Catholic belief that he envisions purging the Church of this alleged fundamental anti-Semitism. We will note these later. However, it is important to understand that fundamentally, Carroll's purpose is to put forth a laundry list of liberal bromides for Church reform and uses the context of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to push this reform agenda, as both Wills and Cornwell. As Carroll himself observes, "Human memory is inevitably imprecise, and it is not uncommon for the past to be retrieved in ways that serve present purposes." [\[9\]](#) That neatly summarizes the whole point of this book. While Carroll may be more astute than Cornwell, and less virulent than Wills, his objectives are the same. Which, again, appears to be bordering on a blasphemous use of the horror of the Holocaust for Church politicking.

Carroll's book is described as a "history" of the Church and the Jews, but it is a great deal more personal rumination than serious historical, or theological, study. Throughout the book, the reader encounters a young Carroll with his mother, Carroll the student, Carroll's trials and tribulations as a priest, Carroll the father, Carroll the husband, along with dying friends, childhood buddies, and various pilgrimages throughout Europe. Half of the action seems to take place as Carroll ruminates at various sidewalk cafes or churches.

Carroll's main sources from a Catholic perspective are disaffected theologians such as Hans Kung and Rosemary Radford Ruether, or Scriptural scholars like John Dominic Crossan from the Jesus Seminar. His primary source on the Church and the

Holocaust, for example, is Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, which he acknowledges in a footnote to have been "controversial," but that he had reviewed it favorably. His knowledge – or at least his citation – of mainstream Catholic sources is limited to non-existent. He makes a single apparent reference to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [\[10\]](#) but calls it the "World Catechism." [\[11\]](#) In its very early development stages some referred to the Catechism project as the "Universal Catechism," but it was never called the "World Catechism." And it has been in publication for eight years and a bestseller under the title, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This is not, therefore, a book that pays much attention to mainstream Catholic theological, scriptural or historical scholarship, nor attempts to portray and interpret Catholic beliefs with any degree of balance.

Constantine's Sword, at the risk of understatement, is a lengthy book that actually argues little but avers grandly. Like Garry Wills in *Papal Sin*, Carroll makes assertions, backs them up when possible with assertions of others who share those assertions, then considers the matter settled. He asks is "it possible that the dominant memory of Christianity's foundational events [reviewer's note: the New Testament], a memory that features Jesus' conflict with the Jews and then his followers' conflict with the Jews...has enshrined a falsehood?" He then cites Crossan that, indeed such is the case and refers to various aspects of the New Testament as the "longest lie." [\[12\]](#)

Carroll's goals are worthy: an investigation into the source and history of anti-Jewish acts, atrocities and polemics within the 2000-year history of the Church and within the course of Western civilization. To deny that such a history exists would be to live a lie. Understanding that history, and knowing that it may have been a factor in allowing European Catholics and Protestants to turn a blind-eye toward Nazi atrocities against the Jews is to acknowledge a painful, and

indeed horrifying, reality. This was central to the Vatican's statement on the *Shoah*[\[13\]](#) and to that part of the papal apology of March 2000. But to make the assertion, as Carroll does (despite a few protestations that the Nazis did, in fact, carry out the "Final Solution," not the Catholic Church) that Catholic theology, history and belief were fundamental and direct causes of the Holocaust is scurrilous and betrays another agenda more fully spelled-out in the concluding section of *Constantine's Sword* when Carroll calls for his Third Vatican Council.

In recent years, of course, it has become part of conventional wisdom that Pius XII was silent in the face of the Holocaust and that the Catholic Church, despite saving more Jewish lives than any other entity at the time, was virtually a collaborator in the "Final Solution." Why has this essentially baseless charge become accepted as fact? Robert George in an afterword to Rychlak's *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, charges bluntly that "the myth that Pius XII was 'Hitler's Pope' lives and breathes on anti-Catholic bigotry. It can do so for the simple reason that anti-Catholicism remains 'the anti-semitism of the intellectuals'...The defamatory falsehoods...originate in, and are to a large extent sustained as part of, a larger effort to undermine the credibility and weaken the moral and cultural influence of the Catholic Church. Why? Because the Catholic Church – and, within the Church, the institution of the papacy – is the single most potent force on the side of traditional morality in cultural conflicts with communism, utilitarianism, racial individualism, and other major secular ideologies." [\[14\]](#)

It is also necessary to make the Church the cause of the Holocaust because so much of what passes as contemporary enlightened thought and views have their roots not in Catholicism or Christianity, but in the very secular ideologies that laid the true foundation for the Holocaust. So-called enlightened views on euthanasia or abortion, for example, find their philosophical origins in late 19th century

racial eugenics that propagated Hitler's attack on the Jews. That is a reality the chattering classes want to ignore. To scapegoat the Catholic Church as the cause of the Holocaust makes a secular examination of conscience unnecessary.

The roots of Hitler's anti-Semitic racist frenzy, and that of European society as a whole, are found not in Catholic belief but in the cultural rejection of Catholic belief in the Enlightenment and pseudo-scientism of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Rather than a continuum from a beginning in the New Testament, rabid racial anti-Semitism was born in the stew of competing 19th century liberal ideologies of nationalism, racialism and eugenics, ideologies fought almost solely by the Church and that still have impact in the 21st century. These were the views of the elite and enlightened, who scoffed at the Church and invented a hundred secular legends still with us today to show the Church as the enemy of this new, modern thinking. Carroll, of course, is not ignorant of the impact of these theories or that the Church stood almost alone in opposition to them. To Carroll, however, these theories were merely part of a whole. Though such theories that led to and created the Holocaust were a fundamental rejection of thousands of years of Judaic and Christian thought, Carroll sees them differently. He sees these enlightenment theories as ideas that grew naturally from Christian origins, rather than an outright rejection. One was merely grafted on the other. "If Hitler's paranoia about Jews was fueled by the grafting of the secular and neo-pagan racism of modernity to the stock of ancient and medieval Jew-hatred, why does that remove Christian history from the center of the story? The stock remains the stock. Modern secularists found a new language with which to slander Jews, but their impulse to do so – here is the point – was as rooted in the mystery of religion as any grand inquisitor's." [\[15\]](#) But it is that fundamental premise that is wrong. Hitler's anti-Semitism was not caused by

religious differences between Catholics and Jews, or anti-Jewish outbursts during the First Crusade. His hatred was a fundamental rejection of both Christianity and Judaism. His hatred was of faith in anything but the Aryan race and the German nation-state. His beliefs and his rationalizations derived from the stew of anti-Catholic secularist philosophies, not Catholicism. He did not approach the world with a mode of thinking and belief rooted in the 1,900 years of Western civilization. Rather, he was rooted in the 150 years of elitist and racist thought that had abandoned the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization.

Carroll finds the foundation error of Christianity in the construction of the New Testament itself. The Gospels writers, he argues, laid the foundation for anti-Semitism in the very way they wrote the Gospels. They did this, Carroll charges, by de-emphasizing the Roman responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus in order to placate Roman authorities. The evangelists and New Testament writers also reflected in their scripture a division between the Jesus movement, (Carroll's general term for nascent Christianity), and Jews who would not accept Jesus. Finally, in a phrase borrowed from Crossan, a "prophecy historicized," [\[16\]](#) distorted their work. This means that seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies led to outright falsehood about the life, teachings and, in particular, the death and resurrection of Jesus. The charge is that the story of Jesus was re-written and elements "invented" in order to tie Jesus more closely to messianic prophecies from the Old Testament. This is the "longest lie" of the New Testament, according to Carroll.

Of course, this is a far cry from mainstream post-Vatican II biblical scholarship, represented by the late Father Raymond Brown, that generally view the Gospel texts as fairly accurate recollections of the life and teachings of Jesus written by those close to Him in time. Carroll's sources represent an extremist view of biblical scholarship and he bases his

fundamental theory of Scriptural interpretation on the shaky – at best – conclusions of the Jesus Seminar activists. His whole thesis is based on invention and speculation 2,000 years after the fact.

There can be little doubt that a way of reading New Testament scripture could lead to anti-Jewish sentiment or, rather, be an excuse for anti-Jewish sentiment. This certainly happened. However, the roots of Christian-Jewish divisions are more clearly found in both the Christian understanding of who Jesus was – the promised Messiah – and in early Church history where Jews and Christians became deeply divided, than in Scriptural directives. False scriptural interpretation and misunderstanding have often infected Christian life (and was the source of the difficulty in the famous case of Galileo[\[17\]](#)) but that does not mean that Scripture is wrong. It means that the interpretation given by some to Scripture is wrong. As Carroll states at one point, if “Christian Jew-hatred did not originate with the Jew Jesus, no matter how it developed, then it is not essential to Christian faith.”[\[18\]](#) All would agree with that assessment. Unfortunately, Carroll himself does not. He believes that the New Testament is clearly anti-Semitic and, therefore, caused anti-Jewish sentiment which, in turn, eventually evolved into the philosophies that created the Holocaust. Rather than arguing that bad Scriptural interpretation in the past was used by some to declare that all Jews shared the blame in the death of Jesus, Carroll would rather agree that this is the proper meaning of Scripture. He sees anti-Semitism as fundamental to the Christian message as presented in the New Testament.

Carroll centers his discussion of the roots of alleged Catholic anti-Semitism on the Gospel accounts of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. “Scholars agree,” Carroll writes, “that within a relatively short period of time, the followers of Jesus had constructed an account of his last days

that would become the source of each of the four Gospels' Passion narratives...Where scholars differ – and this difference is relative to our attempt to name the ultimate source of anti-Jewish contempt – is on the question of whether the Passion story thus told is essentially a historical or literary composition.” [19] Clearly, we will find that Carroll believes that most of the Passion account reflects a “prophesized history” rather than “history remembered.” [20] The theory goes that the “Jesus movement” of the first century, at war with the Pharisees for control of the “true Israel,” enveloped the Passion narrative in anti-Pharisee myths that would in turn establish an anti-Jewish contempt in Christianity. And so, Carroll dismisses a good part of the historicity of the Gospel accounts and of the whole concept that Jesus died on the cross as a saving act of atonement for mankind. As to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Carroll is circumspect at best: “Immediately after Jesus’ death, the circle of his friends began to gather. Their love for him, instead of fading in his absence, quickened, opening into a potent love they felt for one another. Their gatherings were like those of a bereft circle, and they were built around lament, the reading of texts, silence, stories, food, drink, songs, more texts, poems – a changed sense of time and a repeated intuition that there was ‘one more member’ than could be counted. That intuition is what we call the Resurrection.” [21] This appears to be an understanding of the Resurrection for the brie and white wine set, rather than a Catholic and Christian understanding.

Constantine’s Sword is a slogging journey through the history of the Church over the two millennia. He touches down here and there when it suits his purpose. For example, while the treatment of the 12th through the 16th centuries is endless, he barely touches on the nearly eight hundred years from Constantine to the calling of the First Crusade – which leaves a rather sizeable gap in the alleged causal linkage of anti-

Semitism in the Church from the Gospels to the Holocaust.

After meandering quickly through the age of the early Church fathers, Carroll arrives at what he sees as a decisive point: Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD. Briefly, Constantine was battling for eventual control of the Roman Empire. At the Milvian Bridge he would secure control of the Western Empire and, in 324, become sole emperor of the Roman Empire. Before the critical battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine claimed to have seen a vision of the Cross, and the Christian symbol was placed on his standards on the day of battle. After his victory, the Edict of Milan was issued ending the persecution of Christians. Ruling until his death in 337 AD, Constantine promoted Christianity as the religion of the Roman state and involved himself closely in internal Church affairs, though he was not actually baptized a Christian until a few days before his death. Though his ending of the Christian persecution was a critical point in Church history, his imperial involvement in Church affairs established a long-standing dispute over the rights of rulers in temporal and ecclesiastical affairs of the Church.

Carroll sees Constantine in a different light. Though his "political impact on Christianity is widely recognized," Carroll writes, "his role as a shaper of its central religious idea is insufficiently appreciated." Carroll claims that the "place of the cross in the Christian imagination changed with Constantine."[\[221\]](#) This would lead, according to Carroll, to a central theological tenet of Catholicism that wrongly focused on the death of Jesus as atonement and reparation for sin. Thus the concept of salvation would come to dominate Christian thinking as the meaning of the life of Jesus, His death on the Cross an act of atonement for sin. This was an intention that Jesus never had, according to Carroll.

At the same time, Constantine's exercise of authority in the Church, particularly in the name of Christian unity, brought a

heretofore unheard of emphasis on defined doctrinal orthodoxy. Church authority (which would evolve into papal absolutism) now entered the Christian scene as well.[\[23\]](#) Constantine, in Carroll's view, was a very busy man. In any case, Carroll contends that the combination of these theological and legalistic forces centered on Constantine boded ill for the Jews who would be seen as the ones who "killed Christ" on a newly-emphasized cross, and whose failure to recognize their own Messiah was the ultimate heresy, the ultimate insult to Christian evangelization, and made them the first "dissenters" from unity of faith.

All this, of course, sounds a bit like a 16th Century anti-Catholic tract during the Reformation, or one of Jack Chick's contemporary pamphlets claiming Catholic descent from a Babylonian mystery religion. The over 275 years after Christ and preceding Constantine showed a steady development of an understanding of a distinct Christian faith as well as the development of a rich community, liturgical and theological life. Concerns over unity of belief are evident in the earliest years of the Church[\[24\]](#) and a bewildering list of various heresies addressed by the Church long pre-date Constantine. The anti-Nicene fathers of the Church, apologists such as St. Justin Martyr, and early theologians such as St. Irenaeus, who described a world wounded by Adam's sin but healed in Jesus, show an early Church developing an ordered set of beliefs rooted in Christ, distinct liturgy, and an insistence on Christ as the means toward salvation and eternal life. The theological concept of Christ's atonement for sins was hardly a late-developing concept ingeniously inserted into Catholic life by a theologically illiterate Roman emperor, but is taught directly in the New Testament and in the writings of the early Church fathers. Constantine certainly had a strong impact on the early Church that would last for centuries. But Carroll attributes to him far too much impact in the areas of theology, ecclesiology, doctrinal theology and the Church's

hierarchical structure. These were areas of the Church developing for two centuries prior to Constantine and did not spring fully born from a Roman emperor with only a minimal understanding of the faith he embraced to under gird his Empire.

Carroll's central thesis is that emphasis on the Cross as both a form of devotion and source for a theological understanding of the Christian message – enhanced by the legend of Constantine's mother Helena finding the True Cross in Jerusalem – had a devastating impact on Christian self-understanding and on the attitude the Church would develop toward the Jews. Seeing the death of Jesus as central to God's redemptive plan, the Cross ushered in a "teaching of contempt" toward Jews, a teaching that will lead over the centuries to the Nazi Final Solution. The actual destruction of the Jews once Christianity is backed by Roman imperial power, Carroll contends, is only prevented by the theological intervention of St. Augustine (354-430). Augustine would argue in *The City of God* that Jews had a specific role in God's saving plan in that "a continuing Judaism would serve as a source of authenticity for the prophecy-based claims of Christianity." [\[25\]](#) At the end of the Sixth Century, Pope Gregory the Great would forbid any violence against Jews. Carroll argues that with the foundational theology of contempt established, however, the seeds of anti-Semitism had been planted by the Church, such official proclamations notwithstanding.

It can be argued, of course, that the opposite holds true. Racial anti-Semitism had existed in the Roman Empire long before Christianity was a majority faith or even a known faith distinct from Judaism. Particularly with the Jewish *Diaspora* from the Holy Land throughout the Empire after their revolution was defeated by Roman soldiers in 70 AD and the temple destroyed, the Jews were viewed as a people apart. By the practices tied to their faith that reinforced their separateness from Roman society, the Jewish people were

considered a distinct and disliked racial minority. Anti-Jewish attitudes were certainly inherited among Christians as the infant Church more aggressively attracted non-Jews to the burgeoning faith. But to claim that the reason for anti-Jewish attitudes in Western culture was a result of Christian Scripture and Christian theology requires that a history of anti-Semitism older than Christianity be ignored.

The pagan faiths disappeared over the centuries from Constantine to Pope Gregory the Great as the Roman world became essentially Christian. Judaism, however, did not disappear. Carroll suggests that the reason for this is an inherent anti-Semitism within Christianity that required the continued existence of the Jews. The logic doesn't hold. He blames the Church for a cultural phenomenon that preceded it, and points to confirmation in the fact that the Church tried to limit both the severity and violence of anti-Jewish acts through the intervention of Augustine and the proclamation of Gregory the Great. The Jews survived the first thousand years of Christianity by the strength of their own faith and because the Church did not attempt to forcefully eradicate their faith. If Carroll's premise was true, or as basic to the Christian faith as he contends, Judaism would have disappeared by Christian force and no "ambivalence" in Christian attitude would have stopped it.

After establishing his central premise – that Christianity is anti-Semitic in its foundational texts and that Constantine by his centralizing notions and "theology of the Cross" formalized anti-Semitism within the Church's structure and devotion – Carroll proceeds to describe what he sees as a linkage through history of the Church to the Final Solution by portraying anti-Jewish actions in European history. Leaping ahead from Augustine to the Crusades 700 years later, where Jews were violently attacked, (attacks consistently condemned by the popes and the hierarchy), Carroll claims a "miscarried cult of the cross is ubiquitous in this story, from Milvian

Bride to Auschwitz. The 'way of the cross,' which is another way of saying 'crusade,' is the definitive epiphany, laying bear the meaning of what went before and what went after, even to our own time." [\[26\]](#)

Though Carroll's book can bend a coffee table at 756 pages, his litany of anti-Jewish incidents in Western history is spotty and lacking historical nuance. He touches on various events within Western history such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Plague, the Council of Trent and its aftermath, the French Revolution, the Dreyfus Affair, the *Kulturkampf* and concludes, actually quite briefly, with the Holocaust. Throughout these diverse and complicated historical trends and events, he sees a theology of the Cross and Church teaching on the atonement as being the dominant factor in generating anti-Jewish violence and anti-Semitic racism. This just doesn't hold to be the causative factor that Carroll alleges in these complicated events.

Serious historians, for example, acknowledge an upswing in anti-Jewish actions in parts of Europe at the time of the calling for the First Crusade in 1096. The reasons given by historians for this development vary. Some point toward resentment that Jews were primarily the moneylenders of an infant capitalist Europe as the Church taught money lending for interest sinful among Christians. Others point to a growing urbanization that was disrupting old forms of civil life. Still others have pointed to a re-born sense of both evangelization and conformity within society. Led by a stronger papacy, the Church saw its mission to sanctifying the world through a combination of the Church's need to reform its institutional life, free itself from control by secular lords, and to build a Christian society. There was also the growing fear that, "Those who dissented from belief or behaved in a manner that was explicitly defined as un-Christian appeared no longer as erring souls in a temptation-filled world, but as subverters of the world's new course..." [\[27\]](#) This certainly

played a role in enhancing a view of the Jews as outsiders in the creation of the Christian world.

Carroll, however, attributes the rise in anti-Jewish outbreaks directly with the Crusades and its emphasis on the Cross. While certainly crusading rhetoric involved at times slander of Jews – and violent anti-Jewish outbursts – the era was far more complicated than Carroll's simplistic notion of cause and effect. Certainly, there was a renewed emphasis on evangelization and religious conformity. But the primary concern of the era for the Church in Europe was internal reform that would lead to spiritual awakening among Christians. Additionally, a stronger papacy would lead to greater protection – rather than a greater threat – for the Jewish population of Europe. The Church and the hierarchy roundly condemned attacks on Jews by the first crusaders. Pope Calixtus III (1119-1124) issued the papal bull *Sicut Iudaesis* that condemned any violence against the Jews, a bull reaffirmed by 20 of his successors. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached the Second Crusade, would speak out forcefully against anti-Jewish violence and is generally held responsible for limiting such incidents. Though Carroll tries to link a stronger papacy with increased anti-Jewish acts, [\[28\]](#) the opposite appears true. A stronger Church and papacy that can influence secular authorities in European history rather than be controlled by secular authorities, the less likely were anti-Jewish outbreaks. (This would be clearly seen in the Reformation where anti-Semitism exploded in Protestant Germany where the local church was under the complete control of local authorities.)

Carroll sees the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, under Pope Innocent III, as another part of the linkage between the early Church and the Holocaust. Citing Hans Kung's interpretation, he sees the council as fundamentally changing the situation of the Jews both legally and theologically. [\[29\]](#) The Council was a historic event in Church history, solidifying two centuries of

Church reform. The Council “tackled an enormous range of issues, all of them practical: the establishment of orthodox teaching, especially on the sacraments – this was the Council which defined the doctrine of Transubstantiation – new regulations requiring every Christian to get to confession and communion at least once a year, improvements in record-keeping in Church courts...rules for the better discharge of episcopal duties and especially preaching and catechizing in the language of the people, and reform of the monasteries. Behind much of this the distinctive concerns of the Pope can be detected, and the Council was the high point of the medieval papacy’s involvement with and promotion of the best reforming energies in the Church at large.”[\[30\]](#)

Carroll points out that certain conciliar decrees, however, placed restrictions on Jews and such legislation did isolate the Jewish community more formally. Among the restrictions the Council asked for was a special form of dress so that Jews could be more clearly identified, that Jews should be forbidden to go out during Holy Week and that they be forbidden from holding public office. It is clear that in such anti-Jewish regulations, Church leadership was reflecting some of the worst aspects of contemporary culture. At the same time, it is also clear that any number of such regulations were also intended – from the perspective of the time – to protect Jews from attacks. The Holy Week legislation, for example, was clearly intended for their protection, as Holy Week became in certain areas a time for attacks on Jews.

Carroll was more concerned, however, that this Council clearly showed the “universalist absolutism of Roman Catholic claims” to the teaching of Christ which “is causally related to the unleashing of Catholic anti-Judaism.”[\[31\]](#) In other words, Carroll sees a stronger Church, with a stronger papacy and with certitude of belief as generating anti-Semitism because Jews are “the original dissenters.” Yet, such a causal link is never established. In fact, greater centralization of the

Church would generally result in a lessening of anti-Jewish practices. As will be seen in the discussion of the Spanish Inquisition, severe anti-Jewish activities took place more often where papal authority was co-opted by local authorities, or where Church authority had succumbed to secular authority. For example, anti-Jewish actions increased during the Plague years of the 14th century where Church authority was less effective. "Blood libel" stories had evolved, claiming that Jews would sacrifice Christian children, or that Jews conspired to poison wells. The papacy quickly condemned such stories, but they persisted in different areas by local legend. Carroll's history consistently shows the opposite of what it intends. Anti-Jewish activities persisted in history despite the Church, rather than because of the Church. When Church authority was weakened, the outbreaks tended to increase. When dangerous racial anti-Semitism would grow in the 19th Century, the Church was effectively at its weakest in influencing government or society.

Carroll, of course, does not see the anti-Jewish legislative aspects of the Lateran Council as its most damaging aspects. Papal authority and "Catholic absolutism" are his greater concerns. And most important, he sees the Council as firmly establishing in Catholic thinking the theological concept of Christ's death as atonement for sin. To Carroll's thinking, this central Catholic belief is fundamental to anti-Jewish attitudes as the "longest lie" created by New Testament writers. What Carroll does not concede, however, is that central to the concept of Christ's atonement in Catholic belief is that He died for the sins of all mankind. Proper understanding of that belief means, as has been understood in Catholic doctrine since the days of the early Church fathers, that Christ died because of sin. The concept of "Jewish deicide" – that the Jews "killed" Christ – is contradictory to that essential Catholic belief. Christ died, according to ancient Catholic belief, because of the sins of all, not the

actions of a few.

There can be no doubt that ignorance and false Scriptural interpretation helped to create an atmosphere of anti-Judaism within Western society. There was, as Carroll shows, an “ambivalence” toward Jews within Catholic teaching that contributed to anti-Jewish actions. While Church leadership forthrightly condemned violence against the Jews, it tolerated abusive anti-Jewish homilies and pronouncements. Church leadership too often shared in the sentiments of the culture. However, Carroll’s fundamental flaw is in arguing that anti-Semitism was the conscious creation of the Church, rather than a cultural legacy to which many in the Church too often compromised. His claim that a “theology of atonement” generated anti-Semitism is self-contradicting, as such an understanding removed any concept of alleged Jewish “guilt” in the death of Christ by teaching that all mankind was guilty.

When Carroll moves on to discussion of the Inquisition he falls into the historical trap of seeing the Inquisition both as a consistent papal-dominated institution that existed in a clear line from the 13th century virtually to the mid 20th century, as he considers his one encounter with the Index of Forbidden Books in the seminary as “my inquisition.”[\[32\]](#) Carroll states that the Inquisition was the means that “Catholic medieval absolutism exacerbated anti-Jewish religious hatred, fueled new levels of violence, and sponsored an even more hysterical conversionism, which, when up against continued Jewish resistance, finally led to modern anti-Semitic racism.”[\[33\]](#)

To speak of *the Inquisition* fails to understand that no such individual universal entity existed. The Inquisition as a single unified court system directly responsible to the pope and controlled solely by the papacy is a historical fiction. Even within the Papal States in the 16th century, the papacy had difficulty maintaining effective control over local

inquisitions. The local church in alliance with local secular authority usually controlled inquisitorial courts. Though it began in the 13th century as a papal-designated juridical system to remove “heresy-hunting” from control of the mob or secular authorities, it evolved rather quickly as a device of the local church and secular authorities to address local, and later national or dynastic goals. There were many inquisitions, rather than a singular “Inquisition.”

The many inquisitions that took place existed sporadically in different regions, at different times, and to meet different local needs. The medieval inquisition barely existed, for example, in Spain and Portugal. For hundreds of years, the inquisition in many places existed only sporadically, if at all. In the 16th century, it existed primarily in Spain, Portugal, the Papal States and other Italian cities. It existed sporadically – dominated by the state – in France and, early, in England.

Carroll’s argument is that the Spanish Inquisition created “racial” anti-Semitism and, as such, was generated by the Church and linked directly to Nazism. Spanish anti-Semitism was not a religious prejudice, but a racial one. It derived from the success in Spanish culture of Jewish converts to Catholicism and the goal of a racially unified Iberian peninsula, free of the “foreign” Muslims and Jews. In 1391, anti-Jewish riots swept through Spain. More religious than racial – though this has been disputed – these riots led to major forced conversions of Jews to Christianity. These Jewish converts would be called *conversos* or New Christians, to distinguish them from traditional Christian families. The *converso* identity would remain with such families for generations.

Converso families were welcomed into a full participation in Spanish society not available to Jews and they would soon become leaders in government, science, business and the

Church. Though it was legislated in certain areas that those forced to convert could return to their own religion, many did not. These *converso* families obviously faced the scorn of those who remained Jews. At the same time, however, over the years the Old Christians saw them as social-climbing opportunists. They claimed that they secretly maintained the faith of their forefathers. It would be complaints about these alleged “secret Jews” that would lead to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition.[\[34\]](#) Curiously, Carroll argues, with no documentation, that most of these converts remained “secret” Jews. It is a curious argument because it accepts as fact the reason given for Spanish persecution of the Jews. In fact, after a generation, most of these converts were as Catholic as the Old Christians. But racial prejudice against their Jewish ethnic roots remained. They were considered racially apart. The children’s children of these converted Jews were not considered “pure” Spaniards and would become the primary target of the Spanish Inquisition.

Carroll points out that in 1449, the city council of Toledo passed an ordinance decreeing that no *converso* of Jewish descent may hold office. Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) responded furiously, excommunicating the drafters of the regulation. He wrote that “all Catholics are one body in Christ according to the teaching of our faith.” The King of Castile, however, formally approved the regulation.

“If the beginning of what we think of as modern antisemitism can be located anywhere, it is here,” Carroll writes. “The shift from religious definition of Jewishness to a racial one is perhaps the most decisive in this long narrative, and its fault lines, reaching into the consciousness of Western civilization, will define the moral geography of the modern age. The Church’s worry, for example, that its very own *conversos* were corrupting Christians would find a near permanent resonance in the modern European fantasy of Jews as parasites – successful and assimilated, but feeding on the

host society. The ultimate example of this image would emerge in Germany, of course, but the fear that led Nazis to regard Jews as bloodsuckers to be excised was anticipated by the Iberian suspicion that Jews were more to be feared as assimilated insiders than as dissenting outsiders.”[\[35\]](#)

It is true that the racial prejudice against Catholic families of Jewish stock was the primary instigator of the Spanish Inquisition. However, it contradicts, rather than confirms, Carroll’s basic thesis that anti-Semitism that led to the horror of the Holocaust came from essential Christian theology. Spanish anti-Semitism was aimed at Jews racially. Religion was used as a club of enforcement to knock ethnic Jews down from the successful heights they had attained as Catholics. But the faith was the excuse, not the cause, of Spanish racial anti-Semitism. And that is why Pope Nicholas, and successor popes, would deplore the actions of the Spanish Inquisition against the *conversos*. In Rome, it was viewed not as an attempt to root out heresy, but as a means to attack generations of successful converts.

In March 1492, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand ordered the expulsion – or conversion – of all remaining Jews in Spain. Many *conversos* had already fled to Rome and the Papal States where they would be free of persecution. Those who remained Jews fled to Rome as well, known as the most tolerant of European cities toward Jews. The intent of the declaration of expulsion was more religious than racial, as Jewish conversion was certainly the intent, not “the beginning of a strategy of elimination”[\[36\]](#) as Carroll contends. While many Jews fled, a large number converted, thus aggravating the popular picture of secret Judaizers within the Christian community of Spain. Up through 1530, the primary activity of the inquisition in Spain would be aimed at pursuing *conversos*. The same would be true from 1650 to 1720. While its activities declined thereafter, the inquisition continued to exist in Spain until its final abolition in 1824.

The attacks in Spain on the *conversos* were viewed as despicable in Rome and condemned by the popes. Italians “felt that Spanish hypocrisy in religion, together with the existence of the Inquisition, proved that the tribunal was created not for religious purity, but simply to rob the Jews. Similar views were certainly held by the prelates of the Holy See whenever they intervened in favor of the *conversos*. Moreover, the racialism of the Spanish authorities was scorned in Italy, where the Jewish community led a comparatively tranquil existence.”[\[37\]](#)

If there is a connection between the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust generated by the German Nazis it is in the racial hatred that motivated both. It is not, however, to be found in a connection between Catholic Spain and Protestant Germany. And it is certainly not to be found in the faith whose leadership spoke out forcefully against the attacks on the *conversos*, or a theology that argued that conversion knew no racial boundaries.

Carroll leaps from the early Spanish Inquisition to the Council of Trent (1545-1563), called by the Church in response to the Reformation. He points out that the Council had very little to say about the Jews. The Council primarily concerned itself with Church renewal in light of the Reformation and defending clear Catholic teaching in response to Protestant attacks. Among those clear Catholic teachings confirmed, as Carroll points out, was that “responsibility for the death of Jesus belonged to sinners – to all persons, that is, in their having sinned. The old question Who killed Jesus? Was explicitly answered: Human sinners did.”[\[38\]](#) The declaration by Trent was another contradiction of what Carroll asserts throughout his book: that the theology of the atonement created anti-Semitism by blaming Jews for the death of Jesus and led directly to the Holocaust.

But Carroll argues that if “this perception had maintained its

firm hold on the moral imagination of Christians, the history of Jews would be quite different. That something else happened, beginning with the Gospels' own scapegoating of Jews, only proves Trent's point that 'we' are sinners." [39] Perhaps, however, the exact opposite is true. The thesis that the "Jews killed Jesus" was a popular misinterpretation of the New Testament that the Church taught as wrong in its theology of atonement. If anti-Semitism persisted, it was because it was persistent in the popular imagination, not in the teachings of the Church as Carroll claims. Again, anti-Semitism existed despite essential Church teachings, not because of them, as Carroll charges.

The inquisition in Rome was established during the Reformation period and has generally been regarded by historians as one of the more lax courts. The inquisition court in Rome should not be understood as a universal court, but as one of the inquisition courts within the Papal States. As in most regions, the local Roman court focused primarily on clergy wrongs and on issues of lifestyle – adultery, drunkenness and other forms of impropriety as Rome did not have a racial problem with *conversos*, [40] and the Inquisition itself had nothing to do with the Jewish population. Pope Paul III (1534-1549) had authorized the inquisition in Rome as a means of protecting the Church there from the influence of the Reformation in 1542. He was a protector of the Jews who banned various anti-Jewish activities. Pope Paul IV (1555-1559), however, had a short but troubled reign. It was Pope Paul IV who established the separate Jewish ghetto in Rome, enforced segregationist regulations on Jews and, mistakenly, affirmed the "blood purity" statute in Toledo that had rightly been condemned by previous pontiffs. Carroll sees both events as a definitive sign of the Church embracing, despite the reforms of Trent, a definitive anti-Semitic stance, particularly in its seeming endorsement of the Spanish racial policy of *limpieza de sangre* aimed at the *converso* families of Jewish ethnic heritage. Carroll explains that the "culture-wide

trauma of the Reformation was part of what prompted the shift in papal strategy toward the Jews,"[\[41\]](#) a shift that Carroll sees as momentous.

Limpieza de sangre was part of the "blood purity" restrictions on Jews who had converted to Catholicism and limited their ability to hold public office or offices within Spain. This was the ugly racial element that had infected Spanish society. As we have seen, Pope Nicholas V rightly condemned *limpieza* vociferously. Pope Paul IV as a cardinal "had singlemindedly devoted his whole life to reform of the Church...(yet) under Paul IV reform took on a darker more fearful character. Creativity was distrusted as a dangerous innovation, theological energies were diverted into the suppression of error rather than the exploration of truth. Catholicism was identified with reaction...For the rest of the Tridentine era, Catholic Reformation would move between those poles, and it would be the task of the popes to manage the resulting tensions."[\[42\]](#) Depending on the perspective of the individual pontiff, restrictions on Jewish life within the Roman ghetto would wax and wane. His decision on *limpieza*, however, was reversed and generally abandoned from Catholic life outside of Spain. A few orders with strong Spanish roots, such as the Jesuits, maintained a form of *limpieza*. But no serious student of history would make the claim that this unique Spanish cultural prejudice reflected overall Church practice. Carroll himself recognizes that the anti-Jewish racial theories of the 19th Century that created the anti-Semitism of the Nazis had no relationship to Spanish *limpieza*.

Pope Paul IV's pontificate was short. New popes would reverse his policies – his approval of *limpieza* was quickly abandoned – and treatment of the local Jewish community in Rome would vary from pontiff to pontiff. Popes would change and policies would change. These policies were generated as papal governance of the Papal States, however, not pronouncements of the universal Church. And what Carroll sees as a continuous

linkage was shifting sand. There was no uniform anti-Jewish policy aimed at the local Jewish community from papacy to papacy. The policies reflected the emphasis and mind-set of individuals. However, the different perspectives popes adopted show anything but a continuous chain that is the fundamental thesis of Carroll's book; nor were there theologically infallible papal statements of defining Catholic belief. The Jewish ghetto in Rome is a dark spot on Church history. The long-held notion that popes must be rulers of an independent Papal States or the papacy would be dominated by secular rulers, while theoretically understandable and with historical roots from earlier centuries, placed popes in the difficult position of holding secular authority. Not a few of them exercised that secular authority poorly. That ended in 1870 when Italian nationalist troops occupied the city as "liberators." But within a generation after, that nationalist tide would also result in the emergence of Benito Mussolini and the Italian Fascist state.

Carroll marches quickly through the early Enlightenment, represented by Voltaire, touches on Spinoza and the French Revolution, then on to Vatican I (1869-1870) and the declaration of papal infallibility. "Liberalism and modernism," Carroll writes, "were seen as bearing the fruits of the destruction of civilization itself, and the dark side of the new order would make itself all too clear in the twentieth century. There was much in the new age the Church was right to suspect, so the Catholic strategy of arming the leader of the Church with the spiritual mace of infallibility made some sense." [\[43\]](#)

His understanding of the definition of papal infallibility as conferred on the papacy in 1870 is not, of course, the definition given by the Council. Vatican I dealt with the office of the papacy and the nature of papal authority because these issues were at the very center of the life of the Church in the 19th Century. The emergence of the modern liberal states

had reconfirmed to many within the Church the vital importance of the ancient belief of the central authority of the bishop of Rome as the successor of St. Peter. There were divisions over such a definition, however. Some argued that it would be inopportune to make such a definition in the turmoil of the 19th Century, while others wanted papal infallibility applied to virtually everything the pope said or wrote. The accusation is made that a definition of papal infallibility was demanded by Pope Pius IX and forced on an unwilling Council by papal pressure, curial conspiracies, and squelched debate. However, debate went on for months, and the final definition of papal infallibility fell far short of the desires of the “ultramontanes” who wanted an elevated definition of infallibility. The fact was that consensus emerged, except for extremists on each side, which spelled out a definition of papal infallibility clearly in line with Church tradition and the theology of the papacy. The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point the Church had understood for centuries.

Carroll sees the definition of papal infallibility as a “pivotal event” for his story as “the Church’s relationship to the modern fate of the Jews is intertwined, in a particular way, with efforts to extend the political power of the papacy.” [\[44\]](#) Carroll will therefore look himself in early to the Cornwell thesis that the sole motivation of Pius XII in World War II was the extension of papal power. At the same time, there is Carroll’s blithe acknowledgement of what was taking place in the 19th Century: “the dark side of the new order would make itself all too clear in the 20th century.” That is Carroll’s primary reference to what in fact was going on in European thought in the 19th Century and what it would lead to in the 20th Century.

The culture of thought in the 19th Century – secularism,

communism, racialism and nationalism – would lead to the First World War, the Communist revolution in Russia, Stalin's pogroms, the rise of Fascism and Nazism, World War II and the Holocaust. That is the dark side to which Carroll refers. It also makes a mockery of his essential argument that the anti-Semitism that played its own role in so much of this horror was the creation of the Church, or sustained by the Church. The stew of secular philosophies that led to these 20th century horrors was a creation of the 19th century, that had limited roots in the so-called Enlightenment of the 18th century. These philosophies were definitive breaks with Christian thinking, not evolutions. As Paul Johnson notes, they involved the "birth of the modern" – an entirely new way of viewing self, one's role in culture, one's entire mode of thinking and acting. These were not subtle changes or a grafting on to Christianity. These were philosophies that the Church fought against because they were a fundamental break, a fundamental confrontation, with an entire Christian philosophy, theology, culture and worldview. Carroll's failure to present that adequately in order not to upset his thesis that the Church was to blame for the Holocaust is the fundamental flaw of his book. The fundamental blasphemy is that he would do so in order to put forth a meager list of liberal bromides for alleged Church reform.

Carroll approaches the age of Pius XII and the Holocaust itself after winding his way through the German *Kulturkampf* and the Dreyfus affair in France. He adds nothing new to his story in either recital. Successful Catholic action in response to the *Kulturkampf* is seen as setting what could have been a standard in reaction to Hitler, forgetting that Bismarck was not Hitler and the Germany of 1870 was not the Nazi Germany of 1933. The Dreyfus affair – where a Jewish officer in the French army was convicted of treason – was a high-profile case of anti-Semitism within the French army. Carroll uses it to excoriate the French Catholic

newspaper "La Croix." The newspaper, operated by a religious order, engaged in hot anti-Jewish rhetoric during the Dreyfus affair. While Carroll points to this as symbolizing the entrenched nature of Catholic anti-Semitism, it far more reflected a turn-of-the-century Europe where anti-Semitism was increasing as the influence of the Church decreased in the modern secular states and "modern" thought predominated.

The Church and Hitlerism is confined in Carroll's book to less than 70 pages, about the same length that he gives to his suggestions for Church reform. He begins by restating his essential charge that "(h)owever modern Nazism was, it planted its roots in the soil of age-old Church attitudes and a nearly unbroken chain of Jew-hatred. However pagan Nazism was, it drew its sustenance from groundwater poisoned by the Church's most solemnly held ideology – its *theology*." [\[45\]](#) This is, of course, a gross mis-reading of history. Hitler and Nazism were created by a rampant social Darwinism, an ubiquitous European belief that it was a virtual biological imperative that the lower classes be dominated by their racial superiors, the ideology of imperialism, the birth of scientism that would dispel the "myths" of religion, the campaign to radically excise the Church from public life, the denial of the sacredness of the individual for the good of the State or, as in communism, the good of the class, the creation of the myth of the Nietzsche-like Superman who could undertake any evil for the good of his race, and the replacement of Christianity with neo-paganism. The soil and poisoned groundwater for these Nazi aberrations were the views of 19th century liberalism that were the conventional wisdom of the times. The Catholic Church – its *theology* – was viewed as the enemy of this modern thought. The Church was not the progenitor of the beliefs that created Nazism. It was one of the last remaining bulwarks in Europe against it. The Nazis killed the Jews. For reasons of an internal agenda against the Church, Carroll would prefer to dismiss that, like a revisionist who would claim the Holocaust never took place, and shift the blame to the Church for his

own agenda.

As noted earlier, Carroll regurgitates the central thesis of Cornwell. Like Cornwell, he sees the revision of Canon Law promulgated in 1917 – in which a young priest Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII was involved – as the motivating factor in the Church's reaction to the rise of the dictators. According to the theory, papal absolutism was the driving force of Vatican foreign policy. The Vatican would surrender anything – and bargain with the devil himself – in order to gain authority over, for example, the appointment of bishops. He sees the Concordat that Cardinal Pacelli negotiated with Hitler as giving a first blessing and recognition to the regime (which forgets that prior to the concordat, Hitler had concluded a peace agreement with the western powers, including France and Great Britain, called the Four-Power Pact. and a similar agreement was concluded between Hitler and the Protestant churches). Though Carroll dismisses such claims, the Vatican had no choice but to conclude such a concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Pius XI would explain that it was concluded only to spare persecution that would take place immediately if there was no such agreement. The concordat would also give the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal basis for arguing that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives.

Carroll doesn't really spend much time on the Holocaust itself or a detailed look at the entire World War and how the Church responded. [\[46\]](#) He states that from the onset of Nazism, the "Church, for its part, had come to a decision it would stick with, almost without exception, – that the 'wretched fate' of the Jews was unconnected to its own fate, or that of anyone

else.”[\[47\]](#) Carroll says such things without any necessity for proving that was the Church’s policy. The first formal protest filed by the Vatican under the concordat was against the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses. In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued “Mit brennender sorge,” which spoke out forcefully against Nazi racist policy. It assumes that a calculated decision by Pius to work behind the scenes through his papal representatives and through the existing vehicles of the Church to save as many lives as possible was a callous decision to leave Jews to their fate. It assumes that hurling thunderbolts from the Vatican – which all who lived through Nazism understand would have had no possible impact on Hitler – would have accomplished something or saved more lives. This is mere conjecture based on hindsight. None of the critics of Pius have yet been able to put forth a concrete alternative that Pius could have developed to save more lives than were saved by the Church in that period. Throughout the war years, the Church would save more Jewish lives than any entity that existed at the time.

Disagreeing, however, with the tactics of Pius is one thing. Stating that the Church abandoned the Jews does not reflect any kind of reality. Which is one of the most frustrating aspects of Carroll’s entire “history” of the Church and the Jews. It is not history at all, but an amateur’s meditation on various historical events skewed to reflect the prejudices of his own thesis. This is not careful scholarship. This is simply a very long anti-Catholic essay.

Carroll concludes his treatment of the Holocaust by the need to go after the death of Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who was murdered in the Holocaust and declared a saint by Pope John Paul II. Echoing Garry Wills, he sees the canonization of Stein as an attempt by the Church to claim victimhood in the Holocaust and to “reaffirm the religious superiority of Christianity over Judaism.”[\[48\]](#) Like Wills, he can cite no source for this conjecture, or documentation that

cites any such reasoning from Church leadership. Or anybody within Catholic circles for that matter. Pope John Paul II stated, which is a fact, that she died at the hands of the Nazis because she was a Jew and a Catholic, in retribution for the Church speaking out against Nazi deportations of the Jews in the Netherlands. The death of Edith Stein – and the death of Maxmillian Kolbe – are the only cases of people slaughtered by the Nazis in the concentration camps that a certain circle within Catholicism feels comfortable publicly degrading.

The last section of Carroll's book begins immediately after the degradation of the canonization of Edith Stein. This is when we find out the true purpose of Carroll's lengthy attack on the New Testament and the Christian belief in Christ's passion and death as atonement for sin. This is why he has attempted to set up the Church as the ultimate cause of the Holocaust, while inventing a simplistic history of the Church as the progenitor of an anti-Semitism that preceded its existence. He sees its essential theology as anti-Semitic, its leadership only interested in power. It allowed the Jews to be slaughtered in the Holocaust because it simply didn't care, and the Church was wrong – fundamentally – in the very Scriptures of the New Testament that is its heart and soul. If anyone else truly believed this, he or she would abandon the Church. Carroll would rather stick around to argue papal infallibility, women's ordination and priestly celibacy.

Carroll describes the Second Vatican Council as the "beginning of the long-overdue demise of Constantinian imperial Catholicism, as it had been shaped by a medieval papalism hardened in the fires of the Counter-Reformation...The Church's failure in relation to Adolf Hitler was only a symptom of the ecclesiastical cancer Pope John was attempting to treat." [\[49\]](#) This is a ludicrous picture of the intent of the Council and of Pope John XXIII's view of the Church. Critical to Pope John XXIII's thinking was that the Church must reach out to the world and not see itself as a faithful remnant that

hides from the world. The purpose in John's mind was to certainly remove liturgical encrustation, defensive theological formulations and aspects of the culture of Catholicism that prevented outreach to the modern world. However, the purpose of such was not to convert the Church to modernism, but for the Church to be better able to evangelize the modern world. This has been the hallmark of the papacy of Pope John Paul II, who as a bishop attending the Council and was a strong supporter of the intent and spirit of Vatican II.

Of course, Carroll – much like Garry Wills – argues that while the Council was a historic beginning, it was undermined by Pope Paul VI, a “devoted factotum to Pius XII.”[\[50\]](#) Of Pope Paul VI: “His was the first effort to turn back the tide of Church reform that the Vatican Council initiated, and that program of medieval restoration has been vigorously continued by Pope John Paul II.” [\[51\]](#) Of course, Carroll argues that hopes were too high for Vatican II. A Church incapable of allowing priests to marry or couples to practice contraception is hardly ready for the reform he demands. He calls for a Third Vatican Council that would address the following agenda:

First, the “offensive character (of the New Testament) is part of what the Church must not only admit but to claim. The anti-Jewish texts of the New Testament show that the Church, even in its first generation, was capable of betraying the message of Jesus, establishing once and for all that ‘the Church as such’ can sin.”[\[52\]](#) The Church must understand the New Testament narratives are invented and that any “Christian proclamation that says that redemption, grace, perfection, whatever you call it, has already come is unbelievable on its face.”[\[53\]](#)

Second, Vatican III will abandon the ethos of Constantinian imperial power and the “primary-enforcing ideas of Roman supremacy and papal infallibility.”[\[54\]](#) The “doctrine of papal infallibility amounts to the low point in the long story of

patriarchy, a legitimation of Church exceptionalism, a reversal of the meaning that Jesus gave to ministry, and, finally, an abuse of power.”[\[55\]](#)

Third, Vatican III should initiate a “new Christology” that abandons concepts such as the immortality of the soul, messiahship of Jesus, Christ’s death as atonement for sin, the belief that Jesus is the only means of salvation, as well as the very concept of salvation. (“The coming of Jesus was for the purpose of revelation, not salvation – revelation, that is, that we are already saved.”[\[56\]](#)) This will allow the Church “to embrace a pluralism of belief and worship, of religion and no religion, that honors God by defining God as beyond every human effort to express God.”[\[57\]](#)

Fourth, the Church in Vatican III will abandon “its internal commitment to methods that undergird totalitarianism”[\[58\]](#) In addition, of course, to abandoning such things as excommunication, bannings, censorship and anathemas, this means the Church must also abandon “the idea that there is one objective and absolute truth, and that its custodian is the Church.”[\[59\]](#) The papal apology, Carroll writes, “did not confront the implications of that still maintained idea of truth” and that universal claims “for Jesus as the one objective and absolute truth” must be abandoned. “Vatican III must retrieve for the Church the deep-seated intuition that mystery is at the core of existence, that truth is elusive, that God is greater than religion.”[\[60\]](#) Bishops should be chosen by the people, the whole clerical caste eradicated, and women ordained (though ordination to exactly what is never clarified).

Fifth, and only after the prior four agenda items are completed, the Church must have a complete act of repentance, a repentance of a “failed and sinful Church.”[\[61\]](#)

Rather clearly, the objective solution Carroll has in mind already exists: Unitarianism.

The five-point agenda for Vatican III is the purpose of Carroll's book. I do not doubt the sincerity of his horror in the Holocaust, or his disgust at the anti-Jewish history that exists within the history of Western civilization and that members of the Church have been a part of it. But his purpose, clearly, is for "the past to be retrieved in ways that serve present purposes." Those purposes are Carroll's five-point agenda for creating a Catholicism that would fit his particular vision. He would do so by undermining the Gospels, dismissing 2000 years of Catholic theology and dismantling the papacy and the priesthood. He would, finally, have a Church that would disconnect from Jesus as the source of truth – that truth can be known, and truth can be evangelized.

Much like Wills found it necessary to re-state that he is Catholic no matter what the positions he holds, Carroll concludes this epic with a personal plea for his Catholicity no matter what he believes. Though confessing his shame about his Catholicity, he confesses as well his own collusion in this historic record of the Church that "sanctified the hatred of the Jews." [\[62\]](#) Despite that, he states that the "most deadly prospect at this point would be to find myself alienated from the community that has been the focus of my 'backward glance.'" [\[63\]](#)

Perhaps acknowledging that his central thesis is flawed can relieve those fears. No one can argue that members of the Church throughout the centuries, going to the highest leadership within the Church, engaged and endorsed at times in anti-Jewish words, sentiments and actions. At the very same time, many within the Church officially condemned such actions and it was the very Church leadership that Carroll hopes to be abandoned that was most vociferous in that condemnation. It was not the belief of the Church, the New Testament, the Church centered in Jesus, the understanding that Christ died for the sins of mankind, or the Church belief in an objective and universal truth that persists in Christ, that created the

horror of the Holocaust. It was the rejection of those, and the attempt to substitute for Judeo-Christian civilization a secularist pseudo scientism of race, class and nationalism that generated Nazism and the Holocaust. Nazism and the Nazis killed the Jews, and the philosophies that created them still bubble just below the surface. But not in the Catholic Church. Rather, they persist in a vicious secularism and pseudo-scientism that divorces faith from modernity, believes that truth cannot be known, and attempts to convince mankind that it is its own god.

SUMMARY POINTS

John Cornwell in *Hitler's Pope*, Garry Wills in *Papal Sin* and now James Carroll in *Constantine's Sword* all identify themselves as Catholic. The authors' Catholic identity gives a fundamental agenda to the collective works. In all three works, the essential issues dealt with are used to lay out an internal agenda within Catholicism. While Cornwell and Wills focus primarily on the role of papal authority, Carroll both includes and expands on that theme to question fundamental Catholic beliefs.

Carroll's thesis is that the anti-Semitism which resulted in the Holocaust is central to Catholic theology and derived from the earliest Christian expressions of belief, namely the Gospel accounts themselves. He concludes his book with a call for a third Vatican Council to make a series of changes in basic Catholic belief that he envisions purging the Church of this alleged fundamental anti-Semitism.

Carroll's main sources from a Catholic perspective are disaffected theologians such as Hans Kung and Rosemary Radford Ruether, or Scriptural scholars like John Dominic Crossan from the Jesus Seminar. His primary source on the Church and the Holocaust, for example, is Cornwell's *Hitler's Pope*, which he

acknowledges in a footnote to have been “controversial,” but that he had reviewed it favorably. His knowledge – or at least his citation – of mainstream Catholic sources is limited to non-existent.

It is necessary to make the Church the cause of the Holocaust because so much of what passes as contemporary enlightened thought and views have their roots not in Catholicism or Christianity, but in the very secular ideologies that laid the true foundation for the Holocaust. So-called enlightened views on euthanasia or abortion, for example, find their philosophical origins in late 19th century racial eugenics that propagated Hitler’s attack on the Jews. To scapegoat the Catholic Church as the cause of the Holocaust makes a secular examination of conscience unnecessary.

Though theories that led to and created the Holocaust were a fundamental rejection of thousands of years of Judaic and Christian thought, Carroll sees them differently. He sees these enlightenment theories as ideas that grew naturally from Christian origins, rather than an outright rejection. One was merely grafted on the other.

Hitler did not approach the world with a mode of thinking and belief rooted in the 1,900 years of Western civilization. Rather, he was rooted in the 150 years of elitist racist and nationalist thought that had abandoned the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization.

Carroll believes that the New Testament is clearly anti-Semitic and, therefore, caused anti-Jewish sentiment that, in turn, eventually evolved into the philosophies that created the Holocaust. Rather than arguing that bad Scriptural interpretation in the past was used by some to declare that all Jews shared the blame in the death of Jesus, Carroll would rather agree that this is the proper meaning of Scripture. He sees anti-Semitism as fundamental to the Christian message as presented in the New Testament.

Carroll dismisses a good part of the historicity of the Gospel accounts and of the whole concept that Jesus died on the cross as a saving act of atonement for mankind. As to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Carroll is circumspect at best.

Constantine certainly had a strong impact on the early Church that would last for centuries. But Carroll attributes to him far too much impact in the areas of theology, ecclesiology, doctrinal theology and the Church's hierarchical structure. These were areas of the Church developing for two centuries prior to Constantine and did not spring fully born from a Roman emperor with only a minimal understanding of the faith he embraced to under gird his Empire.

Carroll blames the Church for a cultural phenomenon that preceded it, and points to confirmation in the fact that the Church tried to limit both the severity and violence of anti-Jewish acts through the intervention of Augustine and the proclamation of Gregory the Great. The Jews survived the first thousand years of Christianity by the strength of their own faith and because the Church did not attempt to forcefully eradicate their faith. If Carroll's premise was true, or as basic to the Christian faith as he contends, Judaism would have disappeared by Christian force and no "ambivalence" in Christian attitude would have stopped it.

Pope Calixtus III (1119-1124) issued the papal bull *Sicut Iudaesis* that condemned any violence against the Jews, a bull reaffirmed by 20 of his successors. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached the Second Crusade, would speak out forcefully against anti-Jewish violence and is generally held responsible for limiting such incidents. Though Carroll tries to link a stronger papacy with increased anti-Jewish acts, the opposite appears true. A stronger Church and papacy that can influence secular authorities in European history rather than be controlled by secular authorities, the less likely were anti-Jewish outbreaks.

Carroll's history consistently shows the opposite of what it intends. Anti-Jewish activities persisted in history despite the Church, rather than because of the Church. When Church authority was weakened, the outbreaks tended to increase. When dangerous racial anti-Semitism would grow in the 19th Century, the Church was effectively at its weakest in influencing government or society.

There can be no doubt that ignorance and false Scriptural interpretation helped to create an atmosphere of anti-Judaism within Western society. There was, as Carroll shows, an "ambivalence" toward Jews within Catholic teaching that contributed to anti-Jewish actions. While Church leadership forthrightly condemned violence against the Jews, it tolerated abusive anti-Jewish homilies and pronouncements. Church leadership too often shared in the sentiments of the culture. However, Carroll's fundamental flaw is in arguing that anti-Semitism was the conscious creation of the Church, rather than a cultural legacy to which many in the Church too often compromised.

It is true that the racial prejudice against Catholic families of Jewish stock was the primary instigator of the Spanish Inquisition. However, it contradicts, rather than confirms, Carroll's basic thesis that anti-Semitism that led to the horror of the Holocaust came from essential Christian theology. Spanish anti-Semitism was aimed at Jews racially. Religion was used as a club of enforcement to knock ethnic Jews down from the successful heights they had attained as Catholics. But the faith was the excuse, not the cause, of Spanish racial anti-Semitism.

The attacks in Spain on the *conversos* were viewed as despicable in Rome and condemned by the popes. Italians, Henry Kamen has written, "felt that Spanish hypocrisy in religion, together with the existence of the Inquisition, proved that the tribunal was created not for religious purity, but simply

to rob the Jews. Similar views were certainly held by the prelates of the Holy See whenever they intervened in favor of the *conversos*. Moreover, the racialism of the Spanish authorities was scorned in Italy, where the Jewish community led a comparatively tranquil existence."

The thesis that the "Jews killed Jesus" was a popular misinterpretation of the New Testament that the Church taught as wrong in its theology of atonement. If anti-Semitism persisted, it was because it was persistent in the popular imagination, not in the teachings of the Church as Carroll claims. Again, anti-Semitism existed despite essential Church teachings, not because of them, as Carroll charges.

Treatment of the local Jewish community in Rome would vary from pontiff to pontiff. Popes would change and policies would change. These policies were generated as papal governance of the Papal States, however, not pronouncements of the universal Church. And what Carroll sees as a continuous linkage was shifting sand. There was no uniform anti-Jewish policy aimed at the local Jewish community from papacy to papacy. The policies reflected the emphasis and mind-set of individuals. However, the different perspectives popes adopted show anything but a continuous chain that is the fundamental thesis of Carroll's book.

The fact was that at the First Vatican Council consensus emerged, except for extremists on each side, which spelled out a definition of papal infallibility clearly in line with Church tradition and the theology of the papacy. The Council proclaimed no new teaching that extended papal authority beyond a point the Church had understood for centuries.

The stew of secular philosophies that led to these 20th century horrors was a creation of the 19th century, that had limited roots in the so-called Enlightenment of the 18th century. These philosophies were definitive breaks with Christian thinking,

not evolutions. As Paul Johnson notes, they involved the “birth of the modern” – an entirely new way of viewing self, one’s role in culture, one’s entire mode of thinking and acting. These were not subtle changes or a grafting on to Christianity. These were philosophies that the Church fought against because they were a fundamental break, a fundamental confrontation, with an entire Christian philosophy, theology, culture and worldview. Carroll’s failure to present that adequately in order not to upset his thesis that the Church was to blame for the Holocaust is the fundamental flaw of his book.

Carroll regurgitates the central thesis of Cornwell. He sees the revision of Canon Law promulgated in 1917 – in which a young priest Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII was involved – as the motivating factor in the Church’s reaction to the rise of the dictators. According to the theory, papal absolutism was the driving force of Vatican foreign policy. The Vatican would surrender anything – and bargain with the devil himself – in order to gain authority over, for example, the appointment of bishops.

Though Carroll dismisses such claims, the Vatican had no choice but to conclude such a concordat, or face draconian restrictions on the lives of the faithful in Germany. Pius XI would explain that it was concluded only to spare persecution that would take place immediately if there was no such agreement. The concordat would also give the Holy See the opportunity to formally protest Nazi action in the years prior to the war and after hostilities began. It provided a legal basis for arguing that baptized Jews in Germany were Christian and should be exempt from legal disabilities. Though the Concordat was routinely violated before the ink was dry, its existence allowed for Vatican protest, and it did save Jewish lives.

Carroll assumes that a calculated decision by Pius to work behind the scenes through his papal representatives and

through the existing vehicles of the Church to save as many lives as possible, was a callous decision to leave Jews to their fate. It assumes that hurling thunderbolts from the Vatican – which all who lived through Nazism understand would have had no possible impact on Hitler – would have accomplished something or saved more lives. This is mere conjecture based on hindsight. None of the critics of Pius have yet been able to put forth a concrete alternative that Pius could have developed to save more lives than were saved by the Church in that period. Throughout the war years, the Church would save more Jewish lives than any entity that existed at the time.

Disagreeing with the tactics of Pius is one thing. Stating that the Church abandoned the Jews does not reflect any kind of reality. Which is one of the most frustrating aspects of Carroll's entire "history" of the Church and the Jews. It is not history at all, but an amateur's meditation on various historical events skewed to reflect the prejudices of his own thesis.

Echoing Garry Wills, Carroll sees the canonization of Stein as an attempt by the Church to claim victimhood in the Holocaust and to reaffirm the religious superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Like Wills, he can cite no source for this conjecture, or documentation that cites any such reasoning from Church leadership. Pope John Paul II stated, which is a fact, that she died at the hands of the Nazis because she was a Jew and a Catholic, in retribution for the Church speaking out against Nazi deportations of the Jews in the Netherlands. The death of Edith Stein – and the death of Maximilian Kolbe – are the only cases of people slaughtered by the Nazis in the concentration camps that a certain circle within Catholicism feels comfortable publicly degrading.

Critical to Pope John XXIII's thinking was that the Church must reach out to the world and not see itself as a faithful remnant that hides from the world. The purpose in John's mind

was to certainly remove liturgical encrustation, defensive theological formulations and aspects of the culture of Catholicism that prevented outreach to the modern world. However, the purpose of such was not to convert the Church to modernism, but for the Church to be better able to evangelize the modern world. This has been the hallmark of the papacy of Pope John Paul II, who as a bishop attending the Council, was a strong supporter of the intent and spirit of Vatican II.

The five-point agenda for Vatican III is the purpose of Carroll's book. One cannot doubt the sincerity of his horror in the Holocaust, or his disgust at the anti-Jewish history that exists within the history of Western civilization and that members of the Church have been a part of it. But his purpose, clearly, is for "the past to be retrieved in ways that serve present purposes." Those purposes are Carroll's five-point agenda for creating a Catholicism that would fit his particular vision. He would do so by undermining the Gospels, dismissing 2000 years of Catholic theology and dismantling the papacy and the priesthood. He would, finally, have a Church that would disconnect from Jesus as the source of truth – that truth can be known, and truth can be evangelized.

It was not the belief of the Church, the New Testament, the Church centered in Jesus, the understanding that Christ died for the sins of mankind, or the Church belief in an objective and universal truth that persists in Christ, that created the horror of the Holocaust. It was the rejection of those, and the attempt to substitute for Judeo-Christian civilization a secularist pseudo scientism of race, class and nationalism that generated Nazism and the Holocaust.

[\[1\]](#) John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope* (Viking Press, 1999).

[2] Ibid, p. 295.

[3] Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War and the Pope* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2000).

[4] Cornwell, pp. 367, 369.

[5] Garry Wills, *Papal Sin, Structures of Deceit* (Doubleday, June 2000).

[6] For my review of *Papal Sin* see the Catholic League's website at www.catholicleague.org

[7] James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword, The Church and the Jews* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). All further references to Carroll will be by page number alone.

[8] p. 22.

[9] p. 109.

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana). Second edition. Available from Our Sunday Visitor.

[11] p. 305.

[12] p. 70.

[13] *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998).

[14] Rychlak, p. 310.

[15] p. 425.

[16] p. 129.

[17] See Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter*. (Walker & Company, 1999).

[18] p. 92.

[19] p. 126.

[\[20\]](#) p. 129.

[\[21\]](#) p. 124.

[\[22\]](#) pp. 173, 175.

[\[23\]](#) pp. 188-189.

[\[24\]](#) See "First Letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians," (88 – 97 AD) and the Apostles Creed from the Second Century A.D and the early *Didache*.

[\[25\]](#) p. 218.

[\[26\]](#) p. 250.

[\[27\]](#) Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1989) p. 40.

[\[28\]](#) p. 283.

[\[29\]](#) p. 283.

[\[30\]](#) *Saints and Sinners*, Eamon Duffy (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 112.

[\[31\]](#) p. 283.

[\[32\]](#) p. 319.

[\[33\]](#) p. 318.

[\[34\]](#) See Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*(Yale University Press, 1997).

[\[35\]](#) pp. 347-348.

[\[36\]](#) p. 365.

[\[37\]](#) Kamen, p. 309.

[\[38\]](#) p. 372.

[\[39\]](#) p. 372.

[\[40\]](#) Peters, p. 110.

[\[41\]](#) p. 377.

[\[42\]](#) Duffy, pp. 169-170.

[\[43\]](#) p. 453.

[\[44\]](#) p. 440.

[\[45\]](#) p. 476.

[\[46\]](#) The interested reader on this topic should review Ronald Rychlak's *Hitler, the War, and the Pope*. Though dismissed by Carroll, as it does not fit his thesis, it is worth reading for a documented – as opposed to simply the author's own interpretations – history of this era.

[\[47\]](#) p. 510.

[\[48\]](#) p. 539.

[\[49\]](#) pp. 548, 550. Carroll repeats on page 550 the old canard that when Pope John XXIII was dying he was asked what the Church should do against Rolf Hockhuth's play "The Deputy" that began the revisionism concerning the actions of Pius XII in World War II, he responded "Do against it? What can you do against the truth?" Though in a 1997 story in The New Yorker, Carroll conceded that this story was possibly apocryphal, he repeats it here as fact. The story was first raised, it appears, by Hannah Arendt in a 1964 essay and never attributed or documented. Pope John XXIII evidenced throughout his papacy a strong devotion and respect for Pius XII. It was Pope John who issued the order that in response to "The Deputy" that the Vatican record should be published, which led to the 11-volume "Acts and Documents" of the Holy See during World War II.

Regarding his help in saving Jews during the war, Pope John said “in all these painful matters I have referred to the Holy See and simply carried out the Pope’s orders: first and foremost to save Jewish lives.” In his last encyclical just two months before his death, *Pacem in Terris*, there are 32 references to the writings of Pius XII. It seems unlikely that there is any truth to this alleged quote.

[\[50\]](#) p. 551.

[\[51\]](#) p. 552.

[\[52\]](#) p. 566.

[\[53\]](#) p. 567.

[\[54\]](#) p. 575.

[\[55\]](#) p.576.

[\[56\]](#) p. 585.

[\[57\]](#) p. 587.

[\[58\]](#) p. 589.

[\[59\]](#) p. 591.

[\[60\]](#) p. 593.

[\[61\]](#) p.604.

[\[62\]](#) p. 610.

[\[63\]](#) p. 613.