

Political Theology After Auschwitz: Jürgen Habermas' Postsecularism in Postwar German Perspective

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In a 2006 article on "Religion in the Public Sphere," Jürgen Habermas, director emeritus of the Frankfurt *Institut für Sozialforschung* and among Europe's preeminent public intellectuals, adopted a stance that baffled many of his longtime interlocutors. Departing from a classical liberal division between the public domain of politics and the private sphere of religion, Habermas suggested that even religious utterances untranslated into the language of secular reason should be permitted in public political deliberation. Indeed, nonreligious citizens should not only welcome the participation of their religious counterparts, but "can be reasonably expected not to exclude the possibility that [religious] contributions may have cognitive substance."¹

Such statements—in particular, Habermas' contention that secular citizens should acknowledge the "*cognitive substance*" of religion—have struck many commentators as antithetical to the tradition of critical social theory that Habermas represents, including Habermas' own prior account of "communicative action."² Whereas Habermas' 1981 *magnum opus* described the formation of consensus among speakers through the exchange of mutually contestable validity claims, he now appears to exempt religious citizens from making their claims intelligible to those outside the faith. Scholars seeking to explain this apparent shift have

¹ Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the 'Public Use of Reason' by Religious and Secular Citizens," in Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 139.

² Richard J. Bernstein, "Naturalism, Secularism, and Religion: Habermas's Via Media," *Constellations* 17 (2010): 155-66; Peter E. Gordon, "Critical Theory between the Sacred and the Profane," *Constellations* 23 (2016): 466-81; Patrick Neal, "Habermas, Religion, and Citizenship," *Politics and Religion* 7 (2014): 318-38. See also the contributions by J. M. Bernstein, Maeve Cooke, and Thomas McCarthy in Craig Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, ed., *Habermas and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

pointed toward a global rise in religious fundamentalism and renewed religious tensions in Europe since the end of the Cold War, in particular since the attacks of September 11, 2001. On this view, Habermas' recent writings represent an effort to forge common ties of citizenship between Europe's secularized Christians and religious Muslims. Habermas can be either praised for his ecumenical vision, or criticized for ceding too much ground to religion.³

In this talk, however, I will propose a different possibility. If we dig deeper into Habermas' understanding of how exactly religion serves the public sphere, it becomes clear that he begins not from the growing Muslim presence in Europe, but from the historical significance of Christianity and Judaism for the development of Western democracy. In a 2002 interview, Habermas traced "Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity" back to the "legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love." "This legacy," Habermas continued, "has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it."⁴

Habermas' insistence on the "Judaic" and "Christian" foundations of democracy should not be read as an endorsement of a conservative tradition of Christian Democracy reminiscent of West Germany's early Christian Democratic Union (CDU).⁵ Instead, I will argue, this conviction grew out of Habermas' engagement with the so-called "new political theology" that emerged in West Germany during the 1960s, in opposition to the reactionary political theology popularized

³ Commentators frequently understand Habermas' lecture upon receiving the *Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels*, delivered in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, as a turning point. This is also the perspective of the most comprehensive historical overview of Habermas' engagement with religion: Eduardo Mendieta, "Religion in Habermas's Work," in *Habermas and Religion*, 391-407. For a critical valuation, see Cristina Lafont, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Remarks on Habermas's Conception of Public Deliberation in Postsecular Societies," *Constellations* 14 (2007): 239-59; a sympathetic appraisal is offered in Camil Ungureanu and Paolo Monti, "Habermas on Religion and Democracy: Critical Perspectives," *The European Legacy* 22 (2017): 521-27 and the essays collected in this special issue.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, "A Conversation About God and the World: Interview with Eduardo Mendieta," in Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 147-67, quoted 149.

⁵ For an alternative view, see Peter E. Gordon, "Between Christian Democracy and Critical Theory: Habermas, Böckenförde, and the Dialectics of Secularization in Postwar Germany," *Social Research* 80 (2013): 173-202.

by Carl Schmitt in the 1920s. For representatives of the "new political theology"—figures such as the Protestant theologians Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle, and the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz—the Christian message of salvation served not to buttress sovereign authority, but to liberate humankind from thoughtless obedience. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, these theologians regarded the recovery of Christianity's Jewish origins as central to articulating the emancipatory power of Gospel.⁶

This talk will lay out Habermas' dialogue with the "new political theology," a strand of continuity in his work that extends back long before immigration and "multiculturalism" became watchwords of German public debate. I will show how Habermas' interactions with Christian critics of postwar Germany's dominant political culture, culminating in his response in the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s, shaped his view of the democratic potential of religion. Yet more recently, Habermas' defense of "Judeo-Christianity" has led him to express skepticism about the democratic capacities of other religious traditions. Habermas' trajectory, I will conclude, illuminates disjunctures between the political commitments of Germany's left-liberal milieu, forged in struggles over the Nazi past during the 1970s and 1980s, and contemporary debates surrounding Germany's transformation into a multiethnic, multireligious society.

⁶ For overviews, see Thomas Kroll, "Der Linksprotestantismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der 1960er und 1970er Jahre: Helmut Gollwitzer, Dorothee Sölle und Jürgen Moltmann," in *Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Verschiebungen im politischen Feld der 1960 und 1970er Jahre*, ed. Thomas Kroll and Tilman Reitz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 103-22 and Annegreth Strümpfel, "Theologie der Hoffnung – Theologie der Revolution – Theologie der Befreiung: Zur Politisierung der Theologie in den 'lagen sechziger Jahren' in globaler Perspektive," in *Die Politisierung des Protestantismus: Entwicklungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland während der 1960er und 70er Jahre* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 150-67. On the contrast between the first and second generations of political theology in twentieth-century Germany, see Jean-Claude Monod, "Le 'problème théologico-politique' au XX^e siècle," *Espirit* 250, no. 2 (Feb. 1999): 179-92.

I.

The origins of Habermas' interest in the "new political theology" are rooted in his early life. Unlike the Jewish intellectuals of the Frankfurt School's first generation, Habermas was born in 1929 to parents who maintained strong attachments to a conservative cultural Protestantism.⁷ His father-in-law was a member of the Confessing Church, the organization of Protestant pastors established in 1934 to oppose efforts by the Nazi state to take control of the Protestant churches.⁸ As a student coming of age in the 1950s, Habermas identified with the political agenda of former Confessing Church members who opposed West German rearmament and challenged the CDU's identification of Christianity with the Cold War "West."⁹ He joined extraparliamentary protest movements, beginning with the movement against the nuclearization of the West German *Bundeswehr*, inhabited by outspoken Protestant church leaders.¹⁰ In the early 1960s, Habermas participated in a working group sponsored by the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* that sought to reconcile Marxism and Christianity.¹¹ And from 1966, he sat on the board of the *Kuratorium Notstand der Demokratie*, the organization of West German intellectuals that opposed the promulgation of "emergency laws," alongside Confessing Church veterans such as the theologian Helmut Gollwitzer and pastor Martin Niemöller.¹²

Of course, Habermas' philosophical commitments should not be reduced to biographical circumstances. But from Habermas' later reflections, it is hard not to conclude that Christians

⁷ Stefan Müller-Dooch, *Habermas: A Biography*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 2, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37. Habermas voted for Heinemann's *Gesamtdutsche Volkspartei* in the 1953 national elections.

¹⁰ On Habermas' engagement in anti-nuclear politics, see Matthew Specter, *Habermas: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 36. For his links to the wider oppositional Protestant milieu in West Germany, see my dissertation, "Faith for This World: Protestantism and the Reconstruction of Constitutional Democracy in Germany" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018), 312-13, 362-63, 418-19.

¹¹ See the protocols for the meetings of the "Marxismus-Kommission" of March 10-11, 1960, October 6-8, 1960, and March 6-8, 1961, in Archiv der Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft, Heidelberg, Box 709.

¹² Helmut Schauer, ed., *Notstand der Demokratie: Referate, Diskussionsbeiträge und Materialien vom Kongreß am 30. Oktober 1966 in Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1967), 13-14.

active in early West German protest movements inspired his vision of a democratically engaged religious community: "In both confessions, leftist associations were formed...[which] sought renewal instead of restoration and to establish universal standards of judgment in the public political realm...With an undogmatic understanding of transcendence and faith, this engagement took seriously this-worldly goals of human dignity and social emancipation."¹³

Habermas' connections to West Germany's progressive Christian milieu were not only political but intellectual. Of particular significance was a mutual interest in the Jewish sources of Western culture. By the late 1950s, theologians such as Helmut Gollwitzer sought to foster dialogue between Christians and Jews that would move beyond traditional precepts of Christian supersessionism.¹⁴ Younger theologians, such as Habermas' generational contemporaries Moltmann, Sölle, and Metz, went a step further, arguing that the rupture of the Holocaust demanded a fundamental reorientation of Christian theology. For the pioneers of a "new political theology," who published their first major works in the mid-1960s, theology began not with abstract claims about divine sovereignty but with the experience of concrete human suffering. The recovery of the Jewish core of Christian theology was, in their view, the prerequisite for overcoming a fateful history of Christian deference to the state. References to Jewish thinkers and concepts populated the works of the "new political theology"—from Jürgen Moltmann's engagement with traces of Jewish messianism in Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch to Dorothee Sölle's invocation of the Jewish *shekinah*, the worldly presence of God who shares in human suffering.¹⁵

¹³ Jürgen Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," in *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 228.

¹⁴ Benjamin Pearson, "Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant *Kirchentag*" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2008), 269-87.

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 15-19, 263, 267-69; Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, trans. Everett R. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 145-46. On Sölle's

Between the early 1960s and early 1970s, Habermas engaged in a parallel project of recovering the Jewish influence on post-Kantian German philosophy. Like his counterparts in theology, Habermas believed that the tradition of German-Jewish thought, which long maintained a liminal position in European culture between insider and outsider status, could offer critical perspectives on contemporary society.¹⁶ Habermas pointed in particular toward Walter Benjamin's "redemptive criticism" that insisted on viewing history from the standpoint of the victimized and forgotten, a standpoint that broke through the linear time of victors' history to foreshadow the ultimate messianic redemption of the world.¹⁷ Habermas invoked Jewish thought not to defend the "Judeo-Christian West," a slogan popular among Cold War Christian Democrats, but to condemn the suppression of the memory of Nazi genocide in the early Federal Republic. As he acidly commented in 1961, "we are in the process of letting everything be forgiven and forgotten too (in order to accomplish what could not have been accomplished better by anti-Semitism)."¹⁸

Habermas inaugurated a more direct dialogue with representatives of the "new political theology" during the 1970s, as he began work on what would become his 1981 *Theory of Communicative Action*. In 1974, Habermas invited a working group chaired by Dorothee Sölle to the *Max-Planck-Institut* in Starnberg for a conversation on the role of religion in public life, while Habermas' 1979 *Stichworte zur "Geistigen Situation der Zeit,"* a response to the so-called

reception of Jewish theology, see also Nancy Marian Hawkins, "Dorothee Sölle's Political Theology of God: Liberation, Feminism, Mysticism" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 1999), 81-87, 99-103.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers" in Habermas, *Political-Philosophical Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 21-43.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism—The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin," trans. Philip Brewster and Carl Howard Buchner, *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 30-59, especially 38-39, 56-59. See also Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 253-64.

¹⁸ Habermas, "German Idealism," 42. On conservative uses of Judeo-Christianity in 1950s West Germany, see Noah B. Strote, "Sources of Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Early Cold War Germany," in *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition? A European Perspective*, ed. Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 75-100 and Strote, *Lions and Lambs: Conflict in Weimar and the Creation of Post-Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 220-42.

conservative *Tendenzwende* in West German politics, included contributions solicited from Metz, Moltmann, and Sölle.¹⁹ Most significantly, a de-transcendentalized, this-worldly concept of religion proved significant for Habermas' emergent "postmetaphysical" philosophy of communication. In his 1973 *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas cited theology to address a key challenge he faced: Could a public morality rooted not in foundationalist principles, but solely in the practical imperative of good-faith communication, secure the social integration necessary for its own functioning? For Moltmann, Sölle, and Metz, Habermas noted, the "idea of God" is shorn of its metaphysical baggage and transformed into "a communicative structure that forces [individuals]...to encounter one another *indirectly*, that is, across an objective something that they themselves are not."²⁰ The moral ideal of the new political theology, then, involved a unifying ethic of communication aimed at the betterment of society. For Habermas, the persistence of this theological discourse suggested that even secularized societies could generate the moral resources necessary to sustain open and critical communication.

II.

The *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s, as I noted earlier, formed the crucial juncture at which Habermas brought together the philosophical and political implications of the "new political theology." This was of course the debate conducted among West Germany's leading public intellectuals about German responsibility for the Holocaust, set off with a June 1986 editorial by the historian Ernst Nolte that treated Auschwitz as merely a response to comparable atrocities by the Soviet Union. Habermas' replies to conservative historians demanded a

¹⁹ Hans Eckehard Bahr, ed., *Religionsgespräche: Zur gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Religion* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1975), 1-25; Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives*, trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 121.

reckoning not only with German complicity under National Socialism, but with the abiding legacy of Nazism in postwar West German society.²¹ Though he pointed out the unprecedented nature of Nazi atrocities, Habermas' case was not in the first instance historical. Instead, he drew on theological discourse to posit a new articulation of German identity—modeling the translation of the moral insights of religion into public discourse that Habermas had long understood as the hallmark of progressive theology in West Germany.

A process of recovering the Jewish roots of Christianity again proved central to Habermas' interventions. His key theological interlocutor during the *Historikerstreit* was the Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz, with whom he had been in contact since the early 1970s.²² In a series of essays on Jewish-Christian relations after Auschwitz beginning in 1980, Metz called for a transformation of Christian theology, from its longstanding orientation toward an instrumental concept of reason derived from Greek philosophy toward the recovery of a Jewish messianic tradition that admonished against reconciliation with this-worldly injustice.²³ At the height of the historians' controversy, Habermas similarly called for retrospective solidarity with Nazi Germany's victims, invoking the "redemptive criticism" of Walter Benjamin:

It is especially these dead who have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of a solidarity that later generations can continue to practice only in the medium of a remembrance that is repeatedly renewed, often desperate, and continually on one's mind. If we were to brush aside this Benjaminian legacy, our fellow Jewish citizens and the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of all those who were murdered would feel themselves unable to breathe in our country.²⁴

²¹ For Habermas' interventions in the *Historikerstreit*, see "A Kind of Settling of Damages," in Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 207-48.

²² Jürgen Habermas, "A Symposium on Faith and Knowledge," in Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 154.

²³ Johann Baptist Metz, "Christians and Jews After Auschwitz," in *Bitburg and Beyond: Encounters in American, German, and Jewish History*, ed. Ilya I. Levkov (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1987), 509-20; Metz, "In Angesicht der Juden: Christliche Theologie nach Auschwitz," *Concilium: Internationale Zeitschrift für Theologie* 20 (1984): 382-89. On the larger context of Metz's interventions, see John T. Pawlikowski, "Christology in Light of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 49 (1994): 120-34.

²⁴ Habermas, "On the Public Use of History," in *The New Conservatism*, 233.

Metz would praise Habermas' invocation of "anamnestic reason," a concept developed by Habermas' translator Christian Lenhardt but deeply inspired by Benjamin.²⁵ For Metz, this was a form of reason that encoded the historical memory of suffering, and prevented the forgetting of the past "in the interest of securing individual and collective identities of those alive today."²⁶

In 1993, Habermas paid tribute to Metz on the occasion of the latter's retirement at Münster, calling on his fellow philosophers to aid in the development of a new form of reason oriented toward the standpoint of human suffering. As in his earlier *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas looked to the new political theology as a discourse that reconciled the need for social solidarity with the value pluralism of modern societies. Metz, he noted, believed that the Church must submit itself to the competing validity claims of other worldviews in light of its own history of colonialism. Anamnestic reason offered a basis for engaging with other traditions on their own terms, without subsuming them into a narrative of Christian salvation. Habermas viewed precisely the *self-critical* impetus of the new political theology as its key qualification to serve as a theological dialogue partner for his own brand of "postmetaphysical thinking."²⁷

III.

This overview of Habermas' engagement with the "new political theology," I would submit, sheds light on Habermas' more recent writings on the contributions of religious citizens to what he has termed a "postsecular" public sphere. It should be clear by now that Habermas'

²⁵ Christian Lenhardt, "Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and its *Manes*," *Telos* 25 (1975), 133-55; see also Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 165 n24.

²⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, "Anamnestic Reason: A Theologian's Remarks on the Crisis in the *Geisteswissenschaften*," in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, ed. Axel Honneth et al., trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 189-94, quoted 192.

²⁷ Habermas, "Israel or Athens: Where does Anamnestic Reason Belong? Johannes Baptist Metz on Unity amidst Multicultural Plurality," in *Religion and Rationality*, 129-38. On this exchange, see also Max Pensky, "On the Use and Abuse of Memory: Habermas, 'Anamnestic Solidarity,' and the *Historikerstreit*," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 15 (1990): 351-80.

writings on religion since 2001 hardly reflect a radical departure, but a deepening interest in a longstanding set of concerns. In the concluding portion of this talk, I want to suggest that this background can help us tease out tensions in Habermas' current work. How have narratives aimed at recovering the significance of Judaism for postwar German philosophy and theology, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, structured Habermas' more recent interventions in debates about new religious minorities?

In a 2008 article for the center-left *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, a tension embedded in Habermas' adaptation of the new political theology comes to the fore. While Habermas' philosophical concept of the "postsecular society" is oriented toward achieving a rapprochement between secular and religious worldviews in general, his historical genealogy leads him to emphasize the particular significance of Judaism and Christianity for fostering democratic sensibilities. At one level, Habermas recognizes that only in the mid-1960s did the Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany "embrace[d] liberalism and democracy." Yet he goes on to subsume the specific history of the twentieth-century churches into a much longer dialectic. In the West, according to Habermas, religious minorities gained equal rights of religious freedom through a "protracted process" that began in the Reformation and "lasted into the twentieth century."²⁸ His description the "more reflexive form of religious consciousness" that emerged in the West implies a degree of historical closure, exemplified in the dialogue between philosophy and theology sustained in his own work. On the other hand, Habermas claims, "many Muslim communities still have this painful learning process ahead of them."²⁹

²⁸ Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere of 'Post-Secular' Society," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, 215-16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

Elsewhere, Habermas has argued that "Eastern religions" lack a conception of the autonomous subject, and therefore have not completed the process of "cultural and social modernization."³⁰

What are we to make of these statements? At first glance, Habermas' invocation of a "learning process" echoes recent pronouncements by Christian Democratic politicians, including Chancellor Merkel, to characterize the historical path of German Protestantism toward the embrace of pluralism and tolerance.³¹ Wolfgang Schäuble, the recently departed CDU finance minister, wrote in a 2017 tract commemorating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation that Muslim immigrants to Germany should be allowed the chance to undergo a similar "learning process," "although it is clear that in this case, it must not last hundreds of years."³² Yet as I have argued, Habermas is not best understood as the heir to a conservative lineage of Christian democracy. Even in his more recent writings, Habermas has continued to refer to Johann Baptist Metz as an "ideal religious post-secular dialogue partner." He correspondingly distances himself from conservative theologians who call for a return to traditional Christian teachings as the foundation for a shared political morality.³³

Instead, I would argue that Habermas' recent statements show how even the more critical forms of West German political theology—which Habermas and his generational counterparts deployed with such force to challenge the restrictive memory culture of the postwar decades—contain their own possibilities for exclusion. Habermas approaches an argument that has gained ground in Protestant circles during the past two decades, which identifies the *progressive* values

³⁰ Habermas, "Interview with Eduardo Mendieta," in *Religion and Rationality*, 148.

³¹ Angela Merkel, "Speech given by Federal Chancellor Dr Angela Merkel in Lutherstadt Wittenberg on 31 October 2017 on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation," *The Federal Chancellor*, https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/EN/Reden/2017/2017-10-31-bk-merkel-reformation_en.html (accessed April 15, 2018).

³² Wolfgang Schäuble, *Protestantismus und Politik* (Munich: Claudius, 2017), 48.

³³ Habermas, "The New Philosophical Interest in Religion," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, 76. For Habermas' 2004 exchange with the conservative Catholic theologian Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, see Habermas, "Prepolitical Foundations of the Constitutional State?" in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, 101-13.

of the German constitution as the product of Christian teachings translated into secular form. Precisely because progressive Christians played significant roles in expanding the public discourse about German history and identity in the aftermath of the Holocaust, it becomes all too easy to claim that Christianity, or "Judeo-Christianity," was the driving force behind postwar German democratization—to fall back on a concept of Christian universalism that the new political theology sought to overcome. The history of Christianity is rewritten as a path toward the pluralization of worldviews, until even Judaism could be accommodated. This narrative runs the risk of subsuming the Holocaust itself into the historical "learning process."³⁴

Yet ultimately, an account of pluralism that construes non-Western subjects as obstacles to liberal democracy, as a result of their religion or "culture," is unlikely to be adequate to addressing contemporary challenges of migration and diversity—especially with the rise of new populist movements that have styled themselves as the guardians of Christianity, and, in the case of the AfD, of Judaism as well.³⁵ We are perhaps better off beginning from a revised concept of historical responsibility fully aware of the dangers of incorporating the past into a narrative of national redemption.

³⁴ This narrative has been deployed in particular by the theologian Wolfgang Huber, who recently retired as bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg and chair of the Council of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*. On Huber and his relationship to an earlier generation of Protestant thinkers in West Germany (including Habermas), see my "Faith for This World," 425-29.

³⁵ Igal Avidan, "AfD und Judentum: Ein einseitig instrumentelles Verhältnis zum Antisemitismus," *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/afd-und-judentum-ein-einseitig-instrumentelles-verhaeltnis.1079.de.html?dram:article_id=386645 (accessed August 20, 2018). On the stigmatization of Muslims in contemporary Germany through a discourse of "tolerance," see Sultan Doughan, "Teaching Tolerance: Citizenship, Religious Difference, and Race in Germany" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, forthcoming).