

## Introduction

### **The Righteous Then and now**

When the Germans occupied France in World War II, historian Jules Isaac was fired from his post as France's Inspector General of Education. Isaac had been a fixture of French intellectual society for decades. His seven-volume *Cours d'histoire* served as the standard history text in most French high schools and universities. Isaac was also a decorated World War I veteran and patriotic Frenchman. While Jules Isaac never denied his Jewish identity, he did not define himself by it. As the Nazis implemented their "final solution" in France, Isaac turned his historian's mind to the question of anti-Semitism. How, he thought, could the Holocaust be happening in societies that have been Christian for nearly two thousand years? At first, Isaac managed to maintain his characteristic academic detachment from his subject. But his subject refused to maintain its detachment from Isaac. While he was away from home one day in 1943, the Gestapo arrested Isaac's wife, daughter, son, and son-in-law. Of the four, only his son would return home from the death camps. Before being deported from France, Madame Isaac managed to send a note to her husband exhorting him to, "Save yourself for your work; the world is waiting for it."

On the run and in hiding, Jules Isaac devoted himself to fulfilling his wife's last wish. Isaac's writing became to him a "cry of an outraged conscience, of a lacerated heart."

By the war's end, he had completed a six-hundred-page manuscript titled *Jesus and Israel*. In wrestling with the question of how the Holocaust could happen in a Christian Europe, Isaac had reached an unexpected conclusion. While German soldiers serving a neo-pagan Nazi ideology were the ones who carried away his family, Jules Isaac pointed the finger of ultimate blame not at the Nazis, but at the Christian church. He wrote that while the German responsibility for the Holocaust was "overwhelming," it was only a "derivative responsibility."

The real culprit, Isaac asserted, was the centuries-old tradition of Christian anti-Semitism. In his words:

Christian anti-Semitism is the powerful, millennial tree, with many and strong roots, onto which all the other varieties of anti-Semitism— even the most antagonistic by nature, even anti-Christian—have come to be grafted in the Christian world.

Isaac traced the source of this Christian anti-Semitism to the church's traditional teaching on the Jews and Judaism, what Isaac named the "teaching of contempt." In *Jesus and Israel*, Isaac thoroughly documents and then rebuts this corpus of anti-Jewish beliefs. At the heart of this teaching of contempt was the claim that the Jews "as a whole" had rejected and then crucified Jesus, and that Jesus in turn had rejected and condemned the entire Jewish people. Central also was the church's uniform denial of

Jesus' Jewish identity and Christianity's Jewish roots.

Isaac concludes Jesus and Israel with the following, haunting statement of his thesis: The glow of the Auschwitz crematorium is the beacon that lights, that guides all my thoughts. Oh my Jewish brothers, and you as well, my Christian brothers, do you not think that it mingles with another glow, that of the Cross?

Although he condemned the Christian teaching of contempt for the Jews, Jules Isaac never condemned Christianity. Despite all he suffered, Isaac persisted in the optimistic belief that if it would only end this teaching of contempt, the church would produce Christians who would save Jews, not kill them. On this point he did not rely upon mere conjecture. For much of the time he was writing *Jesus and Israel*, Jules Isaac was hiding from the Nazis in a Catholic home. His rescuer, a woman named Germaine Bocquet, received her Catholic education from a teacher who had purposely removed anti-Semitism from his lesson plan.<sup>6</sup> When asked why she risked her life and that of her husband to save the life of a Jew, Germaine Bocquet replied:

The religious education I had received had instilled in me respect for the Jewish people, and gratitude that they have given us the prophets, the virgin Mary, Christ, and the apostles. Jews were for me people of the Covenant, of God's promises. Jesus, the Messiah, was a faithful son of the Law, which he had come to bring to perfection, not to abolish. I had never heard the Jews spoken of as Christ-killers; I had been taught that our sins crucified Jesus.

Tragically, Mrs. Bocquet's religious education was not the standard catechism in the churches of Europe. While she believed that the Jews were still beloved of God and the beneficiaries of God's holy covenant, the Christian majority embraced the teaching of contempt and a "replacement theology," which held that the church had superseded the Jews as God's chosen people. While Mrs. Bocquet saw the Jews as the family and followers of Christ, most Christians viewed the Jews as the enemies and murderers of Christ. While Mrs. Bocquet risked her life to save a Jew, an entire continent of Christians was killing Jews or standing by and letting it happen. By removing the Jews from God's love, the dominant Christian theology of the day left them vulnerable to man's hate.

Thirty-five years after the Holocaust, the Israeli air force destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak, outside of Baghdad. The Israelis had determined that Iraq was using the reactor to develop a nuclear bomb, a weapon this implacable enemy might one day use against them. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin justified the action to the world by declaring that he would not permit "another Holocaust in the history of the Jewish people."<sup>8</sup> Israel was universally condemned for the Osirak raid, including by its ally the United States.

In San Antonio, Texas, a pastor named John Hagee was dismayed by the loud outcry against Israel's action. He decided to counter the chorus of criticism with a public show of support. With the help of a fellow pastor and two rabbis, Pastor Hagee organized a

“Night to Honor Israel.” The day after he held a press conference to announce the upcoming event, someone phoned Pastor Hagee’s church and said, “Tell that preacher he’ll be dead by Friday.”

As the evening of the event drew near, someone shot out the windows of Pastor Hagee’s car while it was parked in front of his house.<sup>9</sup>

The Night to Honor Israel went ahead as scheduled. After the speeches, Hagee presented a \$10,000 check to the president of the local chapter of Hadassah. Then, at 9:27 p.m., Hagee was handed a note. Someone had phoned the San Antonio Express News threatening to blow up the auditorium at 9:30 p.m. The room was quickly evacuated.

Despite this troubled start, Hagee’s Night to Honor Israel became an annual event. Over the years, the size of the crowd grew, and a massive television audience was added. And the checks got bigger. At the 2004 Night to Honor Israel, Pastor Hagee presented checks totaling \$2.25 million to two Jewish organizations that fund the immigration of Jews to Israel and one that supports Israeli orphans.

When asked why he so staunchly supports Israel, Pastor John Hagee speaks of a “biblical mandate to bless the Jews” and of a Christian “debt of gratitude” to the Jewish people. Pastor Hagee notes that:

The Jewish people gave to us the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prophets, Elijah, Daniel, Zechariah, etc.—not a Baptist in the bunch. Every word in your Bible was written by Jewish hands. The first family of Christianity, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, were Jewish. Jesus Christ, a Jewish rabbi from Nazareth, made this statement: “Salvation is of the Jews.” The point is this: If you take away the Jewish contribution to Christianity, there would be no Christianity.

If these words are reminiscent of those spoken by Germaine Bocquet, Jules Isaac’s rescuer, this is no coincidence. Pastor Hagee and Mrs. Bocquet share the same theology. Like so many of the righteous Gentiles who saved Jews during the Holocaust, Hagee roundly rejects the teaching of contempt and replacement theology; he believes that the Jews are still God’s chosen people. When Pastor Hagee looks at Jews, he does not see a rejected people or a deicide people; he sees the family and friends of Christ.

Despite the similarities, however, there is one difference between Pastor John Hagee and Germaine Bocquet, and it is a difference of enormous significance. In her day, Mrs. Bocquet’s theology represented the thinking of a small group on the fringes of Christendom—it was the minority report. A generation later, Pastor Hagee’s theology represents the dominant strain of Christian thinking in America. Replacement theology is on the decline; its adherents have lost their power and momentum. Christians who embrace the Jews as the elect of God are ascendant both theologically and politically. In twenty-first-century America, the righteous Gentiles have taken over the church. Today’s righteous Gentiles confront a world in which the threats facing the Jewish

people have changed but not disappeared. Despite a recent and troubling rise in European anti-Semitism, most Jews in the Christian world no longer live in physical peril and need not seek refuge in Christian homes. Instead, the great existential threat facing the Jews today is the one confronting their Jewish State. Since the day it declared its independence in 1948, Israel has lived under the threat of physical destruction from its Arab neighbors. As Israel's prowess in conventional arms grew, its enemies pursued weapons of mass destruction with sufficient success to ensure that Israel continues to confront annihilation. Since 2000, Israel has been besieged by a new danger in the form of a sustained campaign of suicide bombings by Palestinian terrorists. Israelis, strong and independent in their own land, now face a day-to-day physical danger that once haunted their forebears in Europe.

The modern-day righteous Gentiles exemplified by John Hagee recognize the current threats facing the Jews and have responded to them with an outpouring of support for the Jewish State. Evangelical Christians have become a powerful pro-Israel force in America. In fact, when Republicans hold the balance of power in Washington, evangelical Christians become the most powerful pro-Israel force in America. Evangelical leaders speak to the White House and Congress as the representatives of the largest single voting block within the Republican Party. Outside of politics, evangelical Christians raise millions of dollars every year for Israel and for poor Jews around the world. So many Christians visit Israel each year that the Jewish State often receives more Christian tourists than Jewish ones.

Of course, neither lobbying for Israel nor sending checks to the United Jewish Communities qualifies as an act of heroism. While Pastor Hagee and others have taken risks to support Israel, the threats they faced were from a few extremists, not a brutally efficient regime. Referring to Christian Zion-ists as modern-day righteous Gentiles does not mean that their actions are as noble as those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The times do not currently demand sacrifices so sublime from any of Israel's friends, Christian or Jewish. The reference is intended simply to recognize the fact that today's Christian Zionists share the same theology as their heroic fore-bears, and that they have thus far chosen to act on this theology to the extent demanded by the times. If the Christian Zionists and other friends of Israel do their job properly now, no one may ever need to discover to what heights of heroism they might rise under more exigent circumstances.

With limited exceptions, the American Jewish community has responded to this epochal change in Christian theology toward the Jews with a collective yawn. For the most part, they simply haven't noticed. Because they have failed to recognize this change, America's Jews persist in assuming that Christian attitudes toward the Jews today are substantially similar to those of prior centuries. It is no wonder, therefore, that so many Jews are suspicious when Christians profess to love them so deeply. When American Jews see a cross, they often see it, as did Jules Isaac, bathed in the glow of the Auschwitz crematorium.

In their failure to recognize radically changed circumstances, American Jews resemble those legendary Japanese soldiers stationed on remote Pacific islands during World War II. Japan surrendered in 1945, and her people went to work building a democracy and a modern economy. Japan rapidly became a major ally and trading partner of the United States. Yet, oblivious to these changes, many of these soldiers continued to prowl the jungles in search of the American enemy.

Many in the American Jewish community are also living in the past, stuck not in Pacific jungles but in European ghettos. In an alternative reality built on traumatic communal memories, millions of Jews continue to crouch, fingers on their triggers, surrounded by bloodthirsty Christians who view them as a replaced, deicide people. Yet the world has changed dramatically in recent decades, and the enemy they fear has long since become a friend. These Jews are fighting ghosts.

In focusing on Isaac's cross, the Jewish community misses Isaac's point. Jules Isaac not only looked back into a dark past, but he also looked forward. He looked forward and saw a door open to him. That door led to the home of a Catholic woman willing to save his life. Jules Isaac walked through the door, and he survived.

Today, the Jewish community owes it to six million victims to look back into history and remember the evil that was done. But like Jules Isaac, the Jewish community must also look forward. American Jewry must look forward and find that there is a door open to them. The door leads to the churches and homes of millions of Christians who want to stand with the Jews and with their small, embattled State of Israel. It is a door through which they should walk.

To many American Jews, the proposed alliance with evangelicals in support of Israel is a Faustian bargain. They are reluctant to grasp the devil's hand. Their hesitation, they argue, is driven not by past trauma but by present policy. \_ American Jews, still overwhelmingly liberal, often view evangelical Christians as bitter political opponents. On a series of domestic social issues from abortion to assisted suicide, evangelical Christians champion positions that are anathema to most Jews. Even when it comes to Israel, evangelical Christians often support Israeli policies and politicians that liberal Jews cannot abide.

Here again, the example of Jules Isaac proves instructive. For Isaac, seeking refuge in the home of a Catholic did not require a vow of silence or acquiescence in Catholic teachings to which he objected. He faced no Hobbesian choice between survival and conscience. On the contrary, in the shelter provided by his Catholic rescuer, Jules Isaac wrote a work that placed ultimate responsibility for the Holocaust upon the Catholic Church. Not only did Isaac criticize the church, but he also changed it. After the war, Isaac dedicated the remaining years of his life to encouraging a Christianity that would reflect his rescuer more than it reflected his tormentors. He worked closely with sympathetic Catholics to draft reforms that would eliminate the teaching of contempt from the Catholic catechism. In his effort to secure adoption of these reforms, Isaac met with a

number of Catholic

The extent to which Jewish communal memories magnify and exacerbate present-day policy differences will be explored in later chapters.

Isaac's 1960 meeting with Pope John XXIII proved to be historic. Here Isaac persuaded the pope to take steps that culminated in the vatican's official condemnation of anti-Semitism and the charge of deicide against the Jews.<sup>12</sup> There is thus a direct line from Isaac's writing about the teaching of contempt to the decision by the Catholic Church to end the teaching of contempt.

For American Jews today, joining hands with evangelical Christians will not require ignoring significant policy disagreements. Christian friendship is not being offered at the price of Jewish silence or acquiescence. Each community can continue to pursue its own vision of what is best for America and Israel from within the same tent. While America's Jews may not be able to change Christian politics the way that Jules Isaac changed church doctrine, they may find that collaboration works to blunt differences and foster respect. As Jules Isaac did, American Jews should reach out to their Christian brothers. This time, there is already an outstretched hand waiting to receive theirs.

When the Nazis extended their control to a new country, one of their first acts was to require the Jews of that country to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing. The yellow star was part of the process of dehumanization and subjugation. By separating the Jews from their fellow citizens in this fashion, it would be easier to later extract them from the general population and then murder them.

A wonderful story is told about King Christian X, the king of Denmark during World War II. Legend has it that when Hitler ordered Denmark's Jews to wear the yellow star on their clothes, King Christian protested by placing a yellow star on his own jacket. The Jews were fellow Danes, his subjects, and he would not permit such discrimination against them. According to the story, thousands of Danes followed their king's lead, thus thwarting Nazi efforts to single out the Jews.

While the tale is apocryphal, the heroism of the Danes is not. When the Nazis were arranging the deportation of Denmark's seventy-five hundred Jews, their plans were leaked to a few Danish leaders who promptly informed the Jewish community. Almost all Danish Jews went into hiding, and, eventually, more than seven thousand of them were ferried to safety in neutral Sweden by a flotilla of Danish fishing vessels. Ordinary Danes provided the hiding places, the boats, and the crew for the transport. When Nazi soldiers visited every Jewish address in Denmark, they found very few Jews at home. King Christian and his subjects wore the yellow star on their hearts if not on their clothing.

Such heroism flowed naturally from a people whose church had never embraced the

replacement theology so popular in sibling churches across the border. In the midst of the Danish rescue of the Jews, for instance, the bishop of the Lutheran Church of Denmark proclaimed:

Wherever persecutions are undertaken for racial or religious reasons against the Jews, it is the duty of the Christian Church to raise a protest against it...because we shall never be able to forget that the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem, of the virgin Mary into Israel, the people of His possession, according to the promise of God.

Imagine if there would have been more King Christians during World War II. Imagine if there would have been more Germaine Bocquets. Imagine if the majority of Christians in Nazi Europe would have remained true to the Christian message of love instead of the false theology of hate. It may well have been impossible to perpetrate the Holocaust in a Europe so populated.

Today, there is no need for such an exercise of the imagination. Something truly extraordinary is taking place here and now. American Christianity is being taken over by righteous Gentiles. Unlike during the Holocaust, the Jews aren't being abandoned to their fate. Across America, church by church, one by one, Christians are putting on the yellow star. They are standing with the Jews. This time, they are determined not to leave the Jews or their nation, Israel, to fight alone.