

"Combatting Anti-Semitism. An Interdisciplinary Approach"

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Abstract:

Not only sociological analyses of the current spread of anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviors, but also recent textbook and curriculum analyses show how difficult it is to fight anti-Semitism effectively. The reasons for this may be manifold, but the reflections of this lecture seek to illustrate, using the example of religious education, that an interdisciplinary approach can explain these difficulties and show ways for effective pedagogical interventions.

For example, historical studies show the reciprocal entanglement of different forms of anti-Semitism as well as the effectiveness of black and white stereotyping in which Jews make up the dark backdrop against which individual identity stand out all the more positively.

In view of these historical analyses, a well-founded choice can be made from the wealth of psychological theories of prejudice that is fit to explain the origin and, conversely, the fight against anti-Semitic prejudice. In a pedagogical context this means, for example, that prejudices arising from the above-mentioned stereotyping can be remedied by highlighting commonalities without concealing differences.

However, recent textbook and curriculum analyses show that pedagogical interventions need to be persistent, as the implementation of these interventions in textbooks and curricula, for example, is slow and not straightforward.

It is well known, that there are numerous expressions of anti-Semitism: Some of them reach back to the racial doctrine arising in the late 19th century, which represented “the” Jews as race inferior to the Aryan master race. A typical expression of this is the so-called “Jewish nose” that one may encounter in caricatures from that time period. I inherited this pipe,, carved in the form of a Jew’s head, from one of my ancestors—and it is downright macabre and perfectly horrible that not many years after its creation, Jews were actually burnt in Auschwitz and other places.

Anti-Semitism is also to some extent part and parcel of current political conflicts, as for example when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is linked to traditional prejudices such as those that represent the Jews as a Giant Octopus. The Giant Octopus is a classical anti-Semitic motif, as you can see in the Nazi-journal „Der Stürmer“ from the year 1938.

Such forms of anti-Semitism, however, are not the subject of this presentation. I will instead focus my discussion on religiously-motivated anti-Semitism, which is often referred to as anti-Judaism. In doing so, as a Protestant Christian, I would like to “put my own house in order” and analyze Christian based anti-Semitism self-critically. The first part of my presentation provides a brief historical overview. My intent here is to demonstrate that we cannot underestimate the importance of Christian based anti-Semitism for the spread of anti-Semitism in general. In the second and the third part of my presentation, I would like to draw attention to aspects related to religious education and to psychology. These aspects are important as they explain how religious education can contribute to combatting religiously-motivated anti-Semitism.

1. On the origin and historical influence of anti-Jewish stereotyping

In his essay “Judaism as antithesis: On the tradition of a cultural evaluation pattern,”¹ Christhard Hoffmann argues convincingly that the perception and valuation of Judaism was often characterized by a polarity of good and evil, in which Judaism always found itself representing the negative pole, regardless of the substantive ‘filling’ of one’s own ‘being’.²

According to Hoffmann, the origin of this antithetical evaluation pattern, which proved so fateful for Judaism, is grounded in Christian theology.³ Indeed, Christian identity is seldom articulated without Judaism being brought up as a foil—one that serves as a dark contrast against which Christian identity can stand out all the brighter. The definition of this relationship lends itself to an evident black/white dichotomy:

Christianity:	kind Jesus	crucifixion of Jesus	Righteousness through faith	Elected by God
Judaism:	self-righteous Pharisees	deicides	righteousness through works	Rejected by God

Herein lies one of the roots of enmity towards Judaism if not its principle origin, which throughout the history of Christianity has served as a foil for Christian world-views and the antithesis of Christian identity. To illustrate this Hoffmann quotes from a Protestant church newspaper published in 1865: “Since Golgotha, Judaism has been at best an antiquated phenomenon; it is only through contrast that it holds any historical significance to life.”⁴

The consequences of this black-and-white thinking are devastating: Even as the influence of the church waned, the Christian West continued to use Jews as a negative foil for their own convictions. The reasons for this might be further detailed through prejudice psychology research, since contrasting and identity issues can form the basis for prejudice. As the following table shows, the religiously-motivated pattern of contrasting good versus evil applies to non-religious areas:

“Christian” origins of the antithetical valuation model		Jews
	(humane) Jesus	Self-righteous Pharisees
	crucifixion of Jesus	deicides
	righteousness through faith	righteousness through works
	Elected by God	Rejected by God
Transfer to non-religious areas		
Enlightenment	reason (e.g. enlightened Greeks or Chinese)	superstition (e.g. Judaism)

pre-March 1848	“German” (i.e. national-conservative) politics	“Jewish” (i.e. liberal or democratic) politics
Richard Wagner	“German” (i.e. good) music	Jewish (i.e. bad) music
racial doctrine	“Aryan” race	“Jewish” race

With the onset of the Enlightenment, the Christian aspect of this dualistic valuation gradually receded as the new identity and the newly secularized world emerged. And yet, despite the beginning of Jewish emancipation and such literary efforts as Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*, Judaism continued to serve as the antithesis of one’s sense of identity. When exemplifying the Enlightenment ideals of “reason” and “the secular state,” the Chinese and Greeks served as the “enlightened” role models, while the Jews were associated with the antithetical ideals of “superstition”, “church”, and “theocracy.”⁵

This phenomenon may also be observed in the Counter-Enlightenment. Indeed, the substantive content of the antithetical “Jew – German” valuation can only be understood historically as emerging from a backlash against Jewish emancipation. “By making reference to the Christian and Germanic character of the German ‘folk spirit,’ the ‘foreignness’ and ‘otherness’ of Jews was emphasized and the integration of Jews in German society rejected.”⁶ In this sense, there are some documents of conservative politicians who, for instance, during the pre-March 1848 period decried their democratic opponents as “un-German” and “Jewish.”⁷ Richard Wagner is a classic proponent of this kind of thought, as is clear from the distinction he made between German, in other words, great music, and Jewish, or bad music.⁸

This antithetical valuation is also instructive when it comes to the racial doctrine of the Third Reich. As a German I feel ashamed that in the Third Reich, the “Jewish race” served as the “dark” foil to the “Aryan race”: Surely, this pseudo-scientific racial doctrine has its historical roots in – among other things – an abridged Darwinism and thus primarily in a secular context. But the question remains whether the specific formation of “racist” anti-Semitism could be completely explained without the prior existence of “Christian” anti-Semitism and the lasting impression it had made on Western culture. I think it isn’t possible, as we have to take into account, that under the racist doctrine, the Jews were not only considered one inferior race among others, such as the Slavs or the Roma, but rather as the(!) ‘anti-race,’ whose goal it is to subvert the Aryan race.⁹ How could this be explained without

resorting to the Christian antithetical valuation, which portrays the Jews as subhuman and as the antithesis *par excellence* to the “Aryan” race?

Let us turn now from this historical overview to religious education itself.

2. Anti-Jewish contrasting in religious education

Between 1980 and 1995, several studies examined the topic of anti-Judaism in Germany and Austria through an analysis of religious educational textbooks and curricula. The results of those studies corresponded with other analyses of anti-Semitism in the context of religious education and can be effectively explained using different theories of prejudice. In the following, I will present the results of the religious educational analyses from that time period, while it is worth mentioning, that the present study of Julia Spichal, that was presented in one of our workshops, showed similar results even 20 years later.

The representation of Judaism in textbooks and curricula can be characterized by an ambivalence that could be summarized with the formula “between reform and stagnation”. Namely, a comparative analysis of this topic—regardless of all ongoing reform processes—reveals the following critical topics, within which curricula and textbooks presented Judaism in a problematic light: 1) Passion, 2) Torah and/or Law, 3) Pharisees, 4) “Old” Testament, 5) Jewish history and 6) a generally insufficient definition of the Judeo-Christian relationship.

The findings may be exemplified by the representation of “the” Pharisees as well as the treatment of the Torah (or “law”) in religious educational teaching materials: Although the authors of the textbooks and curricula clearly had good intentions when they accurately describe the Pharisees as a religious group in Jesus’ time. However, “when in the same book—sometimes but a few pages later—the Pharisees appear in opposition to Jesus, they are depicted subjectively, negatively and ten-den-tiously.”¹⁰ A similar problem can be observed in the treatment of the Torah. As long as the Torah is discussed from a religious studies perspective and within the context of Judaism the authors make a concerted effort to present an adequate picture of the Torah and its vital importance to everyday Jewish life. However, once the subject of the Torah is broached in the context of Jesus’ message or ministry, or in the context of lessons on the topics of “violence” or “peace,” the tendency to caricature the Torah as a negative expression of Jewish righteousness became apparent. Michael Brocke and Herbert Jochum assert quite rightly that “almost without exception, the positive approaches find their limits at the educational instrument of contrast.”¹¹

Fundamentally, such findings elucidate a challenge not only for religious education, but for Christian theology as a whole. One way or another, it turns out that religious education lacks a reasonable definition of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity—

“‘reasonable’ here meaning one, in which Christian identity is neither left to inference, nor posited at the expense of Judaism.”¹² Indeed, between 1980 and 1995, numerous religious education scholars pointed out the negative consequences of this insufficient definition of the Christian-Jewish relationship. Ultimately it is religious education teachers who are directly affected by this: “When, for example, [a teacher] attempts to depict Judaism in Jesus’ time in a differentiated and sympathetic manner and comes up with praise for the pious among the Pharisees—then [he or she] finds it difficult to justify what was new about what Jesus brought into the world. [This stands] in stark contrast to [a teacher] who works with a vivid image of the enemy, since the credibility of the new // is presented as self-evident // in contrast to the decadence of the old.”¹³ Kohler-Spiegel arrives at a similar conclusion through her analysis of German, Austrian and Swiss-German curricula: “Thus, the central question is broached yet again—how can Christians formulate the ‘specific, Christian’ nature of their identity in a positive manner without resorting to negative demarcations in regard to Judaism?”¹⁴

3. Psychological perspectives on Anti-Jewish contrasting

In the late 1960s psychology underwent the so-called cognitive revolution. In prejudice research, psychological explanatory models like scapegoat theory or studies about the authoritarian personality were largely supplanted by theories¹⁵ that explained the emergence of prejudices in ‘natural’ processes of thought and perception. In the following I will focus on one of these cognitive theories, the accentuation theory.

Accentuation Theory

In the categorisation of people, a decisive role is played by physical (e.g. body size, hair colour, gender) and social (e.g. ethnic and religious membership) traits. We may understand social prejudice as an assumed correlation between a particular category (e.g. Italian) and one or several traits (e.g. body size).¹⁶ This leads, however, to the accentuation of differences between the traits of different categories – that is traits that mark differences are emphasised or exaggerated (Six 1983:330). In practice this means that a person’s membership in different groups alone (e.g. category A: Italian; category B: Swedish) can lead to an overemphasis on the perception of differences (‘The Swedens are larger than the Italians’). Numerous empirical studies demonstrate accentuation effects in physical as well as social stimuli (see Stroebe & Insko 1989:24).

Because of the complexity of the social environment, accentuation effects related to social prejudice arise primarily as a result of social influence and less as a result of observation (Stroebe & Insko 1989:25). This, in turn, suggests that accentuation theory lends itself more to studying macro factors of socialisation and learning theory. Applied on its own,

accentuation theory can explain why differences between two groups are emphasised. Its limitations, however, lie in its inability to explain why other groups are frequently devalued in relation to one's own group. For this reason we have to move on to the so called Social Identity Theory.

Religious Prejudice as a Problem of Identity (Social Identity Theory)

When it comes to the so-called 'conflict theories', we may distinguish between the realistic conflict theory (Campbell; Sherif) and the social identity theory (Tajfel; Turner; see Stroebe & Insko 1989:14). According to the realistic conflict theory, political, economic, etc. conflicts between groups result in ethnocentrism – that is, enhanced solidarity within the ingroup and a devaluation of the competing outgroup (see Stroebe & Insko:1989:14).

For the analysis of religious prejudice, however, the *social identity theory*¹⁷ deserves more attention. The minimal intergroup experiments for example show that the perception of belonging to one of two groups alone can lead one to see one's own group in a more positive light and devalue the other group. One could say that the inherent human desire for a positive social identity represents the Archimedean fulcrum point of this theory (Tajfel 1982:101–103).¹⁸ Under the social identity theory, prejudices may, for instance, be viewed as an effective means to present one's own group in a better light or to justify its unfair advantages.

Religious Prejudice as Socialisation Problem (Social Learning Theory)

Education plays an important role in maintaining subcultures and therefore also in the passing on of religious prejudice. Children whose parents espouse antisemitic values learn these prejudices from their parents. In contrast to scapegoat theory, proponents of social learning theory do not presuppose a motive which leads to the devaluation of other groups. Social prejudices arise either from the observation of existing differences between different social groups or from social influences that one may be exposed to through parents, peers, school, and the mass media (see Stroebe & Insko 1989:15).

Because racial, ethnic, and gender prejudices are acquired at a relatively early stage of life (from around the age of 4),¹⁹ parents play a very significant role in this process. A child learns these prejudices, on the one hand, by listening to its parents and, on the other, through the learning model provided by the parents' behaviour (see Stroebe & Insko 1989:16).

4. Combatting Antisemitism

The discussion of the various psychological theories shows us that none of these theories can generally explain the origin and function of antisemitic prejudices. To summarize, we find that in the context of cognitive theories, the antisemitic prejudice functions as a categorisation

problem; in the context of social identity theory, it functions as an identity problem; and in the context of social learning theory, it functions as a socialisation problem. The three discussed psychological theories also offer us strategies to combat antisemitic prejudices as mentioned in the historical und religious educational part.

Immediate prospects for combatting Antisemitism in the light of the Accentuation Theory are the following: Strictly speaking, accentuation theory tells us that the mere juxtaposition of Christianity and Judaism accentuates the differences between these two religions. And in the light of the accentuation theory it is obvious that anti-Jewish contrasting, as shown in the historical und religious educational part, is one important source of prejudices against Jews und Judaism.

An effective way to counteract accentuation processes is cross-categorisation. Here, the existing categorisation into Christians and Jews is not simply negated, but is in some way put into perspective or 'crisscrossed'. – Hereby, in addition to the divisive differences (e.g. the doctrine of justification), the overarching similarities between Christianity and Judaism (e.g. the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism and hopes for the future) are also exposed from a Christian perspective.

However, only particular categorisations lend themselves to this kind of commonality seeking comparison. Members of religious groups may perceive these strategies as a threat to their identities and refuse to implement them.

For this reason, we have to move on to immediate prospects for combatting Antisemitism in the light of the Social Identity Theory:

As mentioned before the mere perception of membership in a different group can lead *a priori* to the favouring of one's own religion and discrimination of members of another religion. According to social identity theory prejudices against other religions contribute to a consolidation of one's own religious identity. In contrast to the cognitive-structural theories, social identity theory can explain, why from a Christian perspective there is the tendency to devalue Judaism. However, this process won't take place if the devaluation of the other religion comes at the expense of devaluing of one's own religion. For this reason, the following words of St. Paul in Romans 11,18 are very important for Christian education: "do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you."

By mentioning the realm of Christian education there is only one step to move on to *immediate prospects for combatting Antisemitism in the light of the Social Learning Theory:*

The analysis of religious Antisemitism benefits from the inclusion of social learning theory through a significant expansion of perspective: Here the importance of social influences and subcultural values becomes generally identifiable in a manner that considers the coexistence of different cultures and subcultures. Just think of the Antisemitism propagated by right-wing extremist or islamistic groups – but also what has been said regarding the anti-Jewish contrasting in religious education. Religious prejudices are therefore acquired by the ‘completely normal’ process of socialisation in which one grows up within a culture with very specific religious prejudices.²⁰ In this context, there is no longer a need to pose the question of why a person acquires religious prejudices. Rather, the important question becomes which forces can make a person resistant to religious prejudice within a prejudiced culture (Selznick & Steinberg 1969:169). It is remarkable that one of the most important biblical texts for Christians to revise their problematic relationship to Judaism, Romans 9-11, fulfils the above mentioned psychological needs: Neither it ignores Christian identity, as Paul does not hide the doctrine of justification by faith in the context of Romans 9 - 11. He even discusses it in detail in Romans 9:30 - 10:21. Christian Identity is therefore not being kept a secret in Romans 9 - 11, however it is not being profiled one-sidedly at the expense of Judaism either. Seen from a psychological perspective, it is significant that in Romans 9 - 11 not only the contrasting juxtaposition of faith and legalism is present, but these differences are encompassed by overlapping common features (the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism, the common hope for the future). For this reason Romans 9 – 11 by his dialectic of differences and common features can even contribute to a reduction of anti-Jewish prejudices.

¹ Hoffmann, a.a.O. 20.

² Ebd., 20f.

³ Vgl. ebd., 21.

⁴ Ebd., 23.

⁵ Vgl. ebd., 24.

⁶ Ebd., 27. Ebenso G. Seebaß, Christlicher Antijudaismus und moderner Antisemitismus, in: R. Rendtorff/E. Stegemann, (Hg.), Auschwitz – Krise der christlichen Theologie. Eine Vortragsreihe. Abhandlungen zum christlich-jüdischen Dialog 10, München 1980, 9-25, hier 13: »So wurde der Jude, neben dem Franzosen und dauernder als er, zum Gegenbild (Hervorhebung von mir) dessen, was ideologisch als deutscher Volksgeist festgemacht wurde.«

⁷ Vgl. Hoffmann, a.a.O., 27. Weitere Antithesen finden sich bei Katz, a.a.O., 23-29.

⁸ Vgl. Hoffmann, a.a.O., 27; ausführlicher dazu Katz, a.a.O., 174-193 sowie S. Bergler, »Erlösung dem Erlöser«: Richard Wagner (1813-1883) zwischen Antisemitismus und Antijudaismus, in: *Judaica* 48 (1992), 165-176.

⁹ W. Hofer, Stufen der Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich 1933-1939, in: H. A. Strauss/N. Kampe (Hg.), Antisemitismus. Von der Judenfeindschaft zum Holocaust, Frankfurt/M./New York 1985, 172-185, hier: 174. Jacob Katz zeigt an dem für den rassistischen Antisemitismus wirkungsgeschichtlich bedeutsamen Werk »Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts« des Wahl-Deutschen Houston Stewart Chamberlain auf, wie christliche Motive die rassistische Argumentation durchdringen (vgl. ders., a.a.O., 310-313).

¹⁰ Kremers, Heinz: Die wichtigsten Ergebnisse aus der Analyse der gegenwärtigen religionspädagogischen Literatur und die Frage nach den Konsequenzen, in: ders.: Liebe und Gerechtigkeit. Gesammelte Beiträge, hg. v. A. Weyer, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 223-236, hier: 233.

¹¹ Brocke, Michael / Jochum, Herbert: Das Judentum in Schulbüchern für den katholischen Religionsunterricht heute – eine Problemanzeige, in: H. Jochum/H. Kremers, Juden, Judentum und Staat Israel im christlichen Religionsunterricht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Paderborn u.a. 1980, 55-74, hier: 67.

¹² Fiedler, Peter: ‚Lernprozeß Christen – Juden‘, in *ErWB* 28 (1982), 251-256, hier: 251.

¹³ Sorge, Helga: Judentum. Didaktische Skizze mit einer Projektidee für die Sekundarstufe II, in: *ForR* (1983) 3, 13-19, hier: 14.

¹⁴ Kohler-Spiegel, Helga: Juden und Christen - Geschwister im Glauben. Ein Beitrag zur Lehrplantheorie am Beispiel Verhältnis Christentum Judentum, Lernprozeß Christen Juden 6. Freiburg / Basel / Wien 1991, 323.

¹⁵ Scapegoat theory (see Rothgangel 1997:86–88; as well as the brief mention of it in Aronson, Wilson & Akert (2008: 448f), including the work done by Bierhoff (2006:176; 360) and the studies of the authoritarian personality (see Adorno et al. 1950) are not discussed here. Irrespective of their former significance, these are considered to be outdated and they therefore offer little insight as far as interreligious education is concerned.

¹⁶ 'The categorisation of physical or social aspects of the environment is based on the application of particular criteria in order to distribute a collection of items into more or less extensive groups which differ across the given or similar criteria, but which, however, resemble the same (or similar) criteria within each grouping' (Tajfel 1982:44). The term social categorisation is justified in two ways: Firstly, it deliberately makes reference to social objects, and, secondly, the formation of the categorisation is itself socially conditioned (see also Stroebe & Insko 1989:24).

¹⁷ Petersen (2008) and Petersen & Blank (2008) offer an up-to-date overview of this theory. For the significance of this theory, see Petersen & Blank (2008): 'The minimal group paradigm has been the dominant research paradigm in social discrimination research during the last four decades' (p. 200).

¹⁸ Tajfel (1982) defines social identity as 'that part of an individual's self-image [...] that is derived from the knowledge of his or her membership in social groups and from the value and emotional meaning that this membership carries' (p. 102).

¹⁹ Ethnic prejudices are acquired between the ages of three and five (see Aboud 1998:43). Further discussion of this issue may be found in Bergmann (1988:280, note 70); for an illustrative example with third graders, see Aronson et al. (2008:430f).

²⁰ Selznick & Steinberg (1969:169). In the same work, the authors cite a relevant quote from Robin M. Williams Jr.: 'Prejudices against minority groups are learned. They may reflect deep, irrational, personality processes, but they need not. [...] There is the real possibility that [...] prejudices may be learned in the same way that we learn that the world is round (or flat, or held up on the back of a giant turtle)' (p. 137, note 2).