

# Who Can Save Europe's Jews? Only Its Christians. by George Weigel

To fight anti-Semitism, Europe needs to rebuild its cultural foundations. That project starts with the Church.

The deracination of Europe—which Robert Wistrich accurately limns as the “accumulating layers of delusion and denial that paralyze the educated European mind”—is one of the hard facts of early-21st-century world affairs that can no longer be ignored. It is evident in the ugliness (and worse) that Wistrich describes in France. It is evident in Europe's policy paralysis (and worse) in the face of Vladimir Putin's aggressions, which may result in the de-facto dissolution of NATO. It is evident in the inability of individual European Union member states to address the growing gap between their social-welfare aspirations and fiscal reality. It is evident in the plunging birthrates and demographic winter that has set in throughout Europe: for the first time in human history, an entire continent is systematically and willfully depopulating itself.

The effects of this deracination have been obvious to clear-minded observers, European and American, for years, even decades. But causal analysis of Europe's “delusion and denial” rarely digs deeply enough into the cultural subsoil from which these maladies spring. Until that excavation is done, any chance of a European recovery of decency, will, and nerve is unlikely in the extreme. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrB21mc2fmI>

A good place to start the digging is in the 19th century, with the phenomenon that the French Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac would dub “atheistic humanism.” Here, Father de Lubac argued, was something new. Of course, there had been atheists forever. What was new was an atheism that posited the God of the Bible—the God who first made Himself known to the people of Israel—as the enemy of human freedom.

This was a great reversal, for, as de Lubac reminded his mid-20th-century readers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had come into the world as a liberator: a God who did not, like the gods of Canaan, demand appeasement through the sacrifice of children; a God who did not, like the gods of Greece, play games with even Achilles, the strongest and wiliest of men; a God who did not want his liberated people to fall back into the bad habits of the slaves they had been in Egypt, but Who gave them a moral law by which they could live their freedom nobly.

All of this, de Lubac argued, was thrown over the side of history by atheistic humanism: by Auguste Comte's positivism, with its promise of endless progress through the scientific method; by Ludwig Feuerbach's dismissal of the God of the Bible as the mere projection of human aspirations; by Karl Marx's materialism and its attendant vision of a ultramundane utopia; and by Friedrich Nietzsche's will-to-power. Atheistic humanism hollowed out the European mind; and in so doing, it set in motion the delusions and denials that Robert Wistrich deplors.

How?

What we know as "Europe," or, more broadly, the West, is a civilizational enterprise built on three pillars: Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome or, if you like, biblical religion, Greek rationality, and Roman law. Jerusalem taught the West that life is journey, pilgrimage, adventure, not just one damn thing after another. Athens taught the West that there are truths built into the world and into us; we can know those truths by the exercise of reason; and in knowing them, we can know our obligations. Rome taught the West the superiority of the rule of law over the rule of brute force. Those pillars have now, serially, collapsed, and the result is the deracination that finds its enemy where deracination too often does: in "the Jews."

Why so comprehensive a collapse? Because, it turns out, those three pillars of the Western civilizational enterprise are mutually dependent. When atheistic humanism tossed the God of the Bible over the side of European history—when it tore down the Jerusalem pillar—the Athenian pillar began to wobble. For it seems that, absent

the conviction that God the Creator encoded a certain rationality into His creation, reason by itself loses confidence in its own capacity to get at the truth of things—and the result is the vast confusion of post-modernism, displayed in France by the serial idiocies of a Jacques Derrida.

And that's not the end of the story. For when the Jerusalem and Athenian pillars crumble, the Roman pillar in turn begins to wobble, and the rule of law itself comes under attack in the name of either political correctness (like the bogus "hate speech" crimes now prosecuted throughout Europe while the real haters run wild) or ancient toxins (like the anti-Semitism described by Wistrich). The net result is what an aging Bavarian theologian by the name of Ratzinger called, the day before his election as pope in 2005, the "dictatorship of relativism." One public sign of this new and sinister form of authoritarianism is official paralysis in the face of the Islamist-threat-that-cannot-be-named.

If what Henri de Lubac called the "drama of atheistic humanism" is the proximate root of Europe's 21st century deracination, the cure for the pathology has to lie in the rebuilding of Europe's cultural foundations. And that means a new European encounter with the God of the Bible. For there will be no rebuilding of the Athenian and Roman pillars of the Western civilizational project, no recovery of reason and no recommitment to the rule of rationally-ordered law, absent a rebuilding of the Jerusalem pillar. The prime responsibility for that recovery is going to lie with the Christian churches, and the only serious candidate for leading the recovery is the Catholic Church.

No doubt, this will strike some as a proposal in which irony veers into absurdity, given the Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering at far too many moments in European history. But anti-Semitic Christians are not, in the main, threats to Jewish security in Europe (that security, as Herzl knew and as Wistrich has written, being itself a bellwether of Europe's cultural health in general). The real threats come from post-modern and virulently anti-Semitic secularists, who give cover to virulently anti-Semitic Islamists. Moreover, thanks to a cloud of witnesses that runs from Dietrich

Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth and the martyrs of the White Rose to John Paul II in our own day, confessionally serious Christians in Europe (and America) have come to grips with the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism and may now be in a position to attempt the rebuilding of a Europe safe for Europe's Jews and restorative of Europe's cultural foundations.

Whether that can happen, given the sclerotic state of European Christianity, is another question. There are signs of vitality in new Christian communities and renewal movements throughout the continent, but the clock is running on Europe's implosion, and there is not much time left. Still, if there is anything that John Paul II, who did more to set Jewish-Christian relations on a new path than any pope in modern history, should have taught us by the example of his own life, it's this: never surrender to the tyranny of the possible. What seems a limited range of possibilities can be expanded by the power of moral truth tied to biblical faith.

This is what Communist hacks like East Germany's Erich Honecker found out in 1989. May those responsible, directly and indirectly, for the peril of European Jewry find it out in turn—sooner rather than later.

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