

In This Sign, Conquer! Christians and Christianity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust

There is no escaping the presence of Christianity in the Holocaust. The overwhelming majority of individuals who perpetrated and enabled genocide were Christian. Yet decades after the Shoah, questions persist about how to understand the place of Christianity in mass murder.

This panel engages complex, new (and old) questions about entanglements between the sacred and the profane in the Holocaust. It also examines the line between uniqueness and comparability invoked in the Call for Papers. We show the specific significance of Christian antisemitism in the genocide of Jews and reflect on Christianity's roles in other cases of extreme violence. Robert Ericksen analyzes a leading Protestant theologian, Gerhard Kittel, who thought he could oppose "vulgar antisemites" in the Nazi regime while giving Hitler enthusiastic support and becoming the main contributor to the brutally antisemitic *Forschungen zur Judenfrage*. By examining connections between racism, nationalism and Christianity, Ericksen illuminates antisemitism's intersection with other cultural prejudices. Martina Cucchiara develops related insights into the malleability of Christian thought and Nazi ideology and demonstrates the demands made on Germans to reconcile their existing Protestant or Catholic worldview with National Socialist thinking. Utilizing theories from the history of emotions, she shows how Catholic girls in pre-war Nazi Germany drew on history, literature, and rituals to construct new identities as "Aryans" that did not conflict with their Catholic beliefs. Doris Bergen builds on her research on Wehrmacht chaplains to consider the wider relationship between religion and genocide. Introducing the concept of "genocidal culture," Bergen argues that Christianity served multiple purposes in the imposition of the conquerors' will on people and places. For instance, in the occupation of Soviet territories, the symbol of the cross became shorthand for the German occupying presence. Our moderator, Benjamin Baader, brings an additional perspective through his work on Judaism, gender, and transsexuality.