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Deicide as a Theological Problem

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Deicide as a Theological Problem

When I speak of deicide as a problem, I have in mind much more than the question of whether or not those Jews directly involved in condemning Jesus and in delivering Him to the Roman governor—or, to speak the language of Scripture, “handing Him over to the gentiles” (Ac 21:11)—can legitimately be called deicides. To my mind, this is a question that answers itself, and the answer is “No.” Nor do I wish to inquire if the designation “deicides” can in all seriousness be applied to the totality of Jews, the entire generation at the time of Christ—living in the Holy Land or in the Diaspora—and to all subsequent generations. Such an inquiry would be superfluous. For, as I see it, the matter is settled. The Council has clearly disposed of the fallacious notion of collective guilt.

What I intend to do is to ask aloud whether deicide is an indispensable concept of Christian theology or, if not an essential one, at least one so vital that it bears witness to the Christian mystery and truly serves its proclamation. I am thus concerned with a theological problem whose solution has not become easier because of certain developments during the Council.

Arab spokesmen turned the question into a political one; strange though it sounds, they championed the use of the term “slayers of God” as applied to the Jews and did so in complete opposition to the Koran which denies not only the divine sonship of Jesus and His redemptive death, but also His death at the hands of the Jews.1 Some Jewish writers have seen in the invective so often hurled against them the source of all the evils that have befallen the Jewish people.

1. “[The Jews] declared: ‘We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah. They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did. Those that disagreed about him were in doubt concerning his death, for what they knew about him was sheer conjecture; they were not sure that they had slain him’ (4th sura). See The Koran, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 370.
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It is not mind much more closely involved in the Roman governor's judgment. He over to the Roman deicides. To my mind, this answer is "No." "Deicides" can in all fairness be superfluous. Clearly disposed, it is an indispensable one, at the heart of the Christian mystery and theological cause of certain opposition to the Jews. Some hurled against the Jewish people hatred. The Synagogue, that worthless company of knavish, abominable, and God-slaying men, attacked Thee, 0 Christ, and dragged away as an evildoer Thee, the Creator of all, whom we magnify. Unfortunately, this is not a solitary "prayer." The Eastern liturgy abounds in such derogatory chants.

The second example is from the time of the Crusades. The pauperes—as the disinherited hordes of those days who had joined the knightly crusaders were called—went all through the Rhine valley to kill Jews and loot their homes. This is how the lumpenproletariat of those days justified their massacres: "We have set out to march a long way to fight the enemies of God in the East, and behold, before our very eyes are his worst foes, the Jews. They must be dealt with first." Addressing themselves to the Jews, they shouted: "You are the descendants of those who killed and hanged our God. Moreover [God] himself said: 'The day will yet dawn when my children will come and avenge my blood.' We are his children and it is our task to carry out his vengeance upon you, for you showed yourselves obstinate and blasphemous towards him. . . . [God] has abandoned you; he has turned his radiance upon us and has made us his own." These two
samples of a perverted faith may explain why so many bishops and theologians at the Council were convinced that the true reform of the Church demands that her language be purified and “deicide” completely eliminated from her vocabulary.

No one maintains that the expression is of biblical origin. It was unknown to the apostles, unknown to the young Church. This, of course, is not found in an apocryphal text, but was said long after the time of the triune God. The expression could well have been invented as part of the religious riddle of the time.

This seems to be the correct interpretation of the representation reported elsewhere in this essay, as he writes: “The unsophisticated marching bands, even more than the regular armies, were readily persuaded by this simple reasoning: ‘We are marching a great distance to seek our sanctuary and to take vengeance on the Muslims. Lo and behold, there live among us Jews whose forefathers slew [Jesus] and crucified him for no cause. Let us revenge ourselves on them first, and eliminate them from among the nations, so that the name of Israel no longer be remembered, or else let them be like ourselves and believe in the son of [Mary].’ . . . A distorted version of the alleged self-condemnation of the Jews at Golgotha: ‘His blood be on us, and our children’ (Mt 27:25), likewise made the rounds. It was believed that Jesus had said that ‘there will be a day when my children will avenge my blood,’ on the children of those guilty at the Crucifixion. In the opinion of many Crusaders, that time had come.” In a footnote to this passage, Baron emphasizes that the main argument against the Jews as Christkillers is “almost verbatim repeated by all three Hebrew chroniclers” as well as substantially confirmed by Christian writers (whose names are given at the beginning of this note, J.M.O.). Still, Baron continues, the chroniclers “did not quote here literally the crusaders’ utterances. They merely applied the accepted technique of ancient and medieval historians to make heroes explain their motivations through imaginary speeches” (Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews [New York: Columbia University Press, 1957], IV, pp. 174, 290). On the so-called self-condemnation of the Jews, see the introduction of this volume, pp. 19-22.

5. The first Christian author to raise the charge of deicide seems to have been Melito of Sardes, a second century bishop of that city, the capital of ancient Lydia in Asia Minor. In his homily on the Passion, he calls on all the nations to look at the “unprecedented murder that was committed in Jerusalem, the City of Law . . . .

He who hung the earth in its place is hanged,
He who fixed the heavens is fixed on the cross,
He who made all things fast, is made fast on the tree,
The Master has been insulted, God has been murdered,
The King of Israel has been slain by an Israelitish hand!

(This translation is the one given by Eric Werner in his study “Melito of Sardes, the first Poet of Deicide,” Hebrew Union College Annual [Cincinnati: 1966], XXXVII, p. 202, where all pertinent data and references are to be found.)

While Eric Werner sees in Melito’s homily “a veritable diatribe against the god-killing Jews” (op. cit., p. 201), Karl Heinrich Rengstorf thinks "nothing would be more mistaken than to reproach the bishop of Sardes with a low-class and malicious anti-Judaism. . . . The Jews he has in mind and accuses are not the Jews of his time, much less the Jews of his diocese but the Jews of long ago, the Jews of the first Good Friday, in Jerusalem.” (Karl H. Rengstorf and Siegfried von Kortzfleisch, Kirche und Synagoge: Handbuch zur Geschichte der Christen und Juden [Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1968], I, p. 73.)
so many bishops and even the Pope. It was a true reform of the Church." This, of course, is no conclusive proof against its use. The word "trinity" is not found in any of the writings of the New Testament. Yet, the mystery of the triune God is an essential part of the Church's preaching. It could well be that the idea of deicide belongs to the sphere of New Testament thought without the word having been coined in apostolic times.

This seems to be the viewpoint of the few defenders of the term, representative of whom is Bishop Carli of Segni, Italy. In his widely reported essay, "The Jewish Question at the Second Vatican Council," he writes: "It has been said that one cannot speak of deicide, in the proper sense of the word, since the Jews were unaware of the divinity of Christ. To this we reply: Objectively, in foro externo, it was a question of real deicide because Jesus was truly God and explicitly declared Himself to be such. It is therefore legitimate to use the word, at least as St. Peter used it ('...auctorem verae vitae interfecistis.') Ac 3:15) and St. Paul ('...qui et Dominum occiderent Jesum.' Thess 2:15; '..si enim cognovissent, numquam Dominum gloriae crucifixissent.' 1 Cor 2:8)." These, then, are the loci classicì that must be investigated so that the exegetical aspect of our problem may be solved.

Rengstorf holds further that the "thesis of deicide" above all is a christological statement whose rightness or wrongness does not depend on whether those who sent Jesus to the cross were Jews or non-Jews (op. cit., p. 74). He stresses the fact that the phrase had no harmful consequences for Jews, either in Melito's generation or in those following upon his; yet, he admits that, "taken by itself, the phrase could have been of unheard-of brisance" (ibid.). This raises the question of whether theologians may express the wonder and depth of the Christ-event in words so explosive as to threaten, indeed, shatter the lives of those who do not believe in Christ. Rengstorf himself answers the question by calling every attempt at a theologically correct formulation of Christian truth dangerous unless it strives for concreteness, unless "it does not lose sight of the fact that God is concerned with men as His creatures." Moreover, he sees in Melito's homily a permanent warning to Christian theologians never "to forget that the Deus pro nobis is not the God of Christians alone, rather is He the God of all men and, not the least, the God of the Jews" (op. cit., p. 74). In other words, "deicide" is a term that endangers Jews and Christians. In the case of the latter, not their bodies but their spirits: It may easily turn them into heartless or self-righteous men. It is a triumphalist expression that has no place in an ecclesia peregrina, a church of pilgrims.

The first phrase Bishop Carli advances takes us back to the early days of the primitive community of Jerusalem. The Bishop quotes according to the Vulgate: "auctorem ... vitae interfecistis," which the Douay version rendered: "The author of life you killed." One only has to read further, "whom God hath raised from the dead" to realize that "author of life" cannot possibly be Peter's meaning. The translators of the King James version were keener when they wrote, "Ye killed the Prince of life." The meaning becomes certain if the passage is read in context and in Greek. In Greek, the words of the apostle are: *τὸν δὲ αρχήγον τῆς ζωῆς απεκτείνατε.* According to Bauer's Dictionary to the New Testament, *archēgos* means (1) Fuebrer, Herrscher, Fuerst, "leader, ruler, prince"; (2) Anfaenger, "beginner"; and (3) Urheber, Begründer, "author, founder." To Acts 3:15, Bauer assigns the first meaning. Being an adaptation of Bauer's *Woerterbuch,* the *Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich takes the same position.

The context of Peter's utterance makes the translation "leader to life" a certainty. As I have already mentioned, the apostle continues: "whom God raised from the dead . . . of this we are witnesses." Thus he speaks of Jesus as the One risen or, rather, the One raised by God. The accent is on the humanity, not the divinity, of Jesus. He is "the first to rise from the dead" (Ac 26:23), "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1:18) or, in the words of the NEB, "the first to return from the dead." Through His resurrection, He has broken the "power of death" (2 Tim 1:10), not only for Himself, but also for His own, indeed, "announcing the dawn to the people [Israel] and to the nations" (Ac 26:23). The emphasis on the risen Christ ought to convince anyone wishing to know the mind of the young Church that it is incorrect to read Peter's sermon as an accusation of deicide.

The entire speech makes this clearer still. In the name of Jesus, Peter had returned to a man lame from birth the use of his limbs.

When the marvelled, the assurance of His appointment.

The God of his servant Pilate when righteous or wicked, the leader to life.

Joyously, indeed the power of death is over for the whole.

Now brethren of rulers. This is the mouth of your God, and that you doubt that He who is the victor is indeed the victor? What is the prophetic saying, that Jesus was led to the cross and disassociate consciously.

Besides, in this case the *victor* is the prophetic saying, thus the giving of His life for the destruction of all the non-
When the people saw the former cripple nimble as a youth, they marvelled. The apostle, however, countered their wonderment with the assurance that it was not his power that performed the miracle, rather that of the living God, of Him who acknowledged Jesus as His appointed Messiah.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers glorified His servant Jesus whom you committed for trial and repudiated before Pilate when he had decided to release him. You denied the holy and righteous one and asked for the release of a murderer. You killed the leader to life, but God raised him from the dead (Ac 3:13-15).

Joyously, the apostle declares that it was faith in the name of Jesus, indeed the name itself, that gave the man fettered from the womb the wholeness of his humanity, only to continue:

Now brethren, I know full well that you acted in ignorance as did your rulers. This way, God brought to fulfillment what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: That his anointed should suffer. Change, then, your way. Turn [to God] that your sins may be blotted out, that the times of refreshment may come (3:17–19).

He pleads with them to repent so that Jesus the Messiah may return and that everything be restored in God (20–21). Can there be any doubt that the tenor of this sermon is not one of accusation but of wooing? Whatever the listeners, or some of them, may have done so that Jesus was delivered into the hands of the pagan Pilate and nailed to the cross, Peter calls them “brethren” (3:17). He did not sanctimoniously abandon them nor did he make the slightest attempt to dissociate himself from them—an attempt that consciously or unconsciously underlies the use of the epithet “deicide.”

Besides, it was not the murder of Jesus that stirred Peter—his theme is the victory of the Cross. Jesus, the Suffering Servant of whom the prophetic song of the Second Isaiah spoke, is the One truly alive and thus the giver of the true, full life. All designs against Him could not destroy His work. On the contrary, His resurrection proclaims the end of all “non-sense”; it offers blessing for the Jews, the heirs of the
prophets and sons of the Covenant, but also for all the world (Ac 3:25). Jesus' suffering is thus, to speak with the Canon of the Mass, a *beata passio*, a "blessed passion"—a mystery which the term "deicide" threatens to suppress.

II

QUITE different from the tone of Peter's sermon, relatively close to the Pentecostal event, is the second passage adduced by Bishop Carli. It is taken from the probably oldest writing of the New Testament and doubtlessly the oldest Pauline epistle in existence. The calm, indeed peaceful, relationship between the primitive Church and the Synagogue that prevailed at the beginning seems to have given way to one of tension and unrest, at least in certain communities. On his second missionary journey, the Apostle and his companion Silas had gone to Philippi in Macedonia. Their stay there came to a bad end: The two were dragged to the marketplace by pagan troublemakers, accused before the magistrates and thrown into prison. "These men—these Jews!—are making trouble in our city" (Ac 16:20), was the charge. The denouncers characterized the way of salvation the two had proclaimed as "customs running counter to Roman law and mentality" (Ac 16:21). After their delivery from prison, Paul and Silas had to leave the city; in the spring of 50 A.D., they arrived in a roundabout way in Thessalonica, the present Salonica.

On three successive Sabbaths, Paul preached in the synagogue there on Jesus, the suffering and risen Messiah. His words were not without success. A few Jews, a great number of God-fearing Greeks, and a good many influential women accepted the Gospel. Beset by envy, members of the synagogue—we do not know whether they were the leaders or some irritable members of the congregation—instigated a riot to undo the work of the Apostle and to discourage his helpers as well as the young Christian community. The city resounded with these shouts: "The men who have turned the world upside down have now come here . . . they all flout the emperor's laws, asserting that there is another King, Jesus!" (Ac 17:6f). That very night, Paul and Silas had to flee. Their persecutors, however, would not give up; they fol-

lowed the Apostle and his companion to Dionysopolis (17:13).

In a letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle says: "First, he has made the Synagogue of our people to be the occasion of our joy and thanksgiving to God. For you, brothers, who in the Lord Jesus Christ are of God—God who chose you out of the world—these things were written to warn you, not that you should come under condemnation, but that you might not be duped by anyone under the pretext of prophecy" (1 Thess 2:3f).

Brothers! Venerated Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ! "If the Lord Jesus does not come again, God will be disgraced in His words. Bible and church and world will be nothing but an enigma to everyone who does not believe. These words are not the words of the pagans. Everyone who has been a Jew above all others, who has modern consciousness and is guided by the rising wind of the spirit, will accept these words. Bible, church, and world are nothing but an enigma.

To give something to another means to take something away from oneself. Paul speaks of the pagans who are content to live in a world of enigma to which God has no relation. "If the Lord of heaven was not Lord of heaven, of His own accord, if God who is above all gods proved not such a God . . ."

9. *Judaicus.* Paul speaks: "All these things he had in mind, according to the assumption that he had a threefoldfold mission in his own time, as we see in the letter to the Galatians. The apostle's statements are to be understood as follows."
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Followed the two till Beroea in order to wreck the work just begun (17:13).

In a letter the Apostle sent within the year to the distressed community, the anger against his foes, long pent up, burst through. At first, he had been anxious whether the young church of Thessalonica, inadequately instructed, encircled by paganism, and suspected by the Synagogue, would remain steadfast. On hearing of their faithfulness, he was able to tell them of his gratitude that the word of God had proved a power in their lives (1 Thess 2:13). He then went on:

Brothers! You have fared like the churches in Judea, God’s people in Christ Jesus. You have suffered at the hands of the Judeans who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and who drove us out. They are not pleasing to God and they are hostile to all men for they hinder us from speaking to the nations so as to lead them to salvation. Thus they make full in every way the measure of their guilt. God’s wrath is upon them and presses toward the end, 

These are harsh words but they are not the words of a “Jew-hater,” not the words of a man who despises the stranger, who castigates everyone whom he cannot comprehend. They are rather the words of a Jew about his own kinsmen. “An authentic Jew like Paul,” a modern commentator writes, “cannot be but dismayed and shocked by the resistance of his people to God’s advances”; hence his strong words. Biblical speech is always passionate; in the Pauline letters, the language is even more passionate than in the other books of Scripture.

To give voice to his deep disappointment, Paul seems to have done something unheard of. He seems to have gone so far as to make use of the pagan polemic against the Jews. The Jews had always been an enigma to the Gentiles: a people that adored an invisible God—the Lord of heaven and earth—not a local deity that could be exchanged with, or united to, another local deity; a people that worshipped a God who imposed on them the yoke of a law compelling them to an

9. Ιουδαίοι can be translated as “Judeans” or “Jews.” In this context, where Paul speaks of “the church in Judea,” the first meaning seems to be the one that he had in mind. Still, in the discussion of the text I will proceed from the common assumption that the Apostle spoke of “Jews” without restriction.

almost monastic isolation. In short, a people consecrated to the God who is Spirit—an "uncertain God" in the eyes of some Romans—a people that refused to eat and sleep with others could appear to pagan intellectuals only as godless and misanthropic. "Atheists," "men without pity and hated by the gods," "enemies of other men and of all foreign customs"—this is how some writers of antiquity saw the Jews. It sounds as if the Apostle merely echoes what the gentle authors pronounced before him. What he really does is to imply, if I am not mistaken, that quite a few of his kinsmen seem bent on justifying the ancient reproaches.

Paul knows in his heart that they resist the Gospel and its dissemination because they are convinced that they offer service to God (see Jn 16:2). Though ill-informed, though unenlightened, their zeal is for God and His law (Rom 10:2–4). He also remembers well the time when he himself "savagely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). His great fear is that the spirit manifesting itself in the resistance to the good news, though not in it alone, drives his people toward a catastrophe.

Heinz Schuermann, whose translation I have largely adopted, says with compelling insight:

As [Paul] writes his sentence [of the full measure of sin and the near wrath of God] he happens to work in Corinth as a tentmaker in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who, a short time ago, had been expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. It could be that Paul saw in this event, quite concretely, the beginning of the end: The banishment of Jews [from the ancient city] by the Roman world ruler may have appeared to him as the beginning of the disaster, which, in the year 70 A.D., overtook them when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. An actual event like [the expulsion from Rome] must have left its imprint upon the Apostle; it may have conditioned the particular severity of his language and thus explain it.

What makes Schuermann's translation and interpretation important is that he understands 1 Thessalonians 2:16b in the context of St. Paul's time rather than in the present time. It could not have come upon Paul endgültig (ZB), according to Schuermann, till the end of the year 50, when the Romans might burst upon the Jews. Moreover, the Apostle which, one must not forget, meant to teach not only Romans 9–11 and Romans 11 which were meant to teach to the Jews, but also of the year 50 in a sense of a "deicides." In the year 50, the Jews, victim of persecutions, were no longer a "people" and the apostles. He knew, ground but only as a "people," and grace-full deed, and he had deliberated much the heart of the suffering of his people; how could he forget, at this outcome, that the martyrdom of the Jews and the laity, the suffering of his people, and the individual martyrs.

11. The frequent attacks on the Jews by Greek and Roman writers have been collected by Théodore Reinach (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1895; reprinted by Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1963).
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time rather than in a timeless manner: that God's retribution and anger have not come upon the Jewish people "for good and for all" (NEB), endgueltig (ZB), pour en finir (JB). The Apostle does not say, according to Schuermann, that God's wrath will rest upon his kinsmen till the end of ages, rather that, at any moment, God's judgment may burst upon the inhabitants of Judea.

Moreover, the Apostle's remarks in his Letter to the Thessalonians, which, one must not forget, answered a particular situation, are not meant to teach nor are they his last word on the Jews. Standing in Romans 9–11 and written in 56–57 A.D., his final words—and these were meant to teach—are words of love. But even the harsh words of the year 50 in no way support the use of the terms "deicide" and "deicides." In the Letter to the Thessalonians, the Lord Jesus, as a victim of persecution, stands, so to say, in the midst of the prophets and the apostles. His passion and death are set off against this background but only as a special instance of the fate that God's revelation and grace-full deeds suffer in this world.

I have deliberately chosen the words "in this world." However much the heart of the Apostle cries out when he thinks of the sufferings that so many messengers of God have endured at the hands of his people; however much it cries out when he thinks of the sufferings that are to befall his fellow Jews—still, it would be wrong to forget, at this outcry, the main thought of the passage in question. It is the martyrdom of the young Church everywhere, in the land of the Jews and the lands of the pagans. Everywhere he sees the Church and the individual Christian persecuted—poor, weak, alone, ostracized. 13

13 In the past, some exegetes doubted the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16. Recently, the Pauline character of the passage has been both affirmed and denied. In a paper, first read at a consultation of Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic scholars at Arnoldshain, Germany, in 1966, Otto Michel, of the University of Tubingen, fully accepts the genuineness of what he considers Paul's frontal attack on Judaism. Uncompromisingly, he writes: Es geht dem Apostel um Kampf und Auseinandersetzung, nicht um Reaktion und Stimmung, "For the Apostle, [his polemic] is not a matter of reaction or mood but one of struggle or contest" ("Antijudische Polemik bei Paulus" in Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? eds. Eckert, Levinson, and Stoehr [Munich: Kaiser, 1967], p. 51). Again, Paul sees "Israel's history is one of doom (Unheil); even the responsibility for the death of Jesus rests exclusively with Judaism" (loc. cit., p. 55). Hence his polemic is directed not toward "contingent events but [toward] attitudes the whole of Jewry is charged with: the persecution (or expulsion) of missionaries is the burden of the whole, not of individual communities of the diaspora" (loc. cit., p. 57).
Yet, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 is often understood—among others by Bishop Carli—as if the question here were the attitude of only the Jews to the salvific event in Christ. The attempt, however, to read Scripture in such a way that the Jews are always singled out negatively is a dangerous self-deception. It goes without saying that Scripture speaks continuously of them. After all, the word of God came first to them; only much later did it break into the pagan world. Hence, the New Testament has little to say about the fate of God’s word among the gentiles. Now, there is a routine to relate words like “election” and “grace,” almost as often as they appear in the Bible, to Christianity and words like “infidelity” and “rejection” to Judaism, and to it alone. This, I contend, is bad exegesis; it may well betray an unconscious desire to escape Christ’s claim on the whole man.

During the Council, a Benedictine monk from Germany told me that the singing of the Passion on Good Friday always shook him to the marrow. In his abbey, the role of the *turba,* “the crowd,” to which the passion books usually give the name *synagoga,* is not presented by one singer. The whole community becomes the *turba* because it represents the men of every age and every part of the world. The whole community and every monk in it cries out *Crucifige!*, “To the cross...

Michel ends his paper by saying that it is “part and parcel of scientific openness to take hard polemical texts like this one seriously”; under no circumstances must they be toned down. We must “walk through and endure the depths of differences and antagonism. But it is God’s great gift to know of the freedom that allows us to take a new road beyond the things of the past” (loc. cit., p. 59).

A view diametrically opposed to that of Professor Michel was recently taken at a convention of American scholars. At the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in 1969, Birger A. Pearson propounded the thesis that 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 was a “deuteropauline interpolation.” If the second part of verse 16 is considered, as he thinks it must, a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Apostle cannot possibly be its author since, according to Roman tradition, he was beheaded in 67 A.D. Another of Professor Pearson’s arguments is the doubtlessly valid assumption that the source or pattern for the accusation of the Jews as men who mistreat their prophets is 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, a *topos* commonly used by Christians after the fall of Jerusalem. This argument is hardly convincing—all major commentators, even those who do not question the Pauline authorship of our passage, acknowledge its literary dependence on the Chronicler’s castigation of his people. Our author offers other evidence, perhaps the strongest is the fact that “the hostile reference to the Jews as agents of the crucifixion (2:15) . . . does not square with what Paul says elsewhere either of the Jews or of the agents of the crucifixion (Rom 9–11; 1 Cor 2:8).” Summing up, Professor Pearson holds that his arguments in favor of considering 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 an interpolation “are bolstered by the clear progression of thought from v. 12 to v. 17.” (The quotations are taken from an unnumbered abstract of the still unpublished paper.)
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III

The third passage of Scripture that Bishop Carli considers a prop to his argument is taken from the second chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Of all three, it nearly proves him right, for here the Apostle speaks of the Crucifixion of "the Lord of glory," ton kyrion tēs doxēs (2:8). In the Jewish tradition—in the book of Henoch, for instance—"the Lord of glory" is a title of special dignity, reserved for God alone. In applying this title to Jesus—the One degraded on the cross and now glorified, the One who at the fullness of time appeared as servant and at the end will reveal Himself as the royal victor—the Apostle confirms his faith in the oneness of the Son with the Father.

For the man who lives by faith, the divine glory dwelling in the Redeemer is visible, even on the wood of disgrace and seeming impotence. Is it therefore not reasonable to speak of "deicide" and "deicides"? This at least is Bishop Carli's conviction for, under the caption "May One Call the Jews Deicides?", he argues that one may do so legitimately, in the light of the passages quoted from Scripture. As ill luck would have it—if I may be Bishop Carli's spokesman, for only a second—the third biblical passage does not speak of the Jews at all, leaders or people.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul reveals the purpose that brought him there: to think only one thing, to know only one thing, to preach only one thing, Jesus the Christ nailed to the cross. Therefore he appeared before the Corinthians without persuasive schemes, subtle arguments, or display of fine words, for human wisdom is of no avail before God: it can never grasp God's saving design (1 Cor 2:1-5). The wisdom God had shared with them is "hidden wisdom, His secret purpose, framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory," the Apostle states (2:7). He continues:

But none of the rulers of this world have known it, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. [So it happened], to speak in the words of Scripture, "things beyond our seeing, things beyond our
hearing, things beyond our imagining—God prepared them for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:7-9; NEB).

The “rulers of this eon” or “the powers that rule the world” are not—as one may easily be led to assume if one does not know the Jewish background of the New Testament—Caiphas, Annas, and their council, nor even the emperor and his governor. According to a Jewish conception of those days, and hence according to the Apostle, the “rulers of this eon” are cosmic forces, angelic powers, or supra-mundane beings hostile to God who influence the course of this sinful world. It is really they who brought Christ to the cross, they who caused His passion and death, for eternal wisdom was alien to them and His saving purpose unknown. Had they had but an inkling they would not have laid hands on Christ since what outwardly appeared as His defeat, indeed His ruin, was really their defeat, introduced their ruin, and announced the triumph of those who love God in Christ. Thus the Apostle.

IV

THERE is, I think, only one conclusion that can be drawn from an examination of the three passages Bishop Carli and others base themselves on, and it is this: There is no biblical warrant for the deicide accusation. But is there not at least traditional justification for its use? No doubt, the charge was made often—all too often!—still, there is no real tradition. As early as 1954, Charles Cardinal Journet in his Destinées d’Israël drew attention to an Augustinian text. Referring to those who had clamored for Christ’s death, St. Augustine comments:

The Lord rose and many among [the Jews] believed. They had crucified Him without understanding [what they did]. But later, they believed in Him, and their great error was forgiven them. The blood of the Lord they had shed was forgiven the _homicides_, “manslayers.” I do not say the _deicides_, “Godslayers,” for had they understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (cf. 1 Cor 2:8). The homicide of an innocent

was forgiven them and their error was through grace (Enarr.

To my mind, the word “deicides” is not the point, but the fact that they

14. The Augustinian commentary on the Jewish Rev to Non-Christian Religion of the last session of Vatica deicide charge ought to be memoranda were circulated among writers, one favoring the other pleading its theology. (He has since been made he kindly put at my disposal, appeared for 37:466A; 1, 2, PG 37:9 theosokos, God-bearer. I divine nature to Mary by 37:469H: “God, in the same sense the i which would be an abuse of God’ theologians) but the ered but a man, was in fact a fact—one that is was put to death by the the deny that would mean the legitimate to think that ambiguous character. But need to stress that I do not is a legitimate literary de A different view was extremely difficult to give views as contained in the “deicide” to an “explosiv disguised under notional well as the secret of its p on the Jews, he maintai “deical!” and gives the that the Jews are the “sold in the trial of Christ. It authorities who passed the the Romans never been (66-67). (2) Another it apply to all the Jews.” Bu different meanings, one f not a sin. Again, those
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was forgiven them and the blood they spilled in folly, they now drink through grace (Enar. in Psalm., 61, 5; PL 36:791).

To my mind, the deepest case against the use of "deicide" and "deicides" is not the lack of a scriptural and truly traditional basis but the fact that the two terms pervert the mystery of the Passion.

14. The Augustinian passage is also quoted by René Laurentin in his commentary on the Jewish section of The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1966), pp. 73-74. During the last session of Vatican II, the question was again debated whether or not the deicide charge ought to be explicitly rejected. In the course of this debate, two memorandums were circulated. They were by two well-known French theologians and writers, one favoring the express repudiation of the term as regards the Jews, the other pleading its theological retention. The latter was Père Jean Daniélou, S.J. (He has since been made a cardinal.) I am quoting a summary of his views which he kindly put at my disposal: "My memorandum said that the expression deicide was absolutely correct, provided it was properly understood. The word theoktonos, God-killer, appeared for the first time with Gregory of Nazianzen (Carm. 1, 1; PG 37:466A; 1, 2, PG 37:963A). It is of poetic origin and completely parallel to theotokos, God-bearer. Just as theotokos does not mean that Christ owes His divine nature to Mary but that He, to whom Mary gave His human nature, is God, in the same sense theoktonos does not mean that the Jews wanted to kill God, which would be an absurdity (they would then be the precursors of the 'death of God' theologians) but that He whom they wanted to kill and whom they considered but a man, was in fact God. The word deicide is, then, simply the statement of a fact—one that is theologically speaking incontestable—namely that He who was put to death by the Jews—and by the Romans—was the Son of God. To deny that would mean denial of the hypostatic union. This said, it is perfectly legitimate to think that the use of the word should be avoided because of its ambiguous character. But nobody has the right to reject it as erroneous." (I hardly need to stress that I do not favor the use of "the Jews," "the Romans." Synecdoche is a legitimate literary device, but historical experience gainsays its usage.)

A different view was given by Abbé Laurentin. His paper is so rich that it is extremely difficult to give a brief account of it. I offer instead a summary of his views as contained in the brochure already mentioned. There he compares the word "deicide" to an "explosive" the manifold "consequences of which cannot be foreseen or controlled" (p. 65). The expression "deicide people" he calls "a myth disguised under notional and even theological appearances." This is its fault as well as the secret of its power (p. 66). With one of the drafts of the Statement on the Jews, he maintains that it is "unjust and erroneous' to call the Jews 'deicidal'" and gives the following reasons: (1) The expression seems to imply that the Jews are the "sole deicides," even though "they played only a limited part in the trial of Christ. It was not the Jewish authorities but the legitimate Roman authorities who passed the decisive sentence" (ibid.). And he asks: "... why have the Romans never been charged with collective responsibility for deicide?" (pp. 66-67). (2) Another injustice inherent in the expression is "that it seems to apply to all the Jews." But "those who took part in the death of Christ were small in number" (p. 67). (3) "Still more profoundly, the word 'deicide' has two very different meanings, one formal and the other material." Yet, a material error is not a sin. Again, those who put Jesus to death—Jews and Romans—were not
They move the accent from voluntary sacrifice and loving death to murder, from God's gracious deed to man's vicious act. More than that, it is not just a shifting of accent, the whole theology of the Cross becomes man-centered instead of God-centered, sin-oriented rather than grace-oriented. "Deicide" and "deicides" destroy even what they pretend to assert, that He who made Himself the victim of our sins was God in the flesh. If "deicide" is the proper term, then the One we preach and live by is not the One who gave Himself freely for our sake but one who was forced to come to our rescue.

Recently, an Anglican theologian wrote:

God died upon the Cross. This to the Synagogue is supreme blasphemy, and in a sense, it is. It is the most fantastic statement that could be uttered by human lips, yet it is the heart of the Gospel. Karl Barth called it the "humanity of God"—God's solidarity with sinners. The use of the term "deicide" tends to efface this solidarity. It is thus not only an anti-Jewish but also an anti-Christian term.

formally deicides; in several places, the New Testament attests to their ignorance (pp. 69-70). (4) "There is one last confusion to expose. . . . [It has been] proposed that to challenge the expression 'deicidal people' would be to challenge the title 'Mother of God,' Theotokos, for the Virgin Mary" (p. 71). Laurentin rejects this analogy as false.

"Assuredly," he writes, "it would be legitimate to call the Jewish people theogenic or theotokos, since it is certainly the quality of a people to perpetuate itself by giving birth to descendants" (pp. 71-72). Thus the Jewish people, through Mary, gave birth to Jesus, Man and God. But "it is not a quality of a people as people to put God to death." This is all the more true, he adds, when one keeps in mind the first three points he made. "Maternity creates a substantial and ineradicable relationship between persons. . . . The fact of having killed someone neither creates a substantial belonging of this kind. . . . The argument [then] is primitive and empty" (p. 72). In conclusion he states: "To assimilate divine maternity and deicide, to represent in terms of the same model the unrepented gift God made to his mother" and the disgrace of those who contributed to Jesus' death "is to fail to appreciate God and to wrong his goodwill and his mercy" (p. 73).