Repentance for the Holocaust
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Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past.

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In the Buchenwald concentration camp—which for Victor Gollancz was proof that not all Germans were guilty (see P1)—was a prisoner named Eugen Kogon, who had spent almost six years there for being both an opponent of National Socialism and a Jew.\footnote{Kogon was born in Munich in 1903 to Jewish parents. See Heiner Ludwig, “Politische Spiritualität statt katholischem Fundamentalismus: Zum 20. Todestag von Eugen Kogon,” Neue Gesellschaft Frankfurter Hefte, no. 12 (2007); Karl Prümm, Walter Dirks und Eugen Kogon als katholische Publizisten der Weimarer Republik (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1984).} One of his first acts after liberation in 1945 was to participate in an Allied effort to study “how a German concentration camp was established, what role it played in the National Socialist state, and what the fate of those sent there by the Gestapo and the SS was.”\footnote{Eugen Kogon, Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager (Berlin: Druckhaus Tempelhof, 1947), 13.} The resulting report was the basis for his own expanded work,
Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager (The SS-State: The System of German Concentration Camps), which was first published in 1946 and remained in print even after his death in 1987. It ranks among the first detailed studies of the concentration camps and the Nazi state. The aim of this work, as Kogon put it, was to contribute to the “necessary purification process” (Läuterungs-/Säuberungsprozess) of the German people, the burden of which rested not on the Germans alone; rather, “it was the duty of the Allies’ farsighted realpolitik to awaken the powers of reflection in Germanness (Deutschtum).”4 “The goal . . . must be the removal of evil in the soul so that the return of atrocity is made impossible and that spiritual space is made available for a renewed Germany within Europe.”5 In fact, in the spirit of Gollancz and others, Kogon blamed both the victors and even the concentration camp survivors for not doing a better job in this respect. “The plundering, revenge-taking ‘plague’. . . . Most German inmates liberated from the concentration camps did what in effect extinguished the last existing remnants of sympathy. . . . The majority did nothing but complain, curse, and demand.”6 Such strong words, no doubt containing partial truths and exaggeration at the same time, could only be uttered with the effect of “turning toward” rather than “turning away” by someone like Kogon himself.

Kogon also criticized the way his contemporaries deployed the collective guilt thesis against the Germans, which, according to him, “confused the heart of the people, and in many indeed the heart was hardened.”7 Despite this general reservation, Kogon nevertheless saw a self-critical glance at the German “national essence” as integral to the purification process. This is evident in his frequent attempts to align the SS spirit and (famed) German cultural traits: for example, the “German inclination to idealistic imagination, which then justifies every barbarity,”8 such as turning

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3. Ibid., 12, 367.
4. Ibid., 363.
5. Ibid., 364.
6. Ibid., 366.
7. Ibid., 360.
8. Ibid., 35.
off one’s conscience and imagining that the concentration camps were just tools to turn “political pests” and those unwilling to work into productive laborers.\textsuperscript{9} German Protestantism was also to blame, for its tendency to separate one’s conscience from the power politics of the earthly state, resulting in the absolutization of political authority.\textsuperscript{10} In Kogon’s view it was the task of postwar Germans to “investigate these historical and collective-spiritual roots of guilt,” and to reach the bottom, where “the gold of high German quality” is hidden, in order to “fulfill the true German duty in Europe and in the world.”\textsuperscript{11}

Remarkable, however, is the fact that Kogon did not utter these pronouncements as a Jewish survivor,\textsuperscript{12} making a definitive judgment on German culture, or dictating what Germans should do in order to earn his or the victims’ forgiveness, but as a member of postwar German society engaging in self-critique and reorientation. We see this in the passages where he uses “we”\textsuperscript{13} to include himself in his (self-)accusations against the Germans:

The concentration camps are only one of the gruesome facts, which the German conscience must focus on. . . . Should we not try . . . to delineate the problem, to lay bare its core, and to pass our own judgment . . . ? Perhaps we will grasp the deep meaning of this judgment for Germany and the educational intention of history.\textsuperscript{14}

What differentiates Kogon’s efforts of “turning” from the others already mentioned is his detailed analysis of the German concentration camp, based on his own experience in Buchenwald, thus providing Germans in the postwar period the necessary materials

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 370.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 363.
\textsuperscript{12} As he was a Catholic with Jewish lineage born in Germany, Kogon’s identity is of course anything but self-explanatory. That he could have chosen to identify himself as a persecuted Jew but did not—that is, to be among the plaintiffs instead of the accused—is not to be taken for granted either.
\textsuperscript{13} This voluntary self-identification as one of the sinners/perpetrators is itself another characteristic of biblical repentance (R10).
\textsuperscript{14} Kogon, \textit{SS-Staat}, 361 (emphasis added).
for the “purification process.” What Kogon called a “sociological work” was actually also a psychological and spiritual analysis of the perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders. If *Der SS-Staat* were the only contribution to German “turning” that Kogon had furnished, he would have counted as one of the great “turners” in postwar German history. In fact, his contributions went much further. In 1946, together with his close associates, among them Walter Dirks and Clemens Münster, Kogon founded the monthly periodical the *Frankfurter Hefte*. In today’s media parlance, it would be classified as a periodical about culture and politics, offering articles ranging from literary critique to foreign affairs analysis. But in the founders’ original vision, there was an unmistakable “metaphysical” dimension to the work they were trying to achieve with this publication effort. In the words of Kogon in the very first issue of the *Frankfurter Hefte*, in April 1946,

Something metaphysical has happened to the German people in the twelve rough years of the Third Reich, which the intellect alone can hardly grasp.\(^\text{15}\)

We—the publishers, the coworkers, and the thoughtful readers—believe that we can lend a service to the renewal of Germany. . . . We want to give [the reader] the courage to say no and still more the courage to say yes. We will repeat this, because this is important: the courage to say no and still more the courage to say yes; we want to nourish the power of the heart and the spirit, which comes with this courage, with insight.\(^\text{16}\)

The death and rebirth in repentance is thus expressed as a no and a yes.\(^\text{17}\) If *Der SS-Staat* consists primarily of what postwar Germans

\(^{15}\) Eugen Kogon, “Gericht und Gewissen,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 1, no. 1 (1946): 25–26. This is actually the last chapter of *Der SS-Staat*, which Kogon had recommended his readers to read twice.


\(^{17}\) If we go back a little further in German-Jewish theological-philosophical thought, we can find a comparable formulation in Rosenzweig: “turning” consists primarily of turning from a “No to something” and “Yes to nothing,” to a “Yes to not-nothing” and a “No to nothing.” See Franz Rosenzweig, *Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt a.M.: J. Kauffmann Verlag, 1921), 113–14.
need to say no to, that is, a painful and incisive cut in the national heart where the perceived national essence is concerned, then the *Frankfurter Hefte* appears to be a long-term effort to help postwar Germans distinguish the no from the yes in all areas of life that cut across the individual and the collective, in effect giving content to what Kogon called a “renewed Germany” to fill the spiritual void left by the vacated evil. As one of the few German Jews remaining in postwar Germany, Kogon spent the rest of his rescued life initiating and participating in the renewal of heart and spirit through his publication efforts and political activism.

But why should any German listen to the victors and the victims, if they themselves, as Kogon and the others said, had so much to answer for? In resolving the “victor’s justice” controversy, Kogon once again turned to biblical resources to make his case for repentance:

> The judge is not identical to the executioners of the judgment. . . . Nebuchadnezzar was named by the prophet [Jeremiah][21] as the “servant of God,” sent by him to lead the people of Israel out of the misguided path through punishment. He who goes into the innermost chamber of his own conscience in order to question himself on right and wrong is not interested in the moral suitability of those who have externally brought him to the place of reflection. . . . To him, the others are the “servants of God,” whether they themselves are just or not.[22]

In other words, the triangular vision of God and human beings (see R2) of the biblical paradigm was invoked in order to bring postwar Germans to the repentant acceptance of the “punishment” meted

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18. The *Frankfurter Hefte* was in circulation until 1984, when it was merged with *Neue Gesellschaft*, which is now called *Neue Gesellschaft Frankfurter Hefte* (www.frankfurter-hefte.de).
20. According to Kogon, there were fewer than 20,000 German Jews remaining in the Federal Republic in 1949. See Eugen Kogon, “Juden und Nichtjuden in Deutschland,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 4, no. 9 (1949): 726–29.
out through the victors as just (see R4). Himself a Catholic, Kogon connected this prophetic vision to Christian symbolism to further his case:

[The self-questioning German] does not think like the tax collector: “Lord, I’m thankful that I’m not like the Pharisee there.” For if the latter is not justified as he leaves the temple, then even less justified is the former with such an attitude.23

It is necessary that the world not behave pharisaically, and that Germany not be unrepentant (verstockt).24

For Kogon repentance is a powerful ancient remedy that is threatened not only by the inability to repent on the part of the perpetrators and bystanders, but also by the inability to believe in the “atoning purification” (sühnende Reinigung) of repentance on the part of the “realists” and “skeptics,” for whom the “repentant conviction” (bußhafte Gesinnung) of a nation is but an outdated mode of thinking and a hindrance to the pursuit of national interests.25

Returning to the prophetic vision—that is, repentance is both offered as a remedy and demanded as a response—was therefore an essential element in Kogon’s endeavor to give Germany a new heart and a new spirit. Indeed, many German Christian thinkers have used the platform of the Frankfurter Hefte to advocate the “turning” of the Christian churches, whether it be in their complicity with the Nazi regime, their failure to mount an active resistance, or their long-standing antisemitism.26 As if to shore up this collective German effort, other Jewish thinkers, like Martin Buber, also

23. Ibid., 362. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, found in the Gospel of Luke (18:9–14), contrasts the arrogance of the “innocent” with the humility of the sinner. By reversing the roles, Kogon challenged German Christians to fight this “hidden arrogance” that can take root in the sinner, not only the guiltless. See, however, the problematic use of the term pharisaism in chapter 5, note 17.

24. Kogon, SS-Staat, 10.

25. Ibid., 362.

helped propagate the prophetic vision through Kogon’s periodical. In the March issue of 1948, for instance, a German reader could read Buber’s text comparing the critique and demand of the Jewish prophets (represented by Isaiah) against Israel’s people and their government, and the philosophical understanding of the Greeks (Plato) concerning state power and the role of philosophers. In it the German reader could find a message that was relevant for both Israel (as originally intended by Buber) and occupied Germany at the time: returning to and recognizing the true head of state—the “metapolitical possibility” that human beings (whether philosophers or kings or prophets) are the owners neither of the spirit nor of power, but are only lent these to fulfill particular tasks in history. As such, the political question was never about aligning with this or that world power of the day, but realizing justice in one’s own community.

Indeed, Buber’s voice was much sought after in postwar German society. Invariably, the themes touched upon prophecy and repentance. In Dolf Sternberger’s Die Wandlung, for example, Buber talked about “the false prophet,” who “does not know that there is guilt, guilt that makes one fail the task of the hour. . . ; who also does not know that there is repentance, through which one receives a possibility that did not exist.” But perhaps the most illuminating text of all, in which Buber explained in detail the inner movements of a repentant sinner, where death and rebirth occur, is his Guilt and Guilt Feelings, published in German as Schuld und Schuldgefühle in 1958.

27. The editorial note introduced this text as part of Buber’s inaugural lecture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
29. The biblical example he used was Hananiah (Jer 28).
31. Though first published in English in 1957 (as a journal article) and reprinted numerous times as a chapter in various books, the German version (as a book) displays a much more precise and sophisticated terminology. Martin Buber, Schuld und Schuldgefühle (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1958).
In this short text, Buber introduced three spheres in which “aton- ing for guilt” (Schuldsühnung) is both possible for and demanded of the one suffering from “existential guilt” (which is not mere guilt feeling), as a result of his wrongdoing. These three spheres are the law of the society, conscience, and faith. In each of the three spheres, three “events” are required for atonement to be fulfilled. In the sphere of law, admission (Geständnis) is followed by the sufferance of punishment (Strafverbüßung) and compensation (Schadlosbältung). In faith, the third and the “highest” sphere, confession of sins (Sündenbekenntnis) is followed by regret (Reue) and the offering of repentance (Bußopfer). In the sphere of conscience, which is the primary focus in this text, first there is self-illumination (Selbsterhellung), and then insistence (Beharrung) and atoning (Sühnung). The interrelatedness of these last three acts is described as follows:

First, to illuminate the darkness that still surrounds the guilt despite all previous action of the conscience . . . , second, to insist on the identity of the past and the present person in the newly earned humble knowledge, no matter how high in the reality of his present life he might have ascended from that stage of guilt; and third, to restore (wiederherstellen) the order of being—which was wounded by him in the past—through an active, self-giving relationship to the world, in his place and according to his ability, and in the given historical and biographical situations. For the wounds of the order of being can be healed in infinitely many places other than where they were inflicted.32

Obviously, this conceptualization involves two “identities” of the guilt-bearer:33 one is the “old self,” who had committed the wrongdoing and hence loaded himself with the guilt to begin with, and the other is the “new self,” who has come to look upon that old self and realized his own wrongdoing and, through repentance, has “ascended above that station of guilt.” This way of conceptualizing repentance is, as we have seen, typical of the turners: compare it with Kogon’s no and yes, for example. Interestingly though, in Buber’s formulation, the unabandoning attitude of the new self is

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32. Buber, Schuld und Schuldfühle, 40–41.
33. Not the ego (Ich) and the super-ego (Über-Ich), however, which Buber explicitly rejected. Buber, Schuld und Schuldfühle, 44.
stressed—it is not a new identity that says: “The old self is already dead; I don’t have anything to do with him anymore”; but rather: “The old self is indeed dead, but I am still the one who had done such wrongdoing.” This is a crucial difference to keep in mind when we explore in a later chapter (P11) the similarly unabandoning attitude of the “representatives” of national repentance.

In this understanding of repentance (in the sphere of conscience), the promised new life is expressed in both the idea of a new, atoning relationship to the world, and the idea of past wrongdoings as wounds, which, to be sure, cannot be undone, but are nonetheless not beyond healing (i.e., restoration). This conception thus conforms again to another characteristic of biblical repentance that portrays sin/wrongdoing as relational illness (R2). This way of weaving the two ideas together has the effect of affirming that the project of restoration is neither dispensable nor doomed to fail. The possibility, indeed, the only possibility, of a new and productive life lies in owning up to the old and destructive life of the past—in cooperation with God and the victim.

It was with this understanding of guilt atoning in the sphere of conscience that Buber warned his readers of the danger of dealing merely with the feeling of guilt instead of with the guilt itself (e.g., by turning to a psychotherapist who is unaware of or refuses to recognize the existence of guilt). He used an example to demonstrate the danger of such a trap: when a person is “cured” of her guilt feeling, but her existential guilt remains intact, she forgoes the chance for atonement and reconciliation, which promise the full unfolding of the potentials of her being in her restored relationships. With this conception of “guilt feeling” we can better appreciate Buber’s objection to the execution of Eichmann in Israel.

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35. Buber stressed that since both human conscience and human faith can err, they must entrust themselves to mercy/grace. Ibid., 68. Furthermore, “for the Jews,” he said, God “forgives” a human being “in a meaningful cooperation with the one to whom [the latter] has become guilty,” thus emphasizing the role of the human—side by side with the divine—victim in the guilt atonement of the perpetrator. Buber, *Schuld und Schuldgefühle*, 43–44.

in 1962, which, aside from his concern for the one convicted to
death, Buber feared might serve as a false guilt-atonement by al-
leviating the guilt feeling of many young Germans. Hannah Arendt
roundly criticized Buber for this: “It is strange that Buber, a man
not only of eminence but of very great intelligence, should not see
how spurious these much publicized guilt feelings necessarily are.
It is quite gratifying to feel guilty if you haven’t done anything
wrong: how noble . . . they are trying to escape from the pressure
of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality.”

It is clear that in Buber’s understanding the “guilt feeling” of con-
temporary Germans was potentially “healthy” because if they
chose to undertake the acts outlined in his Guilt and Guilt Feel-
ings, it would lead them to where the existential guilt was, and
hence genuine healing of the wounded relationships could begin; in
Arendt’s understanding, this “guilt feeling” was pure “sentimental-
ity” at best, obstructing young Germans from feeling “indignant”
about present-day politics and political institutions (which were
staffed with high-ranking individuals who had actual guilt but did
not necessarily feel guilty), where a political “turning” was lacking.
In light of the foregoing, it is actually rather strange that Arendt,
a prominent turner in postwar German history, as we have seen
(P1), had failed to see that feeling guilty, when seen in and treated
according to the biblical paradigm, does not paralyze or deaden
the guilt bearer as she feared, but is the beginning of the death-to-
rebirth repentance process that would eventually expand into the
kind of social and political regeneration that she was hoping for.

37. Buber had, in his earlier work, uttered these words for “evildoers”: “He
[who utters Thou] has renounced moral condemnation for good. For him, the
evildoer is only someone entrusted to him with a deeper responsibility, someone
who is more in need of love.” Buber, Ich und Du (Heidelberg: Lambert Schnei-
der, 1979), 128–29. He repeated this with regard to Eichmann: “It is erroneous
to think that the devil unmasked in this trial is new. This sort of devil was always
there in the history of humankind. It was always our duty to turn these human be-
ings from their way. But it was since time immemorial difficult, for devils do not
want to recognize devils.” “Stunde der Schwäche,” Der Spiegel, no. 53 (1961) (em-
phasis added).

It was not only Arendt, however, who found something amiss with this “inner” repentance, which is perceived to be lacking in an “outer” political expression. In the 1970s a German theologian also found the “I-Thou” paradigm to be too interpersonal, too “private,” to “capture the political senses in which we cooperate with one another in society.”

Born in 1928, Johann Baptist Metz survived World War II as a soldier because of an errand as a messenger. Witnessing massive destruction and the deaths of both his companions and “the enemies,” Metz suffered a psychological crisis:

A fissure had opened in my powerful Bavarian-Catholic socialization, with its impregnable confidence. What would happen if one took this sort of thing not to the psychologist but into the church, and if one would not allow oneself to be talked out of such unreconciled memories even by theology, but rather wanted to have faith with them and with them speak about God . . . ?

Hence Metz, as if heeding Buber’s warning and like Martin Niemöller before him, chose not to “overcome the past” by quieting or suppressing horrible memories and guilt feelings, but rather by embarking on a lifelong engagement in what can be called the “turning” of German Catholic theology. If the guilt of the church, as Niemöller put it in the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt, was failing to have engaged in the affairs of the world enough according to the demands of its faith (see P2), the “new political theology,” which Metz was part of, was then “to trace the strange lack of political awareness in theology and Christianity back to its (historical-social) roots and to criticize it, since Christianity and theology cannot hold themselves to be politically innocent and uninvolved without de-luding themselves or deceiving others. This new political theology


is determined to reveal all the talk about ‘pure Christianity’ for what it is: a cover under which to evade the practical demands made by a radical Christianity.”

The centerpiece of Metz’s theology is the memory of suffering, *memoria passionis*, which he called both dangerous and liberating: “It is a dangerous and liberating memory, which badgers the present and calls it into question, since it does not remember just any open future, but precisely this future, and because it compels believers to be in a continual state of transformation in order to take this future into account.” The future that Metz was talking about was a future in which all become subjects—rather than oppressed objects—in God’s presence.

But if Metz’s memory of suffering referred only to the suffering of Jesus, then one would be right to doubt whether there was anything new at all about this “new” political theology; for was it not the accusation of “deicide” one of the roots of traditional Christian antisemitism? Yet, the “turning” of Metz’s theology occurred precisely here: for the practical remembering of the suffering of Christ lies, according to Metz, in the Christian remembrance of others’ suffering. Christians are to “heed the prophetic call of the stranger’s suffering” and to exercise “the freedom to suffer another’s suffering,” while the church is to be the “public memory” of this suffering and this freedom against all totalitarian systems. As Niemöller had singled out the guilt of the church in the immediate postwar years, Metz, some thirty years after Niemöller, continued to proclaim the specific repentance of the church: the church can regain its authority “only if it continues to be connected with love’s concern, a love that searches out its own path through history, following the trail laid down by others’ suffering. Only when the Church has an ear for the dark prophecy of this suffering of others . . . will it truly hear the word of Christ.”

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41. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, xi.
42. Ibid., 89 (emphasis in the original).
43. Ibid., 81.
44. Ibid., 88–90.
Indeed, Metz advocated a kind of spirituality for postwar German Catholics that is characterized by an expansive ethic, one that is concerned not only about “action” and “omission,” but also about what one “allow[s] to happen to others.” Accordingly, neither the “golden” nor the “silver” rule is enough for Christians—either as individuals or as a group—to respond adequately to the political demands of a “radical Christianity.” It is as if the “heart of stone”—whether out of indifference or hostility based on difference—were replaced with a “heart of flesh,” where compassion for the suffering of Jesus is bound with that for the stranger’s.

In a way, this concerted effort to turn German-Christian thinking by Metz, Niemöller, Hans Küng, and others was but a realization of what Rabbi Leo Baeck had called for already in 1946. The preeminent German-Jewish rabbi wrote in Aufbau, one of the most significant German print media by the exiles in New York, a piece on the “Jewish situation,” in which he expounded on the biblical conception of human right: “Human right is . . . above all the right of other human beings.” Basing his argument on the biblical idea of humans being created by God in his own image, Baeck asserted that “there is no wrong that was merely done by one on another. Wrong committed against the others is wrong against me, injustice against one is injustice against all.”

Yet, as thorough and in-depth as these “turnings” may be in the realm of faith, one is right to doubt how widespread or effective these ideas were in the wider society, or if they were confined only to theological rumination. Were there incidents in the postwar history of Germany in which we can see these ideas in action—not necessarily only within the religious realm? Were there indicators by which, although one still cannot be certain of the majority/minority question, one can at least speak of significant minorities who are not to be neglected?

46. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 93.
47. Leo Baeck, “Gedenken zur jüdischen Situation,” Aufbau, 30 Aug. 1946 (emphasis added).
48. Ibid. See also similar formulations in P2.
49. See P10.
In the early 1990s, the euphoria of the newly reunited Germany was overshadowed by yet another round of xenophobic violence. Between 1991 and 1992, over 4,000 violent acts by right-wing extremists were recorded—three times the sum total of the previous seven years.\textsuperscript{50} Seventeen victims were killed in 1992 alone. The attacks were mainly against foreigners, asylum seekers, Jewish synagogues, and so on. Homes were set on fire, “outsiders” were mobbed, battered, if not murdered. In one particularly notorious case in August 1992, what some called the “pogrom of Rostock-Lichtenhagen,” hundreds of asylum seekers and foreign workers were rounded up and attacked by mobs for days while onlookers applauded, before adequate action was taken by the local police to end the televised fiasco.\textsuperscript{51} Hence for the first time since 1945 the German population as a whole was put to the test: Would it excuse itself by saying, “We didn’t do it (for those were crimes committed by a few ‘right-wing extremists’)”? Or worse, “It’s not \textit{us} who were hurt”? Or would it demonstrate the sense of responsibility that Metz had advocated, which takes seriously the “stranger’s suffering” and accepts that there is guilt also in “allowing (atrocities) to happen”—that is, the guilt of bystanders?

The “Chain of Light” (Lichterkette) movement, as a collective response to the xenophobic violence, was described by an unsympathetic observer as an “immense success”:

\begin{quote}
It became the greatest “antifascist”-motivated demonstration in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. . . . Crowds formed themselves into long lines with candles in the mostly dark, winter evening hours to express their rejection of hostility against foreigners. The movement reached its climax in the winter of 1992/1993. . . . On the first Sunday in December 1992, over 400,000 people took to the streets in Munich. . . . End of January 1993 [on the sixtieth anniversary of the Nazis coming to power], in many German cities more than half a million people took to the streets. . . . In Düsseldorf around 120,000, in Berlin 100,000 participants were recorded. Besides these, there were bigger demonstrations in Cologne, Regensburg, Nuremberg, Munich,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} “Die heimlichen Rädelsführer,” \textit{Der Spiegel}, no. 27 (1993).
Bremen, and Hamburg. . . . The success of the “Chain of Light” campaigns was immense.\textsuperscript{52}

Indeed, the massive support for these demonstrations was a shock even to their original initiators. A contemporary report in\textit{ Die Zeit} reckoned that, between November 1992 and January 1993, over three million people in the Federal Republic had demonstrated against antiforeign hostility, antisemitism, and assaults by right-wing radicals. In Munich and Hamburg alone, the turnout for the demonstrations represented close to one-third of their entire populations. “No political parties or unions could have mobilized such masses.”\textsuperscript{53}

Originally a civil initiative in Munich with the slogan “A City Says No,” the movement became a model for similarly oriented campaigns in that period. Demonstrators’ placards read: “No to Racism. No to Elimination of Asylum Seekers.”\textsuperscript{54} “All human beings are foreigners. Almost everywhere.”\textsuperscript{55} “First THEM—Then YOU.”\textsuperscript{56} “Human dignity is inviolable.”\textsuperscript{57} “Living with one another—against antistranger hatred and violence.” “Silence is guilt.”\textsuperscript{58} The link between this wave of civil responses and the Holocaust was also omnipresent: “For tolerance, against exclusion and antisemitism.” “This time everyone is aware of it.”\textsuperscript{59} The reference to the excuse of former generations vis-à-vis the Nazi crimes was obvious.

Even reports critical of subsequent “imitations” conceded that “the first Chain of Light movements have transmitted the signal that the majority of Germans do not secretly applaud when stones

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Description taken from Claus-M. Wolfschlag, “Das ‘antifaschistische Milieu’: Vom ‘schwarzen Block’ zur ‘Lichterkette’—Die politische Repression gegen ‘Rechtsextremismus’ in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” (PhD diss., Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 2001), 192–95.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Giovanni di Lorenzo, “Die intellektuelle Feuerwehr,” \textit{Der Spiegel}, no. 6 (1993).
\item \textsuperscript{57} From Article 1 of the German Basic Law.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Cited in Wolfschlag, “Das ‘antifaschistische Milieu’,” 193–95.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 196.
\end{itemize}
are thrown and foreigners burn.”

“[Supporters of antiforeigner violence] are quick to shut up... [for] they only obtain disgust and contempt from the overwhelming majority of the citizens.”

While statistically questionable, these “majorities” did encompass a broad spectrum of society: “High school students and pensioners, the unemployed and entrepreneurs, landlords and movie stars... Rock stars played music, authors conducted readings [in the apartments of asylum seekers] and offered their royalties for them to use.”

For the unsympathetic observer already cited, “compassion for the victims” of right-wing violence was the “psychological motive” of these participants in the Chain of Light movements, who also wanted to “unburden themselves of guilt feelings in the face of the cruelties that happened in the National Socialist past.”

Yet, for him and the like-minded, this path from guilt feeling to compassion, or from guilt-bearing to self-giving engagement with the world (Buber), was a problem rather than a welcomed “turning,” for it was allegedly part of the “antinationalism” that was “against the interests of one’s own [German] nation, leading to the paralysis of the will to self-determination and to an immense weakening in foreign politics.”

But the participants themselves certainly did not see their action as damaging to the nation, much less as “being instrumentalized” by antifascist groups for political power. And the symbol they created did not prove futile. As Giovanni di Lorenzo, one of the four initiators of the Chain of Light in Munich, explained, “Against the shouting of neo-Nazis we have resorted to silent (protest), and against the Molotov cocktail, the candle.”

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64. Ibid., 457.
65. Participation by political parties and organizations was in fact rejected by the initiators of the Chain of Light in Munich. See di Lorenzo, “Die intellektuelle Feuerwehr.”
right-wing radicalism and antiforeigner hatred,” hence not to be “overestimated,” “it is also true that the Chain of Light . . . has restored the courage of exactly those foreigners and Jews to live in Germany.”67 This was not some wishful thinking on the part of some German demonstrator, but the affirmation of those affected by German xenophobia: di Lorenzo is German Italian, while another co-initiator, Gil Bachrach, a German Israeli.68 Furthermore, public sympathy for antiforeigner discourses and measures did decline dramatically—at least for a period of time—after the Chain of Light movements.69

As Kogon had already seen in 1945, a clear no to the perceived “national essence” would—and still will—be regarded by some as “national suicide,” which would be vehemently, if not also violently, opposed. That’s why courage is required. And certainly not all would share Karl Jaspers’s counterintuitive assertion that the acceptance of guilt is the beginning of political freedom: “For only from the awareness of guilt comes into being the awareness of solidarity and co-responsibility. . . . In short: without the purification of the soul there is no political freedom.”70 The negation therein is real and hence all the more terrifying. For self-illumination (Buber) to persist, assistance is required from “the outside.” And courage to utter yes is needed—affirming both the possibility of “change in heart and spirit” and the necessity of collaboration in precisely this turning. From the Frankfurter Hefte to the Münchner Lichterkette, the element of “co-initiation” was present. And this presence was not without risk and resistance: both di Lorenzo and Bachrach had to overcome objections from their own family circles: “Let the Germans do it themselves!”71 Had they heeded that—by all means reasonable—family advice, one can only imagine the loss in symbol and substance for the German turning recorded in this chapter.

68. Kostede, “Erleuchtung für die Politik.” Di Lorenzo has been editor in chief of Die Zeit since 2004.
69. Kostede, “Erleuchtung für die Politik.”
70. Karl Jaspers, Die Schuldfrage (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946), 104.
71. Kostede, “Erleuchtung für die Politik.”