

# BREAKING THE VEIL OF SILENCE

JOBST BITTNER





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I dedicate this book to my wife, friend,  
co-laborer and called in the Kingdom of God.





“Now the threat to my country cannot be overstated. Those who dismiss it are sticking their heads in the sand. Less than seven decades after six million Jews were murdered, Iran’s leaders deny the Holocaust of the Jewish people, while calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state.

Leaders who spew such venom, should be banned from every respectable forum on the planet. But there is something that makes the outrage even greater: The lack of outrage. In much of the international community, the calls for our destruction are met with utter silence.”

Benjamin Netanyahu  
in his address to the U.S. Congress on May 24, 2011



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Last, but not least, I have to mention my friend Ted Pearce here, without whose encouragement I would surely never have written this book. Here it is, Ted – so you don’t have to write it now.

Jobst Bittner



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# FOREWORD

This is a book that could only have been written by a German pastor and activist with a solid theological background, a deep devotion to the Holy Spirit, and a lifelong commitment to Israel. Jobst Bittner is such a man.

He studied under the late, heralded professor Martin Hengel, famous for his work on Judaism and Hellenism, and so Jobst has a thorough understanding of the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, a subject of foundational importance to this book. And as a pastor who believes in taking the gospel to the streets, he both speaks and acts, putting legs to his faith and bringing a living and public demonstration. He knows that only the power of the Holy Spirit can truly deliver the captives and make the brokenhearted whole. Finally, as a man devoted to Israel and the salvation of the Jewish people, he can assess the painful legacy of the German church, but always with a hopeful eye that looks forward.

Other German Christian leaders have addressed the veil of silence that hung over the church during the fateful years of the Holocaust, among whom was Basilea (formerly Dr. Klara) Schlink, founder of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary.

*With anguish of heart she wrote in 1958:*

*“We Germans were Satan’s henchmen. In the midst of our people this hell was created... We are personally to blame. We all have to admit that if we, the entire Christian community, had stood up as*

*one man and if, after the burning of the synagogues [on Kristallnacht], we had gone out on the streets and voiced our disapproval, rung the church bells, and somehow boycotted the actions of the S.S., the devil's vassals would probably not have been at such liberty to pursue their evil schemes. But we lacked the ardor of love – love that is never passive, love that cannot bear it when its fellow men are in misery, particularly when they are subjected to such appalling treatment and tortured to death. Indeed, if we had loved God, we would not have endured seeing those houses of God set ablaze; and holy, divine wrath would have filled our souls.”*

*(Israel, My Chosen People: A German Confession Before God and the Jews (Eng. trans., Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen, 1987), 39, 42-43)*

But this is 2011, not 1958, and Pastor Jobst contends that the veil of silence – a multifaceted veil of silence – remains over the older and younger generations, and this veil must be torn down by identificational repentance and a positive, public witness.

In response, a sincere critic might ask, “Are we to endlessly repent of the sins of past generations? And is it even our place to do so?” Those are certainly worthy questions, and in my opinion, this kind of repentance is called for when: 1) The wounds of the past sins remain, which is certainly the case with regard to the subject matter of this book; and 2) The seeds of the past sins remain, and this too cannot be denied today.

And yet this is certainly not just another book about German Christians and the Holocaust. Certainly not. It is a call to dig deeper, to uproot every destructive and hurtful remnant that remains, and to move forward into wholeness, freedom, and life. And it brings a very specific call to a very literal March of Life, exalting Jesus and displaying what it really means to be one of His disciples.

As a Jewish follower of Jesus, myself indebted to Gentile Christians who introduced me to Israel's Messiah and Lord forty years ago, I commend this book to you.

Dr. Michael L. Brown



# PREFACE

The development of this book is the result of a process of several years. The more I started thinking about the “Veil of Silence”, the more I discovered how deeply every area of our lives is affected by it. More experience and revelation kept coming. Now I am able to present the finished book, and hope it will be helpful to you in coming to terms with this topic. The “Veil of Silence” probably concerns you more than you would have thought at first.

We are living under a veil of silence without even realizing it. It is passed on from generation to generation, preventing reconciliation, healing and restoration. Is the war generation’s silence concerning the Holocaust something we still carry deep within ourselves today? Unfortunately, the annihilation of the European Jews never really had a place in German family memory. It was only in the early ‘80s that the long-term consequences of the war on the following generations were discovered in Germany. Most families in Germany today still live in the shadow of the past.

I would like to describe a phenomenon that may have different backgrounds and reasons, but that still goes for both the successive generations of the German war generation, as well as the generation of Holocaust survivors. The descendants of both groups started discovering only very slowly how much they have been weighed down by the burden of their family history. Step by step they are learning to speak about it and bring their family story into the light, so it can be worked through. The descendants of

both generations only discovered slowly how much they have suffered under the burden of their respective family histories. Many Christians in German churches and congregations would like to finally close the book on the past of National Socialism, and to avoid it coming back into view over and over again; unfortunately, this does not conform to reality. Both the victims and the perpetrators still suffer from the heritage of their past, and they will only be able to experience healing and restoration once they perceive one another, forgive, and come together in reconciliation. This cannot happen unless the veil of silence over them is broken. I will try to present a biblical-theological perspective, a church history perspective, and a psychological perspective on where the veil of silence comes from, and how it can be broken. Let's start with our own biographical experience here in Tübingen, a university town that used to be one of the ideological centers during the Nazi era which produced executors and mass murderers.

### The Family Level

In this book I will deal with the veil of silence on different levels. The level that probably concerns us most personally is the family level. More than three quarters of German families live under the veil of silence. They are children and grandchildren of the war generation, and still carry the burdens of guilt or trauma, as well as the experiences of flight and expulsion. Their common mark is silence. Many of them are going through endless deserts without ever seeing any hope of change. They have learned to put up with emotional disorders, fears, blockages, bonding disorders, and inner rigidity, without ever really finding the cause or truly getting to know the liberating power of the cross. Once the generational silence is broken and the untold stories are shared, this opens completely new possibilities to find inner peace, security and healing.

Many Christians are missing out on a very important development that has long since become “trendy” in society. They are convinced that all the working through that is necessary has already taken place. It is about time, they say, to leave behind the old guilt complex and to look ahead. But it is amazing to see that the working through of the Nazi period in the general public has actually intensified. Genealogy, the research of family history, has been booming for years. Ancestry research is no longer just a quirky pastime for aristocrats and retirees. Dealing with one’s roots has become trendy, and is considered a symbol of an increased need for identity. The basis for any change is the honest facing of the past. Personally, I had been struggling with this for years, and had to give up my own inner resistance. This happened during a service when I had the privilege of speaking before numerous Holocaust survivors. I experienced a completely different reality there. My speaking German stirred painful memories in many, and the ghosts of the past rose again. After a time of healing and reconciliation, they started sharing the fears and traumas they had inherited from their parents and grandparents. Millions of the second and third generation of Holocaust survivors are still suffering from the effects. Strangely enough, they are still captive under a speechlessness similar to the descendants of the perpetrators. For as long as the generation of victims and perpetrators are still suffering under the heritage of the past, Christians can never think of their responsibility as over.

### The Historical Level

Another level of the veil of silence is the historical level. With the rebuilding process of Germany after 1945 came the tedious process of working through the past. Nazi perpetrators attempted to go into hiding; and they were largely successful. Followers and accessories took refuge in the silence of everyday life and tried

to repress the past. Only 20 years later, the veil of silence slowly started cracking. In the face of six million Jews brutally murdered during the Holocaust, and the strategic mass murder, meticulously implemented, of 30 million people in Eastern Europe, you cannot help but wonder whether it is permissible for Germans to hide behind the guilt of fanatic individuals at all. Hidden behind the silence was a collective moral guilt, the responsibility of a silent majority who had been watching the murderous proceedings and had not done anything. During recent decades, Germany has seen an unparalleled working through of the time of National Socialism. Germany's past was the topic of countless conferences with much repentance. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification, the Lord visibly healed our land. And still today, there hardly is a day without reports, educational programs, and discussions about the Holocaust and other war crimes. Holocaust denial is a punishable offense. Yearly government consultations between Israel and Germany testify to this new solidarity. There are a great number of churches who are in lively contact with Israel.

### The Level of Church History

But still, this veil of silence has not yet disappeared. There is an anti-Semitism that is deeply rooted in us, and that reaches back far beyond the time of National Socialism. This kind of anti-Semitism is like a negative seed that is deeply hidden in our Western culture and embedded in our thinking, so it can break out again and again.

Whether it is in the form of downplaying the Holocaust, a denial of Israel's right to exist, or anti-Jewish attitudes – the common mark of this negative seed is silence. It is the same silence as at the time of the silent majority during the Nazi era. In the guise



of indifference and passivity, it has found its way deep into our churches. Both are hallmarks of the “genetic defect” that Christianity has been carrying ever since it separated from its Jewish roots. In order to prove this assumption, we will take a closer look at the church history dimension of the veil of silence. Here our main question will be why the church in the Western world has lost its authority. Despite resistance in the mainly Hellenistic Mediterranean, the early church was able to spread very rapidly. At the cost of losing its Hebrew roots, it exchanged its spiritual power for secular authority, and finally became the source of centuries of suffering for the Jewish people. Another important question asked in this book will be why we can only regain the authority of the church through openly confessing the guilt of the Christians toward the Jewish people, and through publicly standing by our Hebrew heritage. This leads us to consider what it is that the church has to face, and what means to use. Before we fall into old patterns of thought, we should actually think again about the central part of “identificational repentance” and the controversial issue of “spiritual warfare”.

### The Supernatural Level

I am also using the term “Veil of Silence” as a synonym for the struggle with the invisible world. The Bible speaks about darkness that covers the land. It keeps pointing out that sin can darken a nation, and cover the earth like a dark cloud (Is 60:2). What this cloud is made up of actually seems irrelevant to me. What is crucial is to see that the sin of cities and nations will not be blown over, and so will not automatically become less or obsolete. It still affects people and their descendants, preventing healing and restoration. We found that despite years of earnest efforts in prayer, we were not able to overcome this darkness. The harder we tried and added more commitment to our efforts, the thicker and

more impenetrable this veil seemed to become. I will tell you in this book how the ground was pulled from underneath darkness, and how it broke. Part of this is the testimony of our city, where I have been living with my wife for the past 30 years now. With our own eyes we were able to see the spiritual situation in the city change completely.

### The National Level

Part of our city's history is the March of Life movement, which by 2012 has reached and stirred hundreds of thousands in 80 cities and 12 different nations. The backdrop to this movement are the so-called death marches that are part of the darkest chapter in German history. Just before the end of WWII, the traces of the concentrations camps were supposed to be eliminated. The emaciated inmates were forced to march along the roads of Germany for weeks. 250,000 people, at least a quarter of the total number of victims of the concentration camps, perished during the last five months of the war on such death marches, right before the very eyes of the civilian population. No civilian could have missed this mass murder. It was the time when ordinary people became murderers. The death marches in Germany stand for a "veil of silence". Tens of thousands were involved, either directly as helpers, or indirectly as onlookers. These marches took place in broad daylight – "on our doorstep" – and they were the final, brutal culmination of the Holocaust, in plain sight of the German population. The "March of Life" sums up everything included in "Breaking the Veil of Silence". So in the final chapter of this book I will tell you more about this. It presents what can happen when people take a stand to break the veil of silence – personally, in their families and in their cities and nations. Many of them will get to share their personal stories and testify to darkness leaving their lives, and healing taking place. The March of Life is a living sign that curse can be transformed into

blessing, and darkness into light. Its confession is like an unmistakable signal that Christians have overcome the genetic defect of silence concerning Israel and the Jewish people.

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. (Isa. 62:1)*

There is a proverb that says, "Speech is silver, silence is golden." For some people, this is a good reason to think of silence as something very positive. Someone who can keep silent is thought to be highly principled and strong. In light of the Bible, however, we see a completely different picture. The highest expression of God's love to mankind is the ability of direct communication.

### The Biblical-Theological Level

We will also take the biblical approach to the phenomenon of silence, taking a look at what the Bible has to say about this topic. I actually do not want to let the proverb "Speech is silver, silence is golden" pass unchallenged. A child who does not learn how to express itself and how to communicate with its environment is in serious trouble, and needs help urgently. Married couples who no longer communicate have closed their hearts to one another and are in serious danger of jeopardizing their marriage. A church or congregation has lost its life once silence has come upon them. How much pain, trauma, and things not dealt with in the past can be hidden behind a person's silence? And how much healing, restoration, and change can happen when somebody manages to break the silence!

After presenting the different levels of the veil of silence to you, I will begin the book as I had initially intended to. As I mentioned

in the beginning, the work on this subject has taken me several years, and in the course of time, many things can change, also the preface to a book.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. It was formless and empty” – this is what we read right at the beginning of Genesis – “and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” (Gen. 1:1-3). The darkness was shrouded in silence until it was broken by the voice of God. When He lifted His voice, He broke the silence and said, “Let there be light”, darkness lost its power, and there was light. This was the start of creation, and the beginning of God’s story with mankind. The battle against darkness has never changed. Whenever we raise our voices and break the silence, darkness loses its foundation. To this very day, marriages, families, cities, and nations are covered by a veil of silence. Fathers remain silent toward their children, and the following generations do not have the strength to break their forefathers’ veil of silence. However, we find this same veil of silence also in churches and congregations whenever hearts have become closed to one another. But this is only an outward sign of a much deeper truth. The veil of silence represents the spirit of this age. The Body of Christ is completely helpless before it, to the point where it has taken away their voice completely. As the German nation, we know what it means to be covered by darkness and to lie captive in the dark. I call it the veil of silence. The majority of Germans stood by watching the atrocities of the Nazis; they were called the “silent majority”. Without them, the Holocaust would never have taken place. We will have to decide whether we want to be part of the “silent majority” or not.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE STORY OF A FORMER NAZI CITY

The small university town of Tübingen is situated in Southern Germany, about 30 minutes from Stuttgart. It is a typical German town with old, medieval houses and a river slowly winding its way along the picturesque house fronts. On warm summer days the students sit along the river walls, watching the long punts go by, stoked along by long poles like the gondolas in Venice. Actually, Tübingen is the typical image of a German idyll. Hardly any of the many tourists have any notion that this pretty town has such an ugly and dark history of anti-Semitism, and used to belong to the ideological trailblazers during the Nazi era.

I want to reinforce this with a few facts, so you can get a better idea of what this means. Jews lived in the city, probably starting in the mid 13th century. Their settlement was centered around the “Judengasse” (Jew Alley), which still exists under this name today. In 1348-49, the Black Plague broke out in Germany. The population of entire cities and regions was wiped out. It will remain guesswork whether the persecution and expulsion of Jews in Tübingen first started then. But in any case, the full fury of the rage of the population was directed against the Jews, who were suspected of poisoning the town’s well, causing the “Black Death”. It is very likely that this was the first time for Jews to be expelled and killed in Tübingen. In the course of more than 1,000 years of history,

up to the deportations of 1942, there has only ever been a period of 180 years that Jews were allowed to live in the city. Their life of suffering was marked by persecution, pogroms<sup>1</sup> and repeated expulsions. By 1471, Jews had settled in the city again; but they were expelled again from the city, and the entire region, for the next 400 years by the founder of the university, Duke Eberhard the Bearded. A few years later, the plague broke out again. This time, it killed both the father and grandfather of the founder of the university, along with a third of the population of Tübingen. Perhaps the only bright spot during that time was the important philosopher and humanist Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522). He was the first significant scholar of Hebrew as a non-Jew to learn the Hebrew language and script. He studied, lived, and taught in Tübingen, and became advisor to Duke Eberhard the Bearded. In later years, he publicly advocated the cause of the Jews, despite all opposition.<sup>2</sup>

It was only in the mid-eighteen hundreds that the Jews slowly started returning to the city. They built a beautiful synagogue, which later was demolished and burnt down by SA and SS thugs during Kristallnacht. When Hitler took over on January 30th, 1933, it was a very quiet thing in Tübingen. This hardly comes as a surprise, as the racial policy of the Nazis fell on very fertile ground, well-prepared by centuries of hidden anti-Semitism that had become part of the “cultural codex” of the middle class. The old and beautifully painted city hall became a voluntary spearhead of the racial ideology of the Nazis.<sup>3</sup> Of his own free will, the mayor of Tübingen supported anti-Jewish decisions, and terminated all business contracts to Jewish companies. He chaired the town council that earned Tübingen sad fame by making it one of the first cities in German territory to have implemented the isolation and discrimination of Jews by banning “Jews and foreigners” from the public open-air bath as early as 1933. Less than three months after Hitler’s takeover, democracy was abolished, the hardly existent opposition done away with and silenced, and the dictatorship was established.<sup>4</sup>

In front of the city hall of Tübingen there is the old market square which saw a memorable mass demonstration on April 1, 1933. The NSDAP had established a “Committee against Jewish Atrocity Propaganda” in Tübingen that had called for this demonstration. The basic principles of anti-Semitic propaganda used at this Nazi event have not changed to this day, and are still used in the modern shape of Western anti-Israeli attitudes. Therefore, I want to go into this a little deeper now, and expose you to a passage taken from one of the speeches at this demonstration: “We had to oppose this renewed Jewish inflammatory propaganda. Nobody ever dreamt of starting a boycott. We were forced into it. ... Because it is about Germany, nobody must stay behind in this defensive battle.”<sup>5</sup> As the party carried “moral legitimacy”, at least in the speaker’s eye, it was justified in going to war against the Jews, and winning. The true victims, the Jews, are made out to be the aggressors, and the perpetrators become victims. And what is more, the NSDAP appear to be protecting the country from the alleged danger. So this actually reverses the pangs of conscience, and the Nazis’ own aggression is projected onto the Jews, which helps to legitimize and morally justify their counter-attack. This way, the aggressor is portrayed as the legitimate authority and seen as the apparent deliverer from alleged evil. This reversal and deception permitted the national socialists the sense of acting righteously, and caused the disappearance of all inhibitions to make the aggressive persecution and silent complicity of an anti-Semitic bourgeois middle class possible in the first place.<sup>6</sup> We need to learn from history and take a careful look whenever anyone on the political scene or in the media points the finger at Israel with moralizing remarks.

Perhaps it is due to the basic anti-Jewish attitude of the founder of Tübingen University that it was this university that paved the ideological way for the “final solution of the Jewish question”.

But certainly, the adaptation, as well as the unresisting acceptance, on the part of the citizens of Tübingen in the time prior to 1933 provided the ideal environment for it. Already in the 1920s, radical anti-Semitism flourished at the university, and there were only very few Jews among the professors. After 1929, there were none at all. So the “Jewish question” did not even arise at all for the University of Tübingen, as “Tübingen had always known how to keep Jewish professors away without losing many words about it.”<sup>7</sup> Professors from Tübingen used the “Tübingen Society for Racial Hygiene” founded in 1924 to spread their ideas of a healthy, “racially pure” people. After the university was the first in Germany to proudly announce that it was now “free of Jews”, it established a new institute for the “Research of the Jewish Question” that was devoted to scientific combat against Judaism and anything Jewish in Germany. The local press praised the new figurehead frantically. The research of the scientists was able to prove at last, so they said, that “anti-Semitism is not a matter of mayhem, but rather of serious scientific insight”.<sup>8</sup> Eugenics and Racial Science had become the new leading sciences for the scientific legitimization of National Socialist ideology.<sup>9</sup>

After 1938, Tübingen evolved into a center of both theoretical and practical racial research. The history of the Anatomical Institute in Tübingen after 1933 can serve as an example of how unreservedly some members of the university accepted the criminal structures of the Nazi state. The city cemetery has one section, simply called “Burial Ground X”. Here the remains of the corpses that were used in the Anatomical Institute of Tübingen for research and training purposes for future medical doctors were buried. For this purpose, they used the victims of the Nazi regime – executed Jews, gypsies, Poles, Russians, as well as those who had died as an inhumane consequence of so-called medical experiments. There is no question the anatomists made use of the plentiful supply of corpses from execution sites, correction camps and prisoner-of-war camps. The university provided special career opportunities to



bio-scientists who offered themselves directly for the implementation of the Nazi ideology. One of these was the senior physician for the Psychiatric Clinic in Tübingen, Robert Ritter (1901–1951), a leading racial theoretician and head of the newly formed Institute for Racial Hygiene. The results of his research and surveys were supposed to provide medical proof for the idea of racial superiority, and were used as scientific arguments for the systematic murder of gypsies. The Race Theory developed in Tübingen attempted to provide the Nazi regime with definitions for the term “Jew” in order to make their annihilation more efficient. Hans Fleischhacker, assistant at the Institute for Racial Biology, examined the fingerprints of Jews in a ghetto for his qualification as a professor. In June 1943, Fleischhacker went to the concentration camp at Auschwitz to develop marks for racial selection there. In this extermination camp, the scientist selected Jews according to racial marks, and had them step forward during the morning roll call. He then took them to a separate barrack where he measured head, face and other prominent features. After he had sufficiently surveyed the 86 people, he sent them to the concentration camp of Natzweiler–Struthof, where they were murdered in several groups in a provisional gas chamber. Subsequently, the corpses were supposed to be taken to Strasbourg to be preserved and prepared for Fleischhacker’s scientific analysis. The fact that this did not happen is owed to the advancing Allied forces, who liberated Strasbourg before the necessary preparations were completed. After the war, Fleischhacker was put on trial and classified as a “conformist”. But he was directly involved in the murder of 86 people under the pretext of science. Because of his activities, thousands of Jews were deported, sterilized and murdered.

The University of Tübingen provided the ideological foundation for the Holocaust. It produced many, if not most, of the fanatical masterminds and most efficient mass murderers who stood in the first flight of the SS Sonderkommandos (death squads) and Reichssicherheitsdienst (security service) to participate in the

so-called final solution.<sup>10</sup> They are called the Tübingen Executors of the Final Solution. The vanguard of the murder of the Jews mainly came from a middle class background, or even the upper third of society. About 80% had graduated from university; about half of them even had a doctorate. So they were not common criminals, but they acted out of conviction to ultimately implement the Führer's racial ideology for the Third Reich. They became murderers for a doctrinal goal, and not for personal profit. The fact that the city's anti-Semitic "DNA" was so interwoven with the university is one important reason why so many of the mass murderers for the final solution came from Tübingen. Another reason is mentioned in a scientific research paper by Horst Junginger at the University of Tübingen: The mixture of anti-Semitic prejudices and a secularized image of God had led the Tübingen executors to their murderous disposition. Many of them came from a Christian background that was increasingly put aside in the face of theologically justified hatred of the Jews. Obviously, it was not sufficient in their eyes to proclaim judgment to the Jews. They felt called to personally execute this judgment with fire and sword.<sup>11</sup> I would like to pause briefly here and ask you to think about something. Should we not be shocked by the fact that a secularized image of God that is completely estranged from the Word of God, combined with anti-Semitic prejudices set on a theological foundation, led to such a murderous attitude that finally produced the Holocaust? Don't we realize the same deadly mixture at work even today? Is it not high time to return to the God of the Bible and do away with the false anti-Semitic attitudes legitimized by theology, and correct them?

Only a short time after Hitler came to power, two well-known theologians in Tübingen created quite a stir by their anti-Semitic publications. The Catholic Professor for Dogmatics, Karl Adam (1876–1966) was among the most renowned theologians in Germany. He declared, "To a large degree, the goals of Christianity and national socialist anti-Semitism are identical." The Protestant

New Testament theologian Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948) was one of the leading proponents of the final solution. In his essay “The Jewish Question”, he suggested excluding the Jews from German society and, if the racial segregation should prove unsuccessful, resorting to killing all the Jews as a last resource.<sup>12</sup> Kittel’s Translation of the New Testament, the *Novum Testamentum Graecae*, and the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament of which he was one of the editors, are still found in every pastor’s and theologian’s study today. Kittel’s assistant, Walter Grundmann (1906–1976) contributed 20 articles to the dictionary. Grundmann joined the NSDAP (Nazi Party) in Tübingen, and was one of the most radical advocates for the “German Christians” who chose the Wartburg of all places, which is otherwise known for Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible, to establish an institute to research and eradicate Jewish influence in the church. The institute’s location was supposed to confirm Martin Luther’s anti-Semitism, who had argued for the burning of synagogues, the destruction of prayer books and the Talmud, and the expulsion of the Jews.<sup>13</sup> Grundmann became head of the institute, and advanced to become one of the most well-known theologians among the “German Christians”. This harmless name disguised a neo-pagan movement working toward a Germanic faith, rejecting Christianity, and intending to replace it with pagan ceremonies, Nazi ideology and the glorification of Hitler. The institute developed the idea of an Aryan Jesus with whom the Nazis could identify.<sup>14</sup> For this purpose, he had to be completely carved out of his Jewish context. So Jesus became a mythical Teutonic savior, whose resurrection was supposed to demonstrate the Aryans’ final victory over the Jews. Grundmann had provided the religious legitimization for the annihilation of the Jews. His example helps us to make an extraordinary observation which is still valid today for any kind of totalitarianism: Even though they vary greatly in their form, they all share anti-Semitism as a common mark. When we see the Christian faith being purposely severed from its

historic Jewish context, we need to take a very good look and pay close attention to the goal behind that.

Exactly how many from Tübingen University found their way to the murderous death squads is impossible to prove today. The only thing that is certain is that it was an exceptionally large number. At this point, I would like to give you a few names of people who began their sinister “career” in Nazi Tübingen as examples, to give you a better understanding of this situation.

The founder of the “German Faith Movement” was the Tübingen orientalist and indologist Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962). Hauer, who came from a strict Pietist home, first became a missionary. In India, he came into close contact with Hinduism and Buddhism, which gave his life a completely new direction. From 1927 to 1945, he taught as a professor at Tübingen University. In June 1934, Hauer was personally initiated into the SS by Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, the real organizer of the Holocaust. He had excellent connections to both of them.<sup>15</sup> Hauer became head of the newly established Aryan Institute in 1935. He put his private secretary Paul Zapp<sup>16</sup> in touch with the Waffen SS and made him national executive director of the “German Faith Movement”. Paul Zapp is one of those mass murderers who were responsible for the mass execution of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Zapp headed the Sonderkommando (special commando) 11a in Einsatzgruppe D (special operations unit), whose trail of blood ran across Eastern Romania, the Southern Ukraine and right up to Russia.

Eugen Steimle was also from a very religious background. He was one of the Nazi activists among the students in Tübingen.<sup>17</sup> He was involved in the pogroms in Württemberg, and headed the Sonderkommando 7a of Einsatzgruppe B in 1941. In 1942, he took over the Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C in the Ukraine. He is responsible for the deaths of at least 500 Jews, for which he was sentenced to death on April 10, 1948. In 1951, however, the death

sentence was revoked, and he was released from prison in 1954. He died in Ravensburg in 1987. Politicians and clergy had protested his imprisonment. Up until 2003, his name was still found on a memorial plaque honoring returning war veterans that the city had installed at a central position on one of the supporting walls at the foot of the central church in Tübingen in 1951.

Martin Sandberger was from a well-known pastor's family in Württemberg, and besides numerous massacres, he was responsible for the pogroms in Kaunas, Lithuania. After the invasion of Russia, Sandberger took over the Sonderkommando 1a of Einsatzgruppe A. Along with another jurist from Tübingen, Walter Stahlecker, he was the main perpetrator for the genocide in the Baltic countries. Sandberger was sentenced to death in April 1948, but because of a long list of people who intervened on his behalf, ten years later he was released from prison.<sup>18</sup> After his release, he quickly established himself in society again and for decades lived an undisturbed life in Germany. Just before his death at the age of 98, a journalist tracked him down in an old people's home in Stuttgart. He was one of the last leading war criminals of the SS murder machinery. This encounter resulted in the following report in one of the leading German magazines:<sup>19</sup> Where had Sandberger been during the past five decades? Does he still see pictures from the days of war? The advance eastward in the rear of the Heeresgruppe Nord (Northern Army)? The years spent between the Baltic States and Russia? Himself in an assault boat on Lake Peipus, the Jews kneeling in front of recently dug pits? Sandberger closes his eyes, almost falling asleep any moment. "He was doing fine just now," says the woman who keeps him company this afternoon. A passing moment of weakness, most likely. "Just keep asking." Sandberger opens his eyes again. In a high-pitched voice and broad Swabian dialect he declares, "What I remember is absolutely insignificant." Historians describe... Sandberger as the spearhead of the genocide. "You were not just a cog in the works of an anonymous

extermination machinery, but you developed the concept, constructed and implemented the apparatus that made the murder of millions possible.” Sandberger was the last surviving leader of the Sonderkommandos in Himmler’s murder machinery. In the days of old, whether in Tallinn or Verona, he would appear as a demigod clad in the gray military cloth of the SS. During just the first year of Nazi rule, there were a total of 5,643 executions under his command on Estonian ground. At the peak of his power borrowed from the Führer, just a few strokes of Sandberger’s pen would be sufficient behind the lines of the Eastern front to have a “subject totally worthless to the national community” executed – in his own words.... Once in the Christian old people’s home in Stuttgart, however, the retired Sandberger claimed compassion for himself.... Unfortunately, Sandberger “remembers very little” of those years, during his first and only interview. His memory is more reliable talking about the time before and after the war. This is an excerpt from his last interview. Three months later, Sandberger was dead. He had never asked for forgiveness for his crimes, or lifted the veil of his silence.

Walter Stahlecker (1900–1942) had received his PhD in Tübingen, and then started a career with the police of Württemberg. His father was a Lutheran pastor. Stahlecker headed Einsatzgruppe A, which was responsible for the mass executions during the campaign in Poland and Russia. He has to be perceived as one of the greatest criminals in the Third Reich. His cold-blooded determination to kill makes him stand out among all the other violent criminals. His last preserved report adds the number of people killed under his orders to an unimaginable 240,410. Resistance fighters finally managed to assassinate him in 1942.

The Chief Mayor of Tübingen, Ernst Weinmann, was nick-named “executioner of Belgrade”. He was in office from 1939 to 1945. During the war, he spent the majority of his time in office as SS Sturmbannführer (SS rank within the Storm Troops, equivalent to Major) in Yugoslavia, where he was instrumental in abducting

Slovenes and deporting Jews. After the end of the war, he was sentenced to death in Yugoslavia for his crimes, and hanged. His brother Erwin Weinmann (1909-?) was born close to Tübingen, and already worked for the NSDAP while he was still at school. He qualified as a medical doctor in Tübingen, and worked as junior doctor at Tübingen Polyclinic. He found his way into politics and was recruited for the Sicherheitsdienst (intelligence arm of the SS). During the summer of 1942, he was made head of the Sonderkommando 4a and was responsible for mass executions in the Ukraine. As commander of the security police in Prague, he was said to have fallen during the battle for Prague. Even though he was pronounced dead, the rumors never stopped that he had managed to escape via the so-called “rat line” from Italy via Spain to Egypt. According to the research by the Association of Persecuted Jews, he was an active adviser to the police there for many years.<sup>20</sup>

Yet another mass murderer who had studied in Tübingen was Adolf Rapp (1908-?). In the political climate of Tübingen, he advanced to SS Sturmbannführer. Rapp was head of the Sonderkommando 7a of Einsatzgruppe B and with a special commando of 100 men, he was responsible for mass executions among Ukrainians and Russians. He disappeared after 1945 and was sentenced to life in 1965.

One of Rapp’s fellow students was Rudolf Bilfinger (1903–1998). After receiving his PhD in Tübingen, he worked as a lawyer before making his way via the Stuttgart police into the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (“SS subsidiary organization made up of 7 main departments including the intelligence & security forces and secret police forces for Germany and occupied territories; also oversaw the Einsatzgruppen”<sup>21</sup>). There he exercised high administrative powers and was personally involved in the implementation of the “final solution to the Jewish question”. Following the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, Bilfinger took part in several consultations to organize the Holocaust. Bilfinger was

sentenced to eight years in prison by a French military court, but very soon he was deported to Germany and subsequently released. Afterward, he was employed in civil service again; he died in Hechingen, a small town only about 15 miles away from Tübingen.<sup>22</sup>

Theodor Dannecker (1913–1945) was one of the organizers of the Holocaust, and he was among Eichmann's closest aides. He had grown up in the heart of Tübingen. A failure as a tradesman, he slowly emerged as an expert in "Jewish questions", and later organized the deportation of Jews from France, Bulgaria, Hungary and Italy to the extermination camps.<sup>23</sup>

According to conservative estimates, at least 600,000 Jews perished due to the racial hatred of the executors from Tübingen.

While writing these lines, I am filled with deep pain. But unless you understand why I am speaking about a cloud of darkness that covered us, I cannot tell you about our city. And also, this is the only way to help you realize the miracle of change that we have seen in our city in the course of the past few years.

*See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.  
(Isa. 60:2)*

When my wife and I moved to Tübingen 28 years ago, it was simply a pretty and quiet university town where we intended to study. At the same time, we knew for sure that the Lord had led us to this city. Our Baptist elders had sent us out with the laying on of hands, which could not be taken for granted. We started praying for our city with a few other couples, and we were stunned by the resistance we met.



This surely also had to do with the tedious working through of the city's Nazi past, which had only just begun in the early '80s. In my description of the individual perpetrators, I have mentioned again and again how quickly and easily they were able to escape prosecution and their just punishment. In Germany after the war, people were easily classified as perpetrators and conformists. Nonetheless, even convicted war criminals tended to receive so much backing from the highest political ranks that many times they were released prematurely from prison, re-socialized and even reintegrated into social life again. There were hardly any clear confessions or admissions of guilt. All who managed to be classified as conformists were rehabilitated. And so a heavy, dark curtain was drawn over the sin of the past.

The working through of the past and the denazification process at the university turned out to be a total disaster. Eighty-five percent of the professors who were either dismissed or suspended for an extended period of time ended up achieving their rehabilitation within the first ten years, and the majority returned to the university. I would like to add at this point that this occurrence was an all-German fiasco for the universities. At any rate, it is hardly surprising that the dark chapter of Tübingen's Nazi past remained untouched. For almost 30 years, all had remained silent, or even lied. The generation who had become guilty had largely managed to cover up all shameful, or even criminal, occurrences. Also in this respect, we can see the close connection between city and university. After 1945, everything connected to the Nazi time was subjected to silence, repression and a disgraceful haggling over Jewish possessions misappropriated by the tax authorities.<sup>24</sup> Hans Gmelin was a former SA Standartenführer (equivalent to Colonel) and Nazi diplomat who had been involved in the deportation of 59,000 Jews in Slovakia as mayor, yet he won almost 55% of the votes in 1954, despite his past. He remained in office for many years and was even made an honorary citizen. Naturally this was

not exactly helpful for working through the city's Nazi past. Obviously, for the majority of the voters, his Nazi past was more of a recommendation than a reproach. Gmelin remained in office for 20 years, and by virtue of his office, decisively formed the way that the past was dealt with. In Tübingen he became a key figure of repression and political silence.

It was only three years after my wife and I came to Tübingen in 1982 that a memorial plaque was set up "In Memory of the Persecution and Murder of Jewish Fellow Citizens". For decades, only the remains of an old garden fence had commemorated the former synagogue. It was only in 2000 that a memorial was established at the site of the synagogue to honor the Jews from Tübingen as a "Place Against Forgetting".<sup>25</sup>

While strolling through Tübingen one day, we came across a memorial plaque in the city center commemorating the returning war veterans of WWII. Among those honored, as I mentioned previously, were two lawfully convicted war criminals who had been responsible for the deportation and death of thousands of Jews. Only 21 years later, in 2003, was this memorial plaque removed.<sup>26</sup>

Right next to the Theological Institute in Tübingen is the city cemetery. Philosophers, theologians and political figures are buried there. As a student, this place seemed ideal to take a walk. There I came across the "Burial Ground X", the place where remains from the Anatomical Institute were buried and which had sunk into oblivion after 1945. The city's dealings with the burial ground exemplify the length of time that Tübingen lived under the veil of silence, before it finally accepted the truth about the Nazi crimes as its own history. Up until 1987, medical students were still trained with preparations taken from victims of the Nazis. Only after increasing international pressure on the university leadership were the human remains of the victims of the Nazi regime removed from the university and buried in the city

cemetery in 1990. The following week, the newly set up memorial plaques on Burial Ground X were devastated by right-wing radicals, and covered with graffiti and swastika.

In the mid-'60s, critical students at the university sparked a process of working through its past that was slowly advanced through a series of lectures, essays and books. With the recent publication of a detailed, 1,200 page anthology<sup>27</sup> by a team of scientists from Tübingen University on "Tübingen University During National Socialism" the university has comprehensively worked through its history. This publication is a visible sign of the many changes that have taken place. At last, the Nazi filth nobody wanted to look at, and the filthy ones nobody wanted to mention are finally called by name. The veil of silence has been torn.

When we started praying for the city, it was different. The resistance was like an impenetrable wall of darkness. We prayed much – very much. There were regular nights of prayer, and repeated prayer chains of 40 days. We would get up very early in the morning to stand in the gap for our city, almost every day of the week. We would walk through the entire city praying, over and over again – but nothing changed. When we would proclaim the gospel on the market square, people would just walk by scornfully, or laughing. Others disturbed the meeting through deafening noise or by pouring out water over us. Allow me to fast-forward a few years. By then we had seen the first fruits of our labors, and had started a church in Tübingen in the early '90s. We never relented in our prayers, but still the resistance did not decrease. We had a shop for evangelism in the city center which was smeared with excrement; absolute strangers would approach us in the city and curse us. After somebody stole our prayer notes, we found them published in the daily paper. We were struggling against a veil of darkness, and we had no key on how to break it open. In the meantime, we saw our ministry grow and spread all over Germany and other nations. But what about our own city? Why did we not have authority over the power structures of darkness? The veil of

silence weighed heavily on us like a stifling blanket. Why did we not have the authority to break this veil of darkness over us? We were desperate, until the Lord took us to a point when we had to break the veil of silence in our own lives first. But before I tell you more about this, we should think about the question of where such a veil of silence comes from, and how it is produced.

There is no darkness that cannot be overcome by the power of God. My city is a living testimony to this. So if we, with our history, can experience something like this, then the same can happen in any other place in the world! In the next few chapters of this book, we will take a closer look at how this happened for us and what is the spiritual dimension behind it.