

The Holocaust, Religion, and the Politics of Collective Memory – Beyond Sociology. Ronald J. Berger. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK), 2012. Pp. 281. NP.

This book joins an impressive body of work about the Holocaust by Professor Ronald Berger, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater. It is an overview and analysis of the existing scholarship on the subject, principally in History and Sociology. One of Berger's aims is "to provide a disciplinary-informed selection and interpretation of the extant literature" (3); another is to write a "book for my students, and to the students of others, who deserve to learn more about this most haunting event in human history" (9). He achieved those goals in exemplary fashion.

The book is not, in the main, a report of findings based on fresh research; it is a straightforward, thoughtful, accurate and clear text. The descriptive material that makes up much or most of it is derived from seminal secondary sources on the genocidal practices of the Third Reich and 19th and early 20th century German history and European, especially German, anti-Semitism. The second and third chapters, "Why the Jews?" and "The Rise of Nazism and the Evolution of Anti-Jewish Policy," reflect solid scholarship. These chapters are presented in readily accessible terms and are as comprehensive as possible in a work of modest length. If this aspect of the book is fairly standard fare in the Holocaust literature, other parts provide less frequently found material and analytic insights. These include a short chapter on "Jewish Responses to the Holocaust" (chapter 5), and more extensive treatments of "Bystanders and Third-Party Rescuers" (chapter 6); "European and Collective Memories: Germany and Poland" (chapter 7); and "Jewish Collective Memories: Israel and the United States" (chapter 8).

A section on Polish behavior and attitudes during and after the German occupation, presented at the end of chapter 7, allows Berger to show that there was both widespread anti-Semitism and willing, sometimes enthusiastic, "volunteerism" by Poles, not only in the large-scale expropriation of Jews but sometimes also in their murder. This short addition to the (understandably) largely German focus is welcome; it enriches the story by pointing up the presence of not only anti-Semitic sentiments but also genocidal acts against Jews – including Holocaust survivors returning "home" – beyond the geographic boundaries of Germany and the temporal boundaries of World War II. While Berger identifies often virulent anti-Semitism elsewhere in Europe and discusses the anti-Semitic sentiments that led the governments of the United States and other countries to turn away Jews seeking refuge from the Third Reich, he also notes the collective, as well as individual, efforts in many countries – if not always their governments – to provide shelter. These themes are discussed with penetrating and nuanced analysis, especially in chapter 6. It is in that chapter that the most clear applications of social

theory and substantive consideration of the relationships of religious institutions and doctrines to the Holocaust are to be found.

Three caveats should be borne in mind when approaching this book. The first is straightforward and does not imply criticism: as noted, one of the author's principal aims was to write a (text)book for (presumably undergraduate) students. That is what it is: it does not pretend to present findings from original research or to make a path-breaking theoretical contribution. The second and third caveats follow from questions raised in the mind of this reader about "truth in packaging."

"Sociology" is featured in the title, with the qualifier "beyond" that can be construed in several, even contradictory, ways. It is also the subject of the first chapter, "Sociology and the Holocaust," where a section is introduced "as a preface to our sociological inquiry" (9). Yet, although the names of some of the best known social theorists of the 19th and early 20th centuries and the most prominent ideas associated with them appear, the hallmark theories – social class and capitalism from Marx, bureaucracy from Max Weber, social solidarity from Emile Durkheim – receive very thin treatment indeed. The one Sociology-related theme that stands out is a recurring complaint that sociologists, unlike practitioners of other disciplines, have largely ignored the Holocaust. For that reason, the book is "aimed at remedying the marginalization of the Holocaust in the discipline to which I have devoted the whole of my professional life" (9; also see 231-232). Yet it is replete with references to research and publications on the Holocaust by many sociologists. What is missing, especially since the book is intended for students, is some sort of stock-taking. To what does Sociology as a discipline, or the work of sociologists, add up in the subject-area? What more, or what else, could Sociology or sociologists do in the future? Nor, for that matter, does Berger make a clear case that any single discipline, including Sociology, has a special mission in the study of the Holocaust.

Finally, there is a "truth in packaging" problem of a different sort. Neither in the Preface nor elsewhere does Berger indicate that several chapters – most particularly, chapters 1 and 6 – substantially repeat entire paragraphs and pages, often word-for-word, comma-for-comma, from his earlier book, *Fathoming the Holocaust: A Social Problems Approach* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 2002). While self-plagiarism is not a crime or necessarily a serious ethical lapse, it is professionally correct to note such duplication, especially when it is so extensive.

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