

INTRODUCTION

The German Problem of Vergangenheitsbewältigung

A national catastrophe, a physical and psychic collapse
without parallel.¹

THOMAS MANN, 1945

Here then is a whole people in a state of spiritual ruin such as
has never been known, perhaps, in the history of the world.²

VICTOR GOLLANCZ, 1946

I

This book develops the biblical idea of “turning” (*tshuvah* in Hebrew) into a conceptual framework to analyze a particular area of contemporary German history, often loosely referred to as “coming to terms with the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German, or VgB for short). It examines a selection of German responses to the

1. Thomas Mann, “Germany and the Germans,” in *Thomas Mann’s Addresses Delivered at the Library of Congress, 1942–1949* (Rockville, MD: Wildside Press, 2008), 64. See the use of this speech by Jean Améry to encourage the German youth in **P14**.

2. Victor Gollancz, *Our Threatened Values* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), 84.

Nazi past, their interaction with the victims' responses, such as those of Jewish individuals,³ and their correspondence with biblical "repentance." In demonstrating the victims' influence on German responses, I argue that the latter can be better analyzed and understood as a "model for coping with the past" in a relational rather than national paradigm. By establishing the conformity between such responses and the idea of *Umkehr/Buße tun*, as *tshuvah* is invariably translated into German,⁴ the book asserts that the religious texts from the "Old Testament" encapsulating this idea are viable intellectual resources for dialogues among victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and their later generations in the discussion of guilt and responsibility, justice and reparation, remembrance and reconciliation. It thus is perhaps one of the greatest ironies of the twentieth century, in which Nazi Germany had sought to eliminate each and every single Jew within its reach, that postwar Germans have relied on the Jewish device of repentance as a feasible way out of their unparalleled "national catastrophe" (Mann), their unprecedented "spiritual ruin" (Gollancz).

The controversial nature of the research materials in question necessitates a further clarification of the aims and limits of this study before we venture into the relevant literature, methodology, and structure of the book. First and foremost, this is neither

3. It does not belong to the scope of this study to delve into what constitutes "Jewishness." When a certain idea is labeled or a certain personality is referred to as "Jewish" in this book, it is meant only to convey the fact that it is or can be *perceived* as Jewish (or to have perceived Jewish familial roots)—whether the basis of such perception is valid or not belongs to another inquiry. I would like to thank Sander Gilman for pointing me to this qualification. Nevertheless, given the overlapping meanings (i.e., ethnic, religious, cultural, etc.) of the term, and the Nazi perversion of it, a less-than-precise use of the word "Jewish" is bound to be problematic. My starting point for using it is the identity-legitimacy of the victim's claim arising from Nazi German crimes, and my intention is to give credit (when extraordinary expressions of "turning" are recorded, for instance) where credit is due, rather than arriving at the bizarre situation where somebody was persecuted as a "Jew," and then subsequently honored as a "Christian."

4. In general, the *Einheitsübersetzung* (1980) tends to use *Umkehr* (*umkehren*) throughout the Bible, whereas the *Lutherbibel* (1984) shifts between it and *Buße* (*tun*) in the New Testament and *Bekehrung* (*bekehren*) in the "Old Testament." Compare Jeremiah 31:19, 2 Kings 17:13, and Matthew 3:2.

affirmation nor negation of *moral realities* in postwar Germany; whether the responses analyzed bespeak *real* repentance or not exceeds the analytical purview of the researcher. Rather, this book recognizes its judgmental limits and bases its conclusions solely and consciously on what is “on the surface”: forms of expression and ways of argumentation that are—themselves belonging to observable realities nonetheless—open to interpretation by all.⁵ Likewise, in documenting Jewish efforts of “turning” in correspondence with the biblical idea of “assisted” repentance (i.e., God helping the sinner repent, who is unable to transform himself if left alone), there is no intention—explicit or implicit—to suggest that Jewish victims were themselves guilty, hence “in need” of repentance vis-à-vis the Germans; “co-repentance” in this sense is categorically rejected by the author. Rather, when “mutual-turning” is spoken of in this study, it is meant to describe the process in which the victims, who did not need “turning,” turned nonetheless in aid of the turning of the wrongdoers, who needed it. It is to the explication of the multiple senses of turning (both biblical and historical) that this research dedicates itself. Neither a German nor a Jew, I do not see it as my “duty” to defend one or the other in their responses to the Shoah, or to “idealize” particular individuals, significant as their turning contributions might be. If there is something to defend in this book, it is the biblical notion of repentance, which is its core and organizing principle, as a viable blueprint for international reconciliation.

5. In this sense, my approach differs from that of Klaus Briegleb, who looks at the postwar German literary scene (Gruppe 47 in particular) and finds “contempt and taboo” when it comes to the encounter with Jews and Judaism after the Shoah. Making judgment on whether or how much a particular individual, group, or epoch has come to terms with the past is far from what this book is about. The existence of observable expression—rather than the lack of expected expression—is also important for my investigation, without which there is no correspondence to prove. See Klaus Briegleb, *Mißachtung und Tabu: Eine Streitschrift zur Frage: ‘Wie antisemitisch war die Gruppe 47?’* (Berlin/Vienna: Philo, 2003).

II

While there is no lack of in-depth studies on German VgB, most of which were published in the last two decades or so,⁶ relatively little has been done to explore the religious roots of this phenomenon, and nothing, so far as I could gather in the English and German languages, on the direct link between it and biblical repentance.⁷ Among the most prolific scholars on the phenomenon are Norbert Frei, Peter Reichel, and Constantin Goshler, whose works lay the basis for subsequent research on VgB in its political, juridical, and institutional dimensions, as well as with respect to reparation and artistic representation.⁸ There are also specific studies on key “episodes” or policy areas of coming to terms with the past, such as the Historikerstreit, in which the question and meaning of the singularity of the Holocaust were at stake.⁹ The phenomenon

6. There are also VgB-dedicated monographs published before the 1990s, for example, Armin Mohler's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Von der Läuterung zur Manipulation* (Stuttgart-Degerloch: Seewald, 1968); and *Der Nasenring: Im Dickicht der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Essen: Heitz & Höffkes, 1989). These, however, are in fact polemics *against* rather than factual analyses of VgB.

7. Though Konrad Jarausch ostensibly uses “repentance/turning” as the title for his narrative of German “transformations,” an idea he borrowed from Gustav Radbruch's “Umkehr zur Humanität,” the religious contents of the concept are not explored, and hence no attempt is made to connect these to postwar “transformations.” See Konrad Jarausch, *Die Umkehr: Deutsche Wandlungen 1945–1995* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004); Gustav Radbruch, “Die Erneuerung des Rechts,” in *Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Arthur Kaufmann (Heidelberg: C. F. Müller Juristischer Verlag, 1990), 112. Likewise, *Umkehr* also appears throughout Werner Wertgen's monograph on VgB, but it is not employed as the overarching analytical and organizational concept. See Werner Wertgen, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Interpretation und Verantwortung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001).

8. Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2003); Constantin Goshler, *Schuld und Schulden: Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005); Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001); Reichel, *Erfundene Erinnerung: Weltkrieg und Judenmord in Film und Theater* (Munich: Hanser, 2004).

9. Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Lily Gardner

has attracted so much scholarly attention that it can already boast of having its own “dictionaries” and “lexicons.”¹⁰ Added to these are numerous comparative studies addressing the issues of disparity and transference in the intra-German, European, and interregional contexts.¹¹

In the existing works where religion takes center stage, focus tends to be restricted to how the German churches have or have not dealt with the Nazi legacy—or more precisely, the question of Christian guilt in the Nazi era—while at times offering “theological reflection” as a means of coming to terms with this past.¹² In other words, these works present VgB in the domain of theology and religion as an institution, rather than analyzing the wider history of VgB through theological concepts. Aleida Assmann’s earlier intervention in tracing certain catchwords in VgB discourse to their biblical roots proves a rarity in the literature.¹³ Yet even she would later agree with Ulrike Jureit—who criticizes the religious intrusion into the “secular system” of coming to terms with the past¹⁴—that

Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

10. Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007); Thorsten Eitz and Georg Stötzel, *Wörterbuch der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’: Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, vols. 1–2 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2007 and 2009).

11. See, among others, Annette Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland: Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949–1969 oder: Eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002); Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds., *Erinnerungskulturen: Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2004); and Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: Norton, 2000).

12. Lucia Scherzberg, ed., *Theologie und Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme im interdisziplinären Vergleich* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005); and Matthew Hockenos, *A Church Divided: German Protestants Confront the Nazi Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

13. Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999), 54, 59–60, 80–81.

14. Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider, *Gefühlte Opfer: Illusionen der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2010), 42.

religious concepts, having no reference in the “secular-speaking area,” have no place in the vocabulary of remembrance culture (*Erinnerungskultur*).¹⁵

Yet, as we shall see later and throughout the historical chapters in part 2 of this book, the religious vocabulary of sin and guilt, of atonement and repentance, has accompanied VgB as a historical process¹⁶ from the very beginning. It is therefore questionable as a research practice and historiographical principle that certain materials and expressions are excluded at the outset from the subject matter simply because they don’t conform to a certain view of secularity and its relationship with the phenomenon.¹⁷ As Assmann herself concluded early on, “The entire concept of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) through repentance (*Buße*) is only thinkable on the ground of a guilt culture (*Schuldkultur*).”¹⁸ It is argued here that the concept of repentance from the Hebrew Bible has indeed had a significant influence on the German process of facing the Nazi past. The historical records show that the notions of “turning” are

15. Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2013), 116. The point on which she disagrees with Jureit, though, is the latter’s conflation of victim-identification and victim-orientation, an objection also raised by Werner Konitzer, “Opferorientierung und Opferidentifizierung: Überlegungen zu einer begrifflichen Unterscheidung,” in *Das Unbehagen an der Erinnerung: Wandlungsprozesse im Gedenken an den Holocaust*, ed. Ulrike Jureit, Christian Schneider, and Margrit Fröhlich (Frankfurt a. M.: Brandes & Apsel, 2012).

16. As it is a heavily contested coinage, there have been no doubt various attempts at defining and periodizing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by its proponents and opponents alike. On the conceptual history of the term, see Helmut König, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Wöll, “Einleitung,” in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut König, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Wöll (Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998). On the different periodization models, see note 60 below.

17. One could only imagine the loss in research findings if, for example, the South African experience of coming to terms with the past were to be studied within exclusively secular frameworks, and theological inputs in the process itself were to be left out of consideration. On the comparability and utility of such experiences, see the conclusion in this book. On the theologically informed approach to the study of coming to terms with the past, see John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

18. Assmann and Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit*, 91.

spiritual resources at the disposal of the victims and their descendants, who used them to help the perpetrators and their later generations arrive at insights that were otherwise inaccessible to them. This book seeks to acknowledge this extraordinary and indispensable assistance in understanding what it means “to turn,” and the corresponding willingness and openness to receive that assistance.

An early German volunteer at Aktion Sühnezeichen, an initiative based on the idea of “atonement” (*Sühne*),¹⁹ has documented how she came to know the Jewish meaning of “mercy” from her Hebrew teacher: “Jehuda explained to us that the word ‘mercy’ does not fully render the meaning of ‘chessed.’ Mercy is something that comes from God to us while we remain passive receivers. ‘Chessed’ means much more; it means ‘God’s solidarity’ with us. God stands by us. ‘One must not only receive chessed, but *also do it*,’ said Jehuda. ‘Only then will we know what it means.’”²⁰ Another time she was “taught” in Israel by a “Chaverim” from America about what “repentance” means: “‘You know what,’ Mats said, ‘you can’t run around in chains forever, just because your fathers are guilty. . . . When a person realizes his guilt, the obvious thing for him to do is to learn and to *repent* (*umkehren*) and to *better himself* (*sich bessern*). . . . The first thing we wish from you Germans is not that you come here and speak about ‘atonement’ or ‘sign of atonement,’ but that Germany becomes another Germany because it has learned from the past. Then, what was hurtful to us will also become less hurtful.’”²¹

Needless to say, such views do not “represent” Jewish thinking in any quantitative sense. Yet they do touch upon, as I shall argue in this book, some of the fundamental tenets of biblical repentance: namely, the role of mercy in repentance, the sin of the fathers, and the possibility of renewal. Without the intellectual infrastructure, the “cultural ground” (Assmann) furnished by these ancient

19. See P5.

20. Christel Eckern, *Die Straße nach Jerusalem: Ein Mitglied der ‘Aktion Sühnezeichen’ berichtet über Leben und Arbeit in Israel* (Essen: Ludgerus-Verlag Hubert Wingen, 1962), 18 (emphasis added).

21. *Ibid.*, 111 (emphasis added).

notions from the Bible, which at times of grave moral crises can be the only remaining recourse to argumentative legitimacy, the key questions of how a nation can come to terms with its past risk become intractable, or merely matters of personal taste. Can the past be “mastered” (*bewältigt werden*)? Can something be “made good again” (*wiedergutmacht*) through reparation? If the names are logically false, can one still affirm their referents, or must these be rejected as based on “illusions”? With what “promise” or hope can those Germans engaging in VgB substantiate their claim that their words and deeds would contribute to their renewal as a people and to their reconciliation with their victims? Is it possible at all “after Auschwitz”? Without some form of preexisting “frames of meaning,”²² shared by both the victims and the perpetrators (at least historical-culturally, not necessarily religious-ideologically, as was manifest in Nazi “Christian” theology),²³ how can one answer these questions with a reasonable degree of satisfaction—that is, in a way that is acceptable to those who live within these frames?

III

In the immediate period around the time of military defeat in 1945, some German intellectuals both inside and outside the country were engaged in reflection on what was in store for their nation after Nazism. Ubiquitous in this reflection was the assessment that the existential crisis (the “German question/problem”) begotten by the twelve preceding years was of such a catastrophic proportion that only through a fundamental “returning”—whether it be to Germany’s religious roots, humanistic tradition, or Western democratic civilization—could postwar Germany have any hope of survival.

22. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 28.

23. See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Alfred Weber, in his *Abschied von der bisherigen Geschichte* (Farewell to Previous History),²⁴ written before the war ended and published in Hamburg in 1946, called what was then still unfolding a “catastrophic historical collapse,” which in effect would seal the end of the history that had been led by European states up until then.²⁵ “The first great and fundamental sin (*Sünde*), which the West (*Abendland*) has committed against itself,” for which it had “to pay a high price,” was having erected a state system in which state behavior is placed “outside general morals,” “outside any effective idealistic supervision of actions,” as in the so-called moral-free state actions.²⁶ Weber then proceeded to explore the “dogmatizing” tendencies in European history, culminating in the “nihilism” predominant in the epoch, which was allegedly the “deep cause” of the catastrophe. For him—the younger brother of Max Weber—the way forward was “to organize Europe and especially its German center on a free democratic basis that represents human dignity and humanity.”²⁷ The German people must engage in self-education for self-renewal and self-transformation, by returning to the “undogmatic European prototypes (*Vorgestalten*).”²⁸ “That is what we need. Here lies our future.”²⁹

Carl-Hermann Mueller-Graaf (a.k.a. Constantin Silens) concurred with Weber that the age in which “Europe was the head and the lord of the world” was coming to end.³⁰ But in his 1946 book, *Irrweg und Umkehr* (Misguided Path and Repentance), Silens focused on what he called the “German problem” instead of “Europeanizing” it.³¹ For him, who professed to belong to “that Christian and conservative Germany,” “the great German guilt (*deutsche Schuld*), the guilt of many decades, is the turning away

24. Alfred Weber, *Abschied von der bisherigen Geschichte: Überwindung des Nihilismus?* (Hamburg: Claaßen und Goverts Verlag, 1946).

25. *Ibid.*, 12.

26. *Ibid.*, 20.

27. *Ibid.*, 251.

28. *Ibid.*, 251–53.

29. *Ibid.*, 253.

30. Constantin Silens, *Irrweg und Umkehr* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1946), 245.

31. *Ibid.*, 10.

(*Abwendung*) from the Christianness of the West (*Christlichkeit des Abendlandes*),” turning instead to Darwin, Nietzsche, and Spengler, the “true misleaders.”³² As such, the Germans, who “are guilty of our fate,” must do repentance, “not repentance (*Buße*) in the sense of worldly revenge. . . [but] repentance in the great sense of Christianity, which means realization (*Erkenntnis*) and confession (*Bekennntnis*) of the wrong done,” “repentance as regretful (*reutig*) realization of one’s own evil.”³³ “They must understand that they need a truthful response before God and for their own sake, so that they break a better path to their children’s future, better than the one that has led them to today’s misery.”³⁴ Without the spiritual outlook derived from the “spirit of Christian regard for the neighbor,” the author—an official in trade and economic affairs both during and after the Nazi years³⁵—was convinced that “there can be no German future.”³⁶

Silens, a Lutheran, could easily find a cohort in other German Christians of his time, such as Johannes Hessen, a Catholic theologian. Hessen held a series of public lectures in the winter semester of 1945–46 at the University of Cologne, where he taught philosophy, musing about “reconstruction” (*Wiederaufbau*) of post-war Germany in different spheres, from science to law to religion. He found no more fitting description of the destruction he witnessed in the Germany of 1945 than the first verse from the book of Lamentations, traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah: “Wandering through the ruins of our great cities, one wants to join in the lament of the prophet: ‘How forlorn the city lies, once full of folks.’”³⁷ Yet, Hessen immediately added, “worse than the material is the intellectual devastation (*geistige Verwüstung*) of Germany. . . . National Socialism has proved to be . . . an assassination

32. Ibid., 253.

33. Ibid., 248–49.

34. Ibid.

35. See Matthias Pape, “Mueller-Graaf, Carl-Hermann,” *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 18 (1997): 497–98.

36. Silens, *Irrweg und Umkehr*, 10.

37. Johannes Hessen, *Der geistige Wiederaufbau Deutschlands: Reden über die Erneuerung des deutschen Geisteslebens* (Stuttgart: August Schröder Verlag, 1946), 10.

of all intellectual culture.”³⁸ Like Silens, he advocated the avowal of German guilt, of a “common guilt” (*Gemeinschuld*), in order to work together toward the “intellectual-ethical rebirth of our people”: “In the final analysis, we have all become guilty. . . . There is not only guilt of the individual, there is also guilt of the community (*Schuld der Gemeinschaft*). Since we belong to the people, whose leadership has unleashed this war and with it brought unspeakable suffering and misery to humanity, each of us has after all become guilty before humanity and before God.”³⁹ He presented Nazism (especially Alfred Rosenberg’s racial theory) as an antithesis to Christianity and proposed “reconstruction in the religious sphere” following the prophetic path of individual Christians like Martin Niemöller and Clemens August Graf von Galen.⁴⁰

Beyond the intellectual-ethical “reconstruction,” a distinguished economist of his time, Wilhelm Röpke, proposed “revolutions” in the political and socioeconomic spheres. Though also for him, these revolutions were dependent on the “moral revolution, just as the German question is always in essence an intellectual-moral one.”⁴¹ The threefold revolution was deemed a necessary undertaking after the “physical, political, and moral suicide (*Selbstmord*)” of the Germans, “a tragedy without parallel in history, a real tragedy, in which guilt and fate are enchained to one another.”⁴² Now that the Germans had become a pariah Volk, “odium generis humani,” “one of the most problematic, most complicated, and most hated peoples,” “one of the worst wellsprings of infection (*Ansteckungsherd*),”⁴³ “it is the hour of ‘regret (*Reue*) and rebirth (*Wiedergeburt*),’ of which the German philosopher Max Scheler had spoken after the First World War.”⁴⁴ The German people as a

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 103–4.

40. Ibid., 19, 25, 72.

41. Wilhelm Röpke, *Die deutsche Frage* (Erlenbach-Zurich: Eugen Rentsch, 1945), 222.

42. Ibid., 9.

43. Ibid., 10–13.

44. Ibid., 222. See Max Scheler’s essay, “Reue und Wiedergeburt,” in *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, vol. 1, *Religiöse Erneuerung* (Leipzig: Der Neue Geist, 1921), 5–58.

whole, said Röpke, “will not commit suicide, but repent (*umkehren*), if he is shown the way back.”⁴⁵ The professor of economics, who had been “retired” in 1933 for being a Nazi opponent, pleaded with his Swiss readers to “nurture the delightful first signs of repentance (*Umkehr*) of German intellectuals,” so that one might eventually really speak of “Germany’s rebirth.”⁴⁶

Without going any further into the early primary German responses to the “catastrophe” of the long decade of Nazi Germany, one can already see from the brief survey above the prolific use of the theologically charged terms “sin,” “guilt,” and “repentance” to perceive, analyze, and to propose solutions to the “German problem.”⁴⁷ Though one might disagree with their diagnoses—for instance, would an unqualified returning to Christianity be a sufficient “German repentance” when the German churches themselves were by and large compromised?⁴⁸ Would a mere returning to the democratic West be a satisfactory answer to the millions of victims of Nazism, many of whom were from or still in the then undemocratic East?⁴⁹ On the other hand, European Jewish intellectuals were also engaging in reflection on whether and how “Jewish remnants” should help Germans attain the “moral renewal” they desperately needed, from remaining in postwar Germany to exercise justice (Eugen Kogon) to leaving for Palestine to establish a model civilized state (Hans Klee).⁵⁰ Irrespective of the actual validity of these, their act of employing biblical concepts to communicate with one another is a historical fact and, insofar as it is continual, a social phenomenon that is itself a legitimate object

45. Röpke, *Deutsche Frage*, 224.

46. *Ibid.*, 225.

47. There is certainly much to explore between biblical notions and German thought, above and beyond the contemporary problem of coming to terms with the past. See, for example, Daniel Purdy, *On the Ruins of Babel: Architectural Metaphor in German Thought*, Signale (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2011).

48. See more on this problem in P2.

49. See P1 and P3.

50. See P10.

of phenomenological investigation.⁵¹ The results will show, *inter alia*, that the broader discourses went actually much further than just (re)turning to Christianity and democracy: whereas an aspect of Nazism was to cut Christianity from its Jewish roots, postwar Christian reflection in Germany was characterized by its returning to this foundation through using scriptures from the “Old Testament” in VgB sermons, and opening itself to Talmudic sources and Jewish voices in general.⁵² Postwar political reform also went way beyond building democratic structure and culture to cultivating individual concern for the suffering of the others, based on the biblical idea of the “new heart” of vulnerability.⁵³

IV

Without some substantial basis for evaluating the discourse on “(re)turning,” it would seem that all proposals have equal validity, which certainly is not the case.⁵⁴ Yet, “turning” in the Bible is not an *empty* concept: not all turnings or returnings are repentant turnings.⁵⁵ This book begins therefore with an exploration of the idea

51. Husserl points us to the phenomena of subjects and intersubjectivity—not as merely psychological-natural objects, but in relation to the *Lebenswelt*, that pre-given, preexisting “ground” on which potentialities and possibilities in theory and praxis stand—as a new field of science toward which philosophy should strive, as phenomenology. My work can be considered as phenomenological investigation insofar as it looks at and seeks to describe that “pregiven, preexisting ground,” that source of “selbstverständliche Evidenz” (what I call intellectual infrastructure), on which Germans and Jews could think, talk, act, and judge about how to deal with the aftermath of the Shoah. In this sense, this book presupposes that the biblical concept of repentance is a constituent part of that *Lebenswelt* in which both perpetrators and victims find themselves.

52. This of course does not mean that deep-seated anti-Judaic notions have disappeared overnight. See, for example, the pitfalls of the earlier German Christian confessions in P14.

53. See R6.

54. See, for example, the maneuvers of shoveling punishment of German guilt onto the few Nazis and positioning Germany as the victim of Hitler in Röpke, *Deutsche Frage*, 240; and Silens, *Irrweg und Umkehr*, 231–32.

55. See R6.

of “turning” in the Bible. The purpose is not to produce new theological knowledge, but to outline the main features of this biblical concept that are pertinent to *collective* repentance.⁵⁶ The present book proceeds from the principles guiding “turning” between God and the individual sinner, and moves on to those concerning specifically interhuman, collective relationships. Modern German translations of the Bible (Einheitsübersetzung and Lutherbibel, etc.) are used—not for technical but anthropological reasons⁵⁷—together with traditional Jewish exegeses (such as those by Moses Maimonides and Rabbeinu Yonah) and inputs from those contemporary Jewish thinkers (such as Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Franz Rosenzweig) who have attained referential status in the German-Jewish cultural world. The linchpin of this biblical investigation is the *Bußpsalmen*, or the Psalms of Repentance: a selection of seven Psalms that are traditionally used by Christians for the expression and education of repentance, with the fourth *Bußpsalm*, Psalm 51, recognized by Jewish sources as *the* Psalm of Repentance.⁵⁸ The first part of this book presents fourteen “potencies” with regard to biblical repentance—divided into two chapters, one on divine-human and the other on interhuman

56. This method is modeled after John Paul Lederach’s approach in his *Building Peace*. Lederach observes how Psalm 85:11 was employed by Nicaraguan conciliators in their village meetings mediating between the Sandinista and the Yatama, and draws a theoretical framework out of this text to analyze the tensions among “truth, mercy, peace and justice” in collective reconciliation. It is Lederach who maintains that sociocultural resources (such as shared religious texts) are of paramount importance for sustaining reconciliation (93–97).

57. Consequently, unlike the usual practice of contemporary biblical research, focus is placed on what *is* being translated into German as such, rather than which is the *most accurate* translation according to the source texts in their original languages. Lederach likewise also depended on the actual Spanish translation (Reina Valera) used by the reconciliation workers he was observing, hence the unusual English translation of the verse based on the Spanish words “la verdad, la misericordia, la justicia, y la paz” he had heard. John Paul Lederach, pers. comm., 30 Aug. 2010.

58. See, for example, Rabbeinu Yonah, *The Gates of Repentance*, trans. and comm. Yaakov Feldman (Northvale, NJ/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1999), 38, 49, 70.

repentance—which together form a system of affirmations, or “relational movements” (i.e., R1–R14):

- R1 The sinner is not sin
- R2 The twofold damage of sin
- R3 Mercy precedes repentance; repentance responds to mercy
- R4 Recognizing punishment as just
- R5 Confession as the only acceptable sacrifice
- R6 Repentance as inner death and rebirth
- R7 “Helping others repent” as the new task of the repentant
- R8 Repentant disagreement
- R9 Even God repents
- R10 Repentance’s representative minority
- R11 Justice between abused perpetrators and abusive “victims”
- R12 The sin of the fathers as cross-generational guilt
- R13 Remembrance for life as cross-generational responsibility
- R14 Reconciliation as turning to each other through turning to God

These will be employed in the second part of the book to analyze and categorize the historical data. Hence unlike Assmann, I do not begin with VgB “catchwords” and trace backward to their biblical origins, but start with biblical concepts and work forward to identify their equivalents in VgB discourses. In this way I seek to render more visible that intellectual infrastructure on which these discourses take place. In this regard, my approach also differs markedly from Stern’s, who has chosen to conduct his investigation of the German-Jewish relationship outside the “realm of special Jewish historiography” and to argue instead for the analytical strength of the “triangular relationship between Americans, Germans and Jews,”⁵⁹ I examine how a repentance-informed outlook of history with its

59. Frank Stern, *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany*, trans. William Templer (Oxford/New York/Seoul/Tokyo: Pergamon Press, 1992), xv, xx.

God-victim-perpetrator triad (R2) may have an impact on the relationship between Jews and Germans in the aftermath of the Shoah.

The historical part of the book (part 2), which is by far the more substantial part, consists of fourteen chapters (i.e., P1–P14), all of which are analyses of primary responses (by Germans and non-Germans, but chiefly in German) to the Nazi atrocities, especially the Shoah:

- P1 “People, not devils”
- P2 “Fascism was the great apostasy”
- P3 “The French must love the German spirit now entrusted to them”
- P4 “One cannot speak of injustice without raising the question of guilt”
- P5 “You won’t believe how thankful I am for what you have said”
- P6 “Courage to say no and still more courage to say yes”
- P7 “Raise our voice, both Jews and Germans”
- P8 “The appropriateness of each proposition depends upon who utters it”
- P9 “Hitler is in ourselves, too”
- P10 “I am Germany”
- P11 “Know before whom you will have to give an account”
- P12 “We take over the guilt of the fathers”
- P13 “Remember the evil, but do not forget the good”
- P14 “We are not authorized to forgive”

Each chapter seeks to demonstrate the correspondence between the set of responses documented and the particular feature of biblical repentance in the corresponding section in part 1 of the book. Since it belongs to the nature of biblical repentance that it is a never-ending, ever-renewing process (R6), I do not attempt, like some other historians of German VgB do, to offer a narrative with an artificial time frame, to determine the “turning points” in history and to characterize each time period.⁶⁰ Rather, in each chapter

60. See, for example, Norbert Frei’s four phases of “Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit” in his *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen*

of this discourse and historical analysis, concrete formulations and expressions of particular turning movements are presented, connected, and compared—at times also with countermovements in order to highlight the contrast—with priority given, when it is possible to trace, to pioneering manifestations in the early postwar period. (Hence the names of key pioneer-“turners,”⁶¹ such as Eugen Kogon and Alfred Grosser, to whom recognition is due, will appear and reappear in different historical chapters, simply for the reason that their formulations have “precedented” several aspects of repentance.) Despite this structural disregard of the time-narrative element, there is still a “natural” progression of time as the chapters progress, if only for the obvious reason that some questions and answers only arose when their social conditions came into being, such as those relating to generational guilt and responsibility (P12–P13) coming up when the “second generation” came of age in the 1960s.

This structuring of the book therefore allows for two ways of reading it: vertically and horizontally. One may begin with the chapters on biblical repentance to have a grasp of its overall spirit, and then proceed to the chapters on historical repentance to see the correspondence between the two; or alternatively, one may read each of the fourteen biblical-historical sections-chapters by pairs (e.g., R12 on biblical repentance concerning generational guilt,

(Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), 26–27; and Assmann’s three phases of “deutsche Erinnerungsgeschichte,” in *Geschichtsvergessenheit*, 143–45. According to these periodization schemes, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” is only one of the phases (running between the late 1950s to the late 1970s or early 1980s). The use of VgB here in this book deviates obviously from these frames; it is used namely as the name of that phenomenon that was manifest in these different “phases,” rather than being limited to one or some of them. Despite the differences in approaches and intentions, I think both Frei and Assmann would concede that it is the name “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” rather than “deutsche Erinnerungsgeschichte” or “Vergangenheitsbewahrung,” “Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit” or “deutsche Lernprozesse” (or Adorno’s “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung,” for that matter), that has, at least judging from the present and despite its referential limitations, become *the* household word for that reality that we are all observing and analyzing.

61. “Turner” is used in this book to refer to those who pronounce messages of turning—whether concerning changes of attitude, mind-set, course of action, way of perception, etc.—that correspond with the spirit of repentance. See more on this in part 2 of this book.

and then P12 on equivalent ideas as expressed in the history of German VgB). Boldface phrases throughout the book function as pointers to specific sections and chapters to help the reader navigate the book.

This method of using the “expansive” concept of biblical repentance, with its multiplicity of turning movements, rather than a “restrictive” definition of VgB as the historiographic principle, has the advantage of contextualizing historical data that are otherwise considered irrelevant to the history of “coming to terms with the past.” (As a result of this, the contributions of Victor Gollancz, Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis, Günther Anders, and some others recorded here are rarely given prominence in most histories of German VgB.) The “downside” of this method is of course the explosion of potential materials. In fact, I am convinced that there is enough historical evidence for each of the fourteen chapters to be expanded into a book-length study. Yet without the context of the whole, the parts risk the loss of meaning aside from a pedantic interest. Hence I have chosen to argue for the contextualizing strength of biblical repentance, aside from its dialogue-enabling potentials, instead of focusing on any one of its fourteen “movements” identified.

Notwithstanding the lack of clear temporal and geographical delimiters, I am looking mainly at German materials that have generated responses from within or without (hence in most cases already “publicized”), between the early postwar years, when taking a particular turning posture bore clear personal risks, and the early postreunification period, after which turning expressions tended to become more of a reaffirmation or reformulation of previous expressions. Exceptions are those materials that have occasioned substantial responses in the German cultural world (e.g., Daniel J. Goldhagen’s thesis), and those that have a significant intellectual contribution to German responses (e.g., Rabbi Harold Schulweis’s spiritual legacy in Holocaust remembrance). Especially helpful to me as source materials, aside from texts published in book form, are circulated periodicals such as the *Frankfurter Hefte*, *Die Wandlung*, and the *Freiburger Rundbrief*. The digital archives of *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, and the *Hamburger Abendblatt* have provided me with additional pertinent reference materials.

This book is not about how popular or unpopular “turning” was in Germany. It must be said at the outset that with but extremely rare exceptions, such as Willy Brandt’s *Kniefall*, for which there was contemporaneous research done on public opinion regarding the gesture (see P5), it is impossible to gauge statistically in retrospect the German and non-German audiences’ opinions toward the responses recorded in this study. It is possible to trace, say, the sales figures of a particular book or journal cited,⁶² but a higher sales figure does not of course necessarily mean agreement with its message(s) (a problem further compounded by the discrepancy between intended and interpreted meanings)—one cannot even be sure if it indicates readership, for buying is not the same as reading, much less reading with or without sympathy. I think therefore it is only prudent not to make any claim of majority support for the responses—though some of the responses analyzed here, such as the *Lichterkette* (P6), were mass movements instead of individual actions. Perhaps it is safer to assume that these were minority opinions, given the historical contexts in which they were uttered.

Though I in no way lay any claim to the exhaustion of the sources available, much less to the “representativeness” of the examples cited, I do feel confident that with the present “sedimentation” of evidence in each of the fourteen historical chapters, a strong case has already been made for the correspondence (at least “on the surface”) between biblical and historical “turning.” When I continue to “discover” documented and perhaps even stronger examples of correspondence, the consideration of length and the avoidance of unnecessary repetition prevent me from accumulating further historical sediments.

62. The *Frankfurter Hefte*, for example, had done its own quantitative study of circulation and readership in April 1947 (with about 2,600 completed questionnaires). The study showed that most of its readers were in North Rhine–Westphalia (33.9 percent), most in the age group of 35–49 (43.4 percent), most with higher education degrees (63.6 percent), and most interested in topics related to religion (17.4 percent) and politics (14.9 percent). Readership (including shared reading) was estimated at 150,000 (the sample, however, was admittedly “not *entirely* representative” of the population). See the entire report by Valentin Siebrecht, “Selbstbildnis der Leser: Zahlen und Tatsachen aus der Umfrage der *Frankfurter Hefte*,” *Frankfurter Hefte* 2, no. 12 (1947).

From a broader perspective, the human possibilities in expression and in action opened up by shared cultural resources are what this book is about. As a Chinese living in an era of gradually deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations, which are ostensibly burdened by “history problems,” I feel a compelling need for the study of German VgB—which Karl Jaspers once defined as *Umkehr*, as distinct from “forgetting” or “shame”⁶³—from which *alternative responses* to past atrocities (for both perpetrators *and* victims) can be deduced. Through revealing the relational dynamics of the German “model,” that is, the contribution of Jewish ideas as communicated/carried out by Jewish and non-Jewish counterparts, I hope to raise questions about the constitutive aspects of Chinese responses and traditional ideas shared in East Asia in the problem of Japanese VgB. We may discover that the lack of certain critical “turnings” (on one or both sides) may have not so much to do with the will to “repent” and to “reconcile” as with shared traditional understandings of what is (im)possible and (un)desirable in the aftermath of intergroup atrocities in the first place. In other words, the so-called history problems can very well be in fact reflective of the problems of our shared ethical paradigm.

Though the presence of a resource does not automatically mean its employment—one only needs to ask why “mutual-turning” had not happened or succeeded among enemy states in Europe in the interwar years—the neglect or ignorance of it does mean foreclosed possibilities. In this sense, the study of the influence of scripture on history through human agency should sharpen one’s perceptibility of potential courses of action that have been either forgotten or obscured.

63. “‘Coming to terms with the past’ does not take place through forgetting, not through ‘shame’ in which a secret apologia still lurks, but only through repentance (*Umkehr*), one that is attested to by—among other things—the *unreserved recognition of the consequences of war*.” Karl Jaspers, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik? Tatsachen, Gefahren, Chancen* (Munich: R. Piper, 1966), 238–39 (emphasis in the original).