Questions for Discussion

We hope the following questions will stimulate discussion for reading groups and provide a deeper understanding of Constantine's Sword for every reader.

1. "Here is the question a Christian must ask," Carroll insists. "Does our assumption about the redemptive meaning of suffering, tied to the triumph of Jesus Christ and applied to the Shoah, inevitably turn every effort to atone for the crimes of the Holocaust into a claim to be the masters of Jews in the other world?" Why must a Christian confront this question? How do you answer that question? How does Carroll answer it?

2. "The Shoah throws many things into relief," Carroll writes; "the human capacity for depravity, the cost of ethnic absolutism, the final inadequacy both of religious language and of silence. But it also highlights the imprisonment of even well-meaning Christians inside the categories with which we approach death and sin. Christian faith can seem to triumph over every evil except Christian triumphalism." What does Carroll mean by the phrase "Christian triumphalism"? How does Christian triumphalism relate to the first two sentences of this quotation?

3. "The Final Solution was a contradiction of everything Christianity stands for," Carroll declares. Yet one of the main arguments of his book is that Christianity was a determining factor in the Shoah. What connections between Christian history and the Shoah does Carroll identify and emphasize? To what extent is he justified, or not, in insisting upon a connective relationship as opposed to a causative relationship?

4. Carroll straightforwardly states, "I presume to measure the sweep of history against the scope of my own memory." How acceptable or unacceptable is this
presumption? What are the advantages and drawbacks of writing history through
the prism of individual conscience and memory? Does Carroll's acknowledgment of
his "limited ability to represent the Jewish side" of the history of the
Jewish-Catholic conflict compromise his arguments and presentation?

5. "The monstrous question," which Carroll directs to all Western Christians, "is
How could you have not cared that the Nazis prepared to murder, and then did
murder, the Jews in front of you? How could that murder not have been
experienced as directly involving you? And finally, when the roundups and
deportations and transports began..., when the killing of Jews replaced the war
effort as Hitler's main purpose, why did you not see that your passivity had
effectively become collaboration?" How do you answer these questions? How do
you answer Cynthia Ozick's apposite question, quoted by Carroll: "Hoping to
confer no hurt, indifference finally grows lethal; why is that?"

6. What are the principal components of "supersessionism," the Christian belief
that Christianity—"the Jesus movement"—replaces Judaism as "the new Israel"
and that Christians replace Jews as "the chosen people"? What have been the
implications of supersessionism, for Christians and Jews, at the various stages of
their shared 2,000-year history? When and how did replacement come to imply
elimination, and with what consequences?

7. Carroll refers on several occasions to an "ambivalence" that, at various times in
history, has characterized Christian—particularly Catholic—attitudes toward and
statements concerning the Jews. What is the cumulative nature of that
ambivalence, and what have been its major manifestations? How did "the pattern
of ambivalence" become set, and how has it served to preserve and carry forward
Christian antisemitism? What examples can you note of "the positive side of
contemporary Catholic ambivalence"?

8. What primary indicators of Jesus' Jewishness does Carroll identify? On the basis
of available evidence, where did Jesus most likely fit within the multifaceted
Judaism of his time? How might conservative Catholics, Orthodox Jews,
fundamentalist Christians, Jews for Christ, and others react to statements that
Jesus, even in his supposedly redemptive death, was first and foremost a Jew?
Why does Carroll insist that "the Church must learn to speak of Jesus Christ in a
way that honors his Jewishness not only as something past but as something
permanent"?

9. How might a revised view of the Gospels as being the result of "prophecy
historicized" (in John Dominic Crossan's phrase) lead to a revision of Christians' view
of Jesus and, subsequently, of Jews' view of Jesus and his followers? How did the "blurring of 'history remembered' and 'prophecy historicized'...come to form the supersessionist prophecy-fulfillment structure of Christian attitudes toward
Jews"?

10. What was the political and religious significance of Constantine's conversion to
Christianity? How did his political exploitation of the Christian religion cause a
lasting confusion within Christianity between political power and religious faith?
How, beginning with Constantine, did "the triumphalism of an empowered
Christianity [lead] to a betrayal of faith" and to Christianity's anti-Judaism?

11. Carroll singles out Constantine's conversion to Catholicism as one of those
events that could have gone in alternative ways. He asks us to wonder how
day "would have unfolded had the young emperor been converted to Judaism
instead." How might history have unfolded from such an event? How might Judaism have fared "as the locus of political and religious domination"? On the
basis of rabbinical Judaism's writings, beliefs, and observances, what extrapolations can we make from the imagined triumph of a Jewish Constantine?

12. What is the continuing importance of Augustine's thinking and writing about Jews and acceptable Christian attitudes and actions concerning Jews? In what ways does "subsequent history resound with the cry of Augustine...: Do not slay them!"? In what ways is "the legacy of Augustine's teaching on the Jews...a double-edged sword"? At the same time, do you agree or disagree with Carroll's coda on Augustine: "Are we reduced to gratitude for the day when one of us found a way, through a jury-rigged theology if ever there was one, to justify the cry 'Do not slay them!'? Yes, we are."

13. What shape does the story of the Crusades take when told from the point of view of its first victims, the Jews of Europe? How might a historically accurate modern-day retelling of that story, widely disseminated in church and synagogue, affect the ways in which Christians and Jews look back upon their shared history and at the issues that divide them today?

14. What have been the consequences of the First Crusade's sparking of an era in which, "for the first time in Christian history, violence was defined as a religious act, a source of grace"? How did the vow of the Crusaders to free the Holy Land by slaughtering Muslims (and Jews) transform the Catholic Church into the Church Militant? In what ways was the Crusaders' "peacemaking" "a heretofore unthinkable militarization of Christian religion"? What intra-Christian antagonisms are part of the legacy of the Crusades, and how have those antagonisms intensified Christian hatred of and violence toward Jews?

15. What were the origins of the stereotypes of Jews that have taken hold of the popular Christian imagination over the centuries—moneylender, greedy capitalist, revolutionary, for example? What effect have these stereotypes had on Christian-Jewish relations, on Christian views of Jews, and of Jewish views of themselves? What comparable stereotypes of Christians may have played a similar role on the Jewish side of the relationship?

16. "Christians...knew little or nothing about this Jewish high culture of the Middle Ages, both far away and near at hand—and that remains true today," Carroll writes. What kind of knowledge did—and do—Christians have of Jews, and how has that kind of knowledge affected their behavior toward Jews? How knowledgeable about Christian tradition and belief have Jews been? How might we explain the differences between the groups' levels of knowledge concerning one another? In what ways might increased knowledge and understanding on both sides be achieved, and in what ways might that increased knowledge ameliorate hatred, fear, and resentment?

17. How successful is Carroll in showing that Peter Abelard "could have represented an even more positive turn in the story" of Christian-Jewish relations than did Augustine? To what extent, and how, did Abelard lift "the pike on a road toward Jewish-Christian mutuality, a road leading to an end to hatred and the beginning of real respect"? What were the short-term and long-term consequences of the fact that Abelard's road was not taken? What did both the Church and the Jews lose as a result of Abelard's condemnation as a heretic? How is Abelard's position "consonant with the religion of Israel," and what hope might a reemphasis on his position hold for Christians and Jews?

18. In Carroll's view, what were the unique consequences of Catholic medieval absolutism as embodied in the institution of the Inquisition? How did the Inquisition signal a turning point in the Christian understanding of and attitude
toward Judaism? What were the historical and religious reasons for this shift? How might the Inquisition be linked with modern antisemitic racism?

19. In what ways was the *convivencia* "a moment full of possibility, another of the roads not taken"? How might Catholics and Jews lead the way in the creation of a modern-day religious and political *convivencia*? What obstacles would have to be surmounted, and what new mechanisms put in place?

20. Carroll refers to the story of Clement VI, at Avignon, as "yet another of those all too rare chapels of heart in this grim history." What made it so? What are some of the other "chapels of heart" to which Carroll calls attention? What factors prevented these chapels of heart from permanently affecting Christian-Jewish relations for the better?

21. When and where did the invidious concept of the taint of "Jewish blood" come into play? What has been that concept's legacy? What similar bigotries based on the notion of tainted blood have infected various societies over the past five hundred years? Why does Carroll assert that "the shift from a religious definition of Jewishness to a racial one is perhaps the most decisive in this long narrative, and its fault lines...will define the moral geography of the modern age"?

22. Carroll underlines the irony inherent in the fact that Saint Teresa of Ávila—who founded the Carmelite order that, "centuries later, would attract the converted Jewish philosopher Edith Stein, who was inspired by Teresa's autobiography—was herself a New Christian, the daughter of a man who, as a boy, had repented a relapse into Judaism? What other ironies of history or biography inform the history of Christian-Jewish relations? How might these ironies prompt an enhanced mutual understanding between Christians and Jews today, as well as prompt a re-examination of the events that have determined those relations?

23. How did Martin Luther break from the Catholic Church and, at the same time, reinforce some of its deepest assumptions regarding Jews? What is the extent of his influence on the modern Christian—Catholic and non-Catholic—attitude toward Jews and the attitude of modern Germany, through the Nazi period, toward the Jews? In turn, to what extent was Luther's position regarding the Jews "grounded in the theological heart of Christian proclamation," in his own nontheological, intensely personal sense of doom, and/or in a unique German context of antisemitism?

24. How do "We Remember," "Memory and Reconciliation," and other papal and Church statements—"the Church's most solemn attempts at self-examination"—address the issues of anti-Judaism, the actions of Church members and of the Church itself, and the Church's claim to a "constant teaching...on the unity of the human race and on the equal dignity of all races and peoples"? What additional questions are raised by these sometimes puzzling official statements? For example, what consequences might derive from the official Vatican distinction between the transgressions of individual members of the Church and the inviolability of "the Church as such"?

25. What twelfth-century events are associated with the rise of Kabbalah as "a source of new Jewish mythology and a new Jewish mysticism," and what sixteenth-century events caused it to flourish anew? How does the mystical theology of Kabbalah compare or contrast with the Christian mystical tradition, in terms of both origins and objectives?

26. What was Voltaire's unique contribution to Western antisemitism? From the
Jewish point of view, why might Voltairean hatred seem little different from established Christian hatred?

27. What were "the pair of masterly elaborations of anti-Jewish stereotyping of the nineteenth century," and how does Carroll associate Karl Marx with both? In what ways did both images reside most vividly in the Catholic imagination? What "special meaning" can we assign to Marx's attacks on Jews, and what "special consequences"?

28. Including the affirmation of papal authority, what actions and statements by Vatican Council I and Pope Pius IX constituted the Church's response to the perceived threat of liberalism? What was the impact on Christian-Jewish relations? How does Carroll show that the context of the declaration of papal infallibility "tells us everything we need to know about its meaning for Catholics and for Jews"? How have "absolutist theological claims and institutional universalism" through the centuries "led directly to Church oppression of Jews"?

29. By the time of a civilian court's reversal, in 1906, of Captain Alfred Dreyfus's conviction, Carroll tells us, "some Jews had drawn conclusions from the Dreyfus affair." What were those conclusions? Given that "the French army has never reversed its two verdicts against the Jewish officer," what residual lessons might the Dreyfus Affair still carry for Jews living in a predominantly Christian society? Why is it that many Christians think of Jews exclusively as Jews, regardless of individual Jews' insistence on a primary national identity, and—at the same time—express resentment of Jewish support of Israel?

30. What inferences pertaining specifically to Christian-Jewish relations might both Jews and Christians draw from Charles Péguy's aphorism "Everything begins in faith and ends in politics"? In what ways might the entire history of Jewish-Christian relations be seen as a persistent sanctification of politics and politicization of faith?

31. "As has been discovered again by tyrants of all stripes," Carroll reminds us, "the great usefulness of mass antisemitism is its efficiency in offering an explanation for everything that people hate about their situations, if not their lives." That being so, and given the repeated revelation of the falseness of such explanations, why does "mass antisemitism" continue to be efficiently useful? How might it be discredited once and for all?

32. How successful is Carroll in showing that there was a direct link between historical Christian Jew-hatred and Hitler's Final Solution; that "however modern Nazism was, it planted its roots in the soil of age-old Church attitudes and a nearly unbroken chain of Church-sponsored acts of Jew hatred"; and that "however pagan Nazism was, it drew its sustenance from groundwater poisoned by the Church's most solemnly held ideology—its theology"?

33. How might Eugenio Pacelli—as the Vatican's cardinal secretary of state under Pope Pius XI and, later, as Pope Pius XII—have facilitated Hitler's persecution and, ultimately, mass murder of Europe's Jews? What might Pacelli—especially as pope—have done, or not done, to protect not only the Jews of Italy but Jews throughout the continent? How does Carroll account for Pius XII's behavior? How balanced is his treatment of this controversial topic and of the Vatican's apparent intention to canonize Pius XII as a saint of the Church?

34. By focusing so much of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue on the question of Pius XII," Carroll writes, "the broader question of a massive Catholic failure is deflected." What factors does he identify as composing that "massive Catholic
failure"—and a more general Christian failure—and what conclusions does he draw concerning that failure's origins and consequences? Beyond this quandary, how can we answer Carroll's further question: "How did a succession of popes prepare the way for the 'silence' of an entire civilization"?

35. In what ways might the Catholic Church's canonization of Edith Stein—Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross—as a martyr for the faith be seen, from a Jewish perspective, as another act of Christian suppressionist sacrilege? How does her canonization focus the complex issues of history, theology, and doctrine that Carroll believes the Catholic Church must confront? In what ways is her story "an object lesson in Church denial"?

36. According to Carroll, what specifically Christian and—perhaps more importantly—what worldwide factors support a call for a third Vatican Council? In addition to "ending antisemitism forever," what other goals does Carroll envisage a Vatican Council III as having? With those goals in mind, how reasonable are Carroll's specifications regarding location, timing, participants, and agenda? What are the implications of his giving his Vatican III schema the title "Agenda for a New Reformation"?

37. What are the principal "unfinished questions" that Carroll identifies as deciding the primary agenda items for a Vatican Council III? How convincing are the rationales that he presents for the inclusion of each? How might a Vatican III correct the extraordinary errors of "the roads not taken" during the history of Christianity? What necessary affirmations must, in Carroll's view, emerge from Vatican III?

38. How might Constantine's Sword provide a model for anyone who wishes to examine, in depth and uncompromisingly, abuses of power or authority within his or her tradition or organization?

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