



The Holocaust and Catholic Conscience: Cardinal Aloisius Muench and the Guilt Question in Germany

Suzanne Brown-Fleming

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"In this revealing study, Suzanne Brown-Fleming takes us back to a post–World War II Catholic world that had yet to come to terms with either Nazism or the Holocaust. One of the leading Catholic clerics in postwar Europe, Cardinal Aloisius Muench both reflected and helped promote German Catholic failures in this regard. Anchored in Cardinal Muench's private papers, this book conducts a fair-minded, but rigorous and morally animated assessment of a Catholic conscience that was later transformed by Vatican II. I recommend it highly." —Michael R. Marrus, Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies, University of Toronto

"This is an excellent book that will be of great interest to all historians in the fields of church history, Christian-Jewish relations, and American Catholicism." —Susannah Heschel, Dartmouth College

"This clearly written book deals with the problems nations face in dealing with their past—in this case, the Holocaust. Germany has faced this dilemma—to accept or shrug off shame—for many generations, but the immediate postwar years tormented them more than any, and more than any other nation has had to face. To a great extent Bishop Muench provided the salve for the Germans' scorched consciences. But Muench, a first-generation German-American, carried his own antisemitic baggage, and answered to a pope who responded weakly to the Holocaust and who afterwards absolved German Catholics as a body from guilt. The reader will feel the anguish of history in these pages." —Michael Phayer, Marquette University

American-born Cardinal Aloisius Muench (1889–1962) was a key figure in German and German-American Catholic responses to the Holocaust, Jews, and Judaism between 1946 and 1959. He was arguably the most powerful American Catholic figure and an influential Vatican representative in occupied Germany and in West Germany after the war. In this carefully researched book, which draws on Muench's collected papers, Suzanne Brown-Fleming offers the first assessment of Muench's legacy and provides a rare glimpse into his commentary on Nazism, the Holocaust, and surviving Jews. She argues that Muench helped legitimize the Catholic Church's failure during the 1940s and 1950s to confront the nature of its own complicity in Nazism's anti-Jewish ideology. This fascinating story of Muench's role in German Catholic consideration—and ultimate rejection—of guilt and responsibility for Nazism in general, and the persecution of European Jews in particular, is an important addition to scholarship on the Holocaust and to church history.

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