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# Saint Joseph, the Turks, and the Jews: The Path to Antisemitism of Josef Deckert, Priest in Vienna, 1869–1901

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## Abstract

This article studies the development of antisemitism in Austria in the late nineteenth century through the example of Josef Deckert. The priest is depicted in historiography as one of the most prominent anti-Jewish agitators of that period, but his path to antisemitism has not been explored. This research indicates that Deckert's adoption of antisemitic ideology happened abruptly and was not guided by ecclesiastical or lay authorities. The article, therefore, invites us to look more at individual actors and local cultures and less on strategies from above when studying the spread of populist movements. At the same time, the analysis draws attention to two aspects that have been studied little in connection to the diffusion of antisemitism in the modern period, the cult of Saint Joseph and the remembrance of the Turkish siege of Vienna. Deckert was deeply devoted to Saint Joseph and invoked the patron saint of the Habsburg monarchy, not only as protector of Catholic Austria at the time of the Ottoman wars, but as patron of the workers and defender against the contemporary Austrian Jews.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; Christian social movement; Cult of Saint Joseph; Turkish Siege of Vienna; Josef Deckert; Austria; Catholic Church

Josef Deckert was an extremely popular figure in late nineteenth-century Vienna. In 1901, according to reports in the contemporary press, around a hundred thousand people participated in his funeral procession through the streets of the Habsburg capital.<sup>1</sup> The priest was celebrated because of his strong pastoral care for the poor and young people in the parish of Weinhaus and his vehement orations and writings against the Jews. Upon Deckert's death, his successor at Weinhaus, Father Pechmann, wrote that Deckert's two main aims were "the diffusion of the devotion of Saint Joseph, and the struggle against modern anti-Christianity." In Vienna at that time, the latter was, if not synonymous with, certainly inseparable from antisemitism. Indeed, in Pechmann's words, Deckert's "struggle against the anti-Christian current, his antisemitism, gained him many friends and admirers, but also many enemies and persecutors."<sup>2</sup>

Often referred to in historiography, but not studied in depth, the case of Josef Deckert offers a window into the development of antisemitism in Austria in the nineteenth century. Arguably, the anti-Jewish agitation of Austrian Catholics is central to both the history of antisemitism and the history of Austria in the modern era, because of the strength of the antisemitic movements that formed in Austria in the second half of the nineteenth century and the deep influence of Catholicism within Austrian society. Politically, antisemitism took shape in Austria in the 1880s mainly within two camps, the supporters of German nationalism, whose most prominent representative was Georg von Schönerer, and the Catholic social movement, led by Karl Lueger and the founder of the federalist

<sup>1</sup>Birgit Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten rund um die Pfarrkirche St. Josef Weinhaus—Währing 1784–2014* (Vienna, 2014), 153.

<sup>2</sup>Archive of the St. Joseph Church in Weinhaus (hereafter ASJW), Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Pechmann's notes, 1901.

Catholic newspaper *Das Vaterland*, Karl von Vogelsang.<sup>3</sup> While pan-German racist ideology failed to fuel a mass political breakthrough, the Catholic social movement won broad popularity. The Christian Social Party came to dominate Vienna's municipal elections in the 1890s, and Lueger held the office of mayor from 1897 until his death in 1910.<sup>4</sup> Due to a combination of conservatism, social and economic appeals to the middle classes, and modern political methods, organized antisemitism gained influence in Austrian society to an exceptional degree compared to elsewhere in Europe.<sup>5</sup>

While the success of the Christian Social Party itself declined in the twentieth century, it has been argued that during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, antisemitism became an acceptable part of a conservative worldview.<sup>6</sup> Seemingly, Catholicism had become inseparable from antisemitism in Austria, to a degree that in the early twentieth century, an organization with the word Christian in its name could be assumed to be antisemitic.<sup>7</sup>

The Austrian population was overwhelmingly Catholic in the late nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Austrian identity was more than anything else connected with Catholicism and, from a Roman perspective, Austria and Hungary had historically been considered bastions of Catholicism at the eastern borders of Europe. Therefore, the Vatican followed the victories of the Christian Socials with keen interest, and historians have suggested that Austria and in particular Vienna came to constitute a testing ground for the use of antisemitism by the Catholic Church.<sup>9</sup> In 1884, a correspondent from Austria for the Roman Jesuit journal, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, explained in straightforward terms antisemitism's potential for gathering popular support in Austria and Hungary. The antisemitic citizen and worker, the correspondent wrote, who previously shunned the church, now "out of hatred to Jews, attends the church, shows the Catholic priest his veneration, willingly listens to his admonitions, and ends by becoming a good Christian."<sup>10</sup> The journal, whose readership consisted of Catholic European elites, was closely connected to the popes and censured by the Vatican.

Studies of Catholic antisemitism have often focused on continuities in statements and policies, sometimes depicting the diffusion of antisemitic propaganda as the result of strategies directed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> The Austrian context, however, is complex and contradictory and

<sup>3</sup>Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York, 1964).

<sup>4</sup>John W. Boyer, *Karl Lueger (1844–1910): Christlichsoziale Politik als Beruf: Eine Biografie* (Vienna, 2010).

<sup>5</sup>Victor Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era: A Socio-Historical Outline* (Budapest, 2004), 360–63; Peter Pulzer, "The Tradition of Austrian Antisemitism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Patterns of Prejudice* 27, no. 1 (1993): 31–46; Peter Pulzer, "The Development of Political Antisemitism in Austria," in *The Jews of Austria: Essays on their Life, History and Destruction*, ed. Josef Fraenkel (London, 1967), 429–43.

<sup>6</sup>Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23 (1978): 25–46; Peter Pulzer, "Third Thoughts on German and Austrian Antisemitism," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4, no. 2 (2005): 137–78; David Lebovitch Dahl, "Normalization of Antisemitism, 1880–1900: The Case of a Jesuit Community in Rome," *Patterns of Prejudice* 48, no. 1 (2014): 46–66.

<sup>7</sup>Nina Scholz and Heiko Heinisch, "Alles Werden sich die Christen nicht gefallen lassen." *Wiener Pfarrer und die Juden in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Vienna, 2001); Bruce F. Pauley, "Politischer Antisemitismus im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Eine zerstörte Kultur: Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im Wien seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Gerhard Botz, Ivar Oxaal, and Michael Pollak (Buchloe, 1990), 221–46; Bruce F. Pauley, "German and Austrian Antisemitism in the Interwar Years: Which was the More Extreme?" in *Österreichischer Zeitgeschichtetag 1993. 24. bis 27. Mai 1993 in Innsbruck*, eds. Ingrid Böhler and Rolf Steininger (Innsbruck, 1995), 272–78.

<sup>8</sup>Francis Walker, "The Census of Austria," *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 2, no. 16 (Dec. 1891): 444–49.

<sup>9</sup>Giovanni Miccoli, "Santa Sede, questione ebraica e antisemitismo fra Otto e Novecento," in *Storia d'Italia, Gli ebrei in Italia, II Dall'emancipazione a oggi*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin, 1997), 1369–1574; Enzo Collotti, "Antisemitismo e Legislazione Antiebraica in Austria," in *La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa. Atti del convegno nel cinquantenario delle leggi razziali* (Rome, 1989), 293–318; Adam Wandruszka, "Il cattolicesimo politico e sociale nell'Austria-Ungheria degli anni 1870–1914," in *Il cattolicesimo politico e sociale in Italia e in Germania dal 1870 al 1914*, eds. Ettore Passerin d'Entrèves and Konrad Repgen (Bologna, 1977), 151–77.

<sup>10</sup>NN, "Cose Straniere, Austria (Nostra Corrispondenza) 3. Notizie d'Ungheria. La legge sui matrimoni fra cristiani ed ebrei andata in fumo. L'opposizione moderata e il partito conservatore. La nuova legge sulle arti e mestieri. L'antisemitismo," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 2 (1884): 639–40.

<sup>11</sup>Vicki Caron, "Catholic Political Mobilization and Antisemitic Violence in Fin de Siècle France: The Case of the Union Nationale," *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 2 (June 2009): 294–346; Robert A. Ventresca, "War Without End: The Popes and the Jews Between Polemic and History," *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 4 (Oct. 2012): 466–90.

challenging to any conclusion that the clerical outbursts of antisemitic propaganda in the late nineteenth century were the results of a concerted strategy or a straightforward continuation of prior manifestations of hatred toward Jews.

Historians have suggested that a local Austrian anti-Jewish tradition may be traced back to Hans Ulrich Megerle, known as Abraham a Sancta Clara, who preached against the Jews at the time of the Ottoman wars in the seventeenth century. In the late nineteenth century, it has been argued, this popular, demagogic, anti-intellectual way of preaching and speaking was successful in gaining support for the Church among peasants and the *Mittelstand* in social battles against liberals and social democrats. Among the most well-known Catholic orators who continued the *volksrednerische Wiener Stil* in the nineteenth century were Sebastian Brunner, August Rohling, the Jesuits Heinrich Abel and Viktor Kolb, and the priest at the center of this analysis, Josef Deckert.<sup>12</sup>

The antisemitic organization of lay and clerical Catholics, however, happened in opposition to the Austrian episcopacy. Since the Austrian Concordat in 1855, the Catholic hierarchy had aligned with the liberal state in Austria and both episcopacy and state had suppressed attempts by the lower clergy to organize outside of strictly devotional Catholic associations. Apparently, only in the 1880s did groups of priests start to engage in social debates. The most prominent of these initiatives was the one undertaken in 1882 by the founders of the *Correspondenz-Blatt für den Katholischen Clerus Österreichs*. According to John Boyer's analysis, the primary concerns of these clerics were their own low income, status, and waning influence in society, especially within the school system. Throughout the 1880s, they increasingly engaged in anti-liberal and antisemitic campaigns in attempts to mobilize the Catholic clergy, artisans, and lower bourgeoisie. Thereby the lower clergy assumed a political role in support of the Christian Social movement, and around 1890–93, together with artisans and shopkeepers and under the ideological leadership of Vogelsang and Lueger, they participated in the formation of the Christian Social Party in Vienna.<sup>13</sup>

In 1895, the Austrian episcopacy and government sent formal denouncements of the Christian Socials to the Vatican. This was less a consequence of the party's antisemitism than of its attacks on the clerical hierarchy and state authorities. The Holy See in fact did not censor the antisemitism of the Austrian party. On the contrary, a leading member of the commission that dealt with the issue, Cardinal Andreas Steinhuber of Passau in southern Bavaria, an advisor to the Holy See in matters related to Germany and Austria, opined that "to break the forces of the Jews, the union of all Christians was necessary. The Holy See cannot enter in merely political questions."<sup>14</sup>

In the historiography on antisemitic movements in Austria, Josef Deckert is often introduced to exemplify the typical anti-Jewish Austrian preacher of the late nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> He was an exponent of the lower clergy and was one of the collaborators of the *Correspondenz-Blatt* since its beginning.<sup>16</sup> Remarkably, however, the accounts do not mention that the priest hardly dealt with the "Jewish question" until 1893, when he started a campaign against Jews, and that this lasted only a few years. In fact, no deeper study of his activities exists apart from a rather apologetic dissertation of 1959.<sup>17</sup> This is perhaps not surprising since in general few attempts have been made to study the

<sup>12</sup>Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism*; Peter Pulzer, "Spezifische Momente und Spielarten des österreichischen und des Wiener Antisemitismus," in Botz, Oxaal, and Michael Pollak, *Eine zerstörte Kultur*, 121–40; Robert A. Kann, *Kanzel und Katheder* (Vienna, 1962); Erika Weinzierl, "On the Pathogenesis of the Anti-Semitism of Sebastian Brunner (1814–1893)," *Yad Vashem Studies* 10 (1974): 217–39.

<sup>13</sup>John W. Boyer, "Catholic Priests in Lower Austria: Anti-Liberalism, Occupational Anxiety, and Radical Political Action in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118, no. 4 (1974): 337–69; John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna: Origins of the Christian Social Movement, 1848–1897* (Chicago, 1981), 122–83.

<sup>14</sup>Micoli, "Santa Sede," 1430–49; Collotti, "Antisemitismo e legislazione antiebraica in Austria."

<sup>15</sup>Friedrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler. Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (Munich, 1968), 70; Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich, 1998), 413, 423; Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*, 156; Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Liverpool, 2006), 259–60; Pulzer, "The Tradition of Austrian Antisemitism," 38; Hillel J. Kieval, *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder at Europe's Fin de Siècle* (Philadelphia, 2022), 142–43.

<sup>16</sup>Boyer, "Catholic Priests in Lower Austria"; Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*.

<sup>17</sup>Heribert Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert—Pfarrer von Weinhaus 1843–1901: Sein Leben und Wirken" (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1959).

adoption of antisemitism by individuals or institutions.<sup>18</sup> Such a study is not an easy task, and the case of Josef Deckert illustrates this.

This article explores Deckert's path toward antisemitism. The analysis does not concentrate on the priest's anti-Jewish crusade, which is already widely cited in literature. Instead, it examines the period before 1893, from Deckert's years as a young assistant priest in the district of Leopoldstadt in Vienna in the 1870s to his arduous project of building a parish church in Weinhaus on the northern outskirts of the Habsburg capital in the 1880s.

The study indicates that Josef Deckert did not follow a planned or gradual trajectory toward assuming the role of antisemitic propagandist. On the contrary, the turn in 1893 appears most abrupt, and Deckert's antisemitism did not seem to be guided directly by civil or clerical authorities. The article, therefore, focuses less on strategies from above and more on the role of ordinary clerics and local cultures when studying the rise of antisemitic movements in the late nineteenth century.

On the other hand, this investigation highlights a particular set of social and cultural factors that may have influenced Deckert's espousal of antisemitism. Some of these are identified in extant literature—the influence of the Viennese tradition of Abraham a Sancta Clara and the social engagement of the Austrian priest. This analysis, however, draws attention to two less-studied aspects, the cult of Saint Joseph and the remembrance of the Turkish siege of Vienna. The devotion to Saint Joseph as protector of Christian society in times of instability, as a model for the artisans and workers, and as a defender against the Turkish menace, constituted a mental framework, I will argue, that was highly compatible with the adoption of antisemitism.

### In the Name of Saint Joseph

Josef Deckert was born in 1843 in the rural village of Drösing about seventy kilometers northeast of Vienna. In 1866, he completed his studies at the seminary in Vienna, and in 1869, he became assistant priest in the St. Leopold Church in the capital's second district. A few years later, in 1874, Deckert became parish priest of Weinhaus. At that time, Weinhaus was a small town of around two thousand villagers north of Vienna, but gradually it became absorbed by the Habsburg capital, and in 1892, the town and parish were incorporated into Währing, Vienna's eighteenth district.<sup>19</sup>

Early on, Deckert showed himself to be driven by two forces that would permeate his life and work: social engagement and devotion to Saint Joseph. In the early 1870s, while working as an assistant in the St. Leopold Church, the young cleric participated actively in the local political association of Leopoldstadt and was elected to its board in 1872.<sup>20</sup> Josef Deckert was among the association's most vociferous debaters of social and political issues. In 1871, he started a Catholic youth movement in Leopoldstadt and the following year he founded a "prayer society for the perpetual worship of Saint Joseph."<sup>21</sup> During elections in Austria and Hungary, Deckert repeatedly urged Catholic associations to support the conservative federalists and he was invited to speak about this and similar themes at Catholic associations in the Landstraße and Alsergrund districts in Vienna and at the Catholic-Patriotic Association of Lower Austria.<sup>22</sup> Later in the 1870s, Deckert was elected to the board of the latter association.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Weinzierl, "On the Pathogenesis of the Anti-Semitism of Sebastian Brunner"; Dahl, "Normalization of Antisemitism."

<sup>19</sup>Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*; Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert."

<sup>20</sup>E.g., NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 27 May 1870, 2; NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 4 August 1870, 3; NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 20 March 1872, 5.

<sup>21</sup>NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 7 May 1871, 5; ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1874.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., NN, "Katholisch-politisches Casino Landstraße," *Das Vaterland*, 5 January 1871, 3; NN, "Katholisch-patriotisches Casino Alsergrund," *Das Vaterland*, 17 July 1873, 5; NN, "Katholisch-patriotischer Volksverein in Niederösterreich," *Das Vaterland*, 4 December 1872, 4.

<sup>23</sup>NN, "Patriotisch-katholischer Volksverein in Niederösterreich," *Das Vaterland*, 11 December 1877, 3.

The newly appointed priest of Weinhaus was well aware that the emerging lay Catholic movements were unpopular among both civil and clerical authorities. In 1874, in his parish diary, Deckert noted that he had been admonished by the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, Joseph Othmar Ritter von Rauscher, not to let himself be used as a pawn by the advocates of the “feudal” order.<sup>24</sup> The bishop was likely alluding to the conservative, anti-liberal forces behind the journal *Das Vaterland*. Vogelsang, who founded the newspaper in 1875, is known to have lamented that the Austrian Catholics went under the deprecatory term “feudals,” a sign that this was the case in his own circles.<sup>25</sup> Evidence of meetings between Deckert and the editors of *Das Vaterland* only appear around 1877–78.<sup>26</sup> However, Deckert had corresponded with the newspaper since the early 1870s and the conservative journal advertised his sermons and publications frequently over the following decades.<sup>27</sup>

Von Rauscher’s warning did not move Deckert to give up his urge to organize Catholic laity and to debate social and political questions. In 1876, the priest founded a monthly paper, the “Messenger of S. Joseph,” to more widely circulate the program of his prayer association. The organization would reach monarchy-wide diffusion and around 70,000 members in 1884 and 120,000 toward the end of the century.<sup>28</sup> In 1877, the Weinhaus preacher contributed to drafts for a resolution on the economic crisis of working people as a participant at the first Austrian Catholic Congress.<sup>29</sup> Deckert’s most demanding project was the creation of a church-building society with the purpose of collecting funds for the construction of a new parish church in Weinhaus dedicated to Saint Joseph. This society was initiated in 1880 and by 1883 it had reached over two thousand members.<sup>30</sup>

Josef Deckert’s social activism was not uncommon among ordinary Austrian clerics of his generation. His poor family background was equally typical. Deckert was the son of an artisan, who worked part time as a sacristan to earn enough to feed his family.<sup>31</sup> From a young age, he engaged personally in sermons and charitable work for children, the poor, and the sick.<sup>32</sup>

While commentators have highlighted Deckert’s dedication to social work, the priest’s persistent veneration of Saint Joseph, and the origin and meaning of this, has not been an object of interest in the literature on the Weinhaus preacher. It could be that, in general, the historiographic focus has been put more often on the conservative clerics’ criticism of the “Josephist” subordination of the church to the liberal state, than on their devotion to Saint Joseph.<sup>33</sup> In the precedence he gave to Saint Joseph, Deckert was likely guided by a local Austrian tradition. The Habsburg monarchy had promoted Saint Joseph since at least the time of Leopold I (1640–1705). In 1654, Joseph was elevated to patron of the Habsburg lands, in 1676 to the main patron of the entire empire, and in 1678, Leopold named his first son after the saint.<sup>34</sup> Deckert made reference to this tradition, praising the

<sup>24</sup> ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert’s notes, 1874.

<sup>25</sup> Wiard v. Klopp, *Leben und Wirken des Sozialpolitikers Karl Freiherr von Vogelsang* (Vienna, 1930), 229–30; Boyer, “Catholic Priests in Lower Austria.”

<sup>26</sup> ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert’s notes, 1877; Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 114; Lothar Höbelt, Johannes Kalwoda and Jiří Malif, eds., *Die Tagebücher des Grafen Egbert Belcredi 1840–1893. Nach editorischen Vorarbeiten von Antonín Okáč* (Vienna, 2016), 523.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Josef Deckert, “Letter to the Editors,” *Das Vaterland*, 26 May 1872, 4; Deckert, “Letter to the Editors,” 23 June 1873, 2.

<sup>28</sup> ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert’s notes, 1883–84; Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> Holzer, “Dr. Josef Deckert,” 62–63; ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert’s notes, 1877; Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 114.

<sup>30</sup> Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 116, 125.

<sup>31</sup> Holzer, “Dr. Josef Deckert,” 1.

<sup>32</sup> NN, “Stimmen aus dem Publicum,” *Das Vaterland*, 31 May 1870, 3; NN, “Tagesnachrichten,” *Das Vaterland*, 27 May 1871, 3; NN, “Tagesnachrichten,” *Das Vaterland*, 23 June 1878, 3; NN, “Für den Asylverein der Wiener Universität,” *Das Vaterland*, 15 November 1884, 8; NN, “Kinder-Asylvereines,” *Das Vaterland*, 20 December 1884, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*, 30–31.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Mikuda-Hüttel, *Vom “Hausmann” zum Hausheiligen des Wiener Hofes. Zur Ikonographie des hl. Joseph im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Marburg, 1997); Charles W. Ingrao, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815* (Cambridge, 1994), 1681; Marie-Elizabeth Ducreux, “Emperors, Kingdoms, Territories: Multiple Versions of the ‘Pietas Austriaca?’” *The Catholic Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (2011): 276–304, here 303.

Austrian imperial house for its devotion to the saint at a meeting of the Catholic-Patriotic Association of Lower Austria in 1877.<sup>35</sup>

The young cleric was also inspired by the recent nomination of Saint Joseph as patron of the Church. The declaration was prepared in the First Vatican Council and made by Pius IX in December 1870, a few months after the Italian army's invasion of Rome.<sup>36</sup> In his statement in 1872 at the inauguration of the *Gebetsverein zur immerwährenden Verehrung des Heiligen Joseph*, Deckert stressed the fact that Joseph was the powerful patron of the Holy Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup>

By turning to the protection of the husband of Mary at this juncture, the Church was following a custom of reviving the cult of Saint Joseph in moments of social crisis that dates back to at least the fifteenth century. This was in line with Catholic dogma, according to which Mary represents the Church, while Joseph, as Mary's husband, came to symbolize the protection of the Church.<sup>38</sup>

Josef Deckert certainly conceptualized the worship of Joseph as a means of social mobilization. In one of the first meetings of the *Gebetsverein*, Deckert declared that "the aim of the association is not just to diffuse the veneration of the holy patriarch in wider circles, but also to place at the disposal of the Church a new host of eagerly praying people [*eifrigen Betern*], who invoke the protection and help of the mighty patron saint in the contemporary tribulations." Therefore, he continued, the short daily prayer of the *Verein* should be considered most suitable and timely: "O heil. Joseph, unser Führer, schütze uns und die heil. Kirche."<sup>39</sup>

One aspect rendered the devotion of Saint Joseph particularly suitable and timely at this moment in Europe. Since early modern times, the veneration of Joseph, the carpenter, had become associated with the appreciation of hard work and middle-class values.<sup>40</sup> Little research has been done on the social and political dimensions of the cult of Saint Joseph in the modern period. It is clear, however, that during the industrial revolution and the emergence of the "social question," and Socialism, the popes advanced the patriarch of the Holy Family as a model for the workers.<sup>41</sup> Notably, in 1889, Leo XIII solemnly promoted the worship of Saint Joseph as an alternative to "the promises of seditious men."<sup>42</sup> In the same period throughout Europe, numerous Catholic associations for working people and the poor were established under the patronage of the saint.<sup>43</sup>

More than ten years before Leo XIII's encyclical, Father Deckert was keenly aware of the potential of the cult of Saint Joseph in this regard. In a talk at the Austrian Catholic Congress in 1877, he asked the participants whether it had not occurred to them why precisely in their days "a worker, an artisan, a carpenter" had emerged as patron for the Christian world. Saint Joseph, Deckert proclaimed, offered guidance toward solving the "social question:" "a worker that has Saint Joseph as icon and patron is in my opinion insusceptible to social democratic influences."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>35</sup>NN, "Katholisch-patriot. Volksverein in Niederösterreich," *Das Vaterland*, 15 January 1877, 2.

<sup>36</sup>Congregation of Rites, Decree, *Quemadmodum Deus*, 8 December 1870.

<sup>37</sup>Deckert, "Letter to the Editors," 26 May 1872, 4.

<sup>38</sup>Carolyn C. Wilson, "A Leonardo 'Concetto' in the Context of the So-Called 'Adoration of the Shepherds,'" *Notes in the History of Art* 24, no. 3 (2005): 28–35; Charlene Villaseñor Black, *Creating the Cult of Saint Joseph: Art and Gender in the Spanish Empire* (Princeton, 2006).

<sup>39</sup>"Oh Saint Joseph, our leader, protect us and the holy Church," NN, "Gebetsverein zur immerwährenden Verehrung des heil. Joseph," *Das Vaterland*, 9 October 1872, 3.

<sup>40</sup>Joseph F. Chorpenning, "The Enigma of St Joseph in Poussin's Holy Family on the Steps," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 60 (1997): 276–81; Lynn White, Jr., "The Iconography of Temperantia and the Virtuousness of Technology," in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison*, eds. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel (Princeton, 1969), 199–201; Black, *Creating the Cult of Saint Joseph*.

<sup>41</sup>Daniele Menozzi, "La devozione a San Giuseppe e il papato contemporaneo: alla ricerca di dimensioni politiche e sociali del culto," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 17 (2004): 341–69.

<sup>42</sup>Leo XIII, Encyclical, "Quamquam pluries," 15 August 1889.

<sup>43</sup>Patricia Kelly, "Catholic Social Teaching: A Trickle-up Response to Poverty?" *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 23, no. 2 (2023): 206–17; Evelyne Deceur, Maria Bouverne-De Bie, and Angelo Van Gorp, "The Social Question as an Urban Question. A Social-Pedagogical Analysis of Participatory Initiatives in Rabot (Ghent) during the Nineteenth Century," in *The Civilising Offensive Social and Educational Reform in 19th-century Belgium*, eds. Christoph De Spiegeleer and Liberaal Archief (Berlin, 2019), 51–72; Menozzi, "La devozione a San Giuseppe e il papato contemporaneo."

<sup>44</sup>NN, "Vom Katholikentage," "Sitzung der Section für Sociales," *Das Vaterland*, 4 May 1877, 2.

It appears, in sum, that the cult of Saint Joseph contained aspects that appealed strongly to Josef Deckert, the value of hard manual labor, the status of the artisans and lower middle classes, and the protection of Christian authority in society in a time of social instability.

### The Turks

Deckert's most consuming endeavor was the construction of a new parish church in Weinhaus. After the idea took shape around 1878, he worked tenaciously on the task for the following decade. In 1883, the ground-breaking ceremony took place and in 1889 the building was inaugurated as the St. Joseph Church. By the time of the inauguration, however, it was clear that Deckert would dedicate the church, not solely to Saint Joseph, but also to the Austrian victory over the Turks in 1683, exactly 200 years before the start of the construction. Thus, the commemorative plaque that was placed in the church after its completion, apart from the mandatory dates of inauguration and the names of the architect, von Schmidt, and the archbishop, Ganglbauer, who consecrated the church in 1889, mentions only two things: Saint Joseph and the victory over the Turks. The plaque states: "This Church was built to honor Saint Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus Christ, patron of the holy Church and the House of Austria; in memory of the glorious liberation of Vienna from the Turkish siege in the year 1683."<sup>45</sup> In a speech held in the church in 1893 and later published, Deckert declared to the audience that they were "present in a church that was built in memory of one of the most important events for Vienna and for all of Western Christianity, in memory of the glorious liberation of Vienna from the Turks in the year 1683."<sup>46</sup>

In the 1880s, evoking the "Turkish threat" was not unique to Deckert. During the nation-building processes of the nineteenth century, claims were made in various regions in Central Europe to having been the historical "Christian bulwark" against Ottoman invasion. The idea of Vienna as a bulwark of Christian Europe was particularly popular.<sup>47</sup> A catalogue of "jubilee literature" shows that around sixty-five titles were published between 1882 and 1884 in Austria marking the 200th anniversary of the victory over the Turks in 1683. In September 1883 in Vienna, the Ottoman siege was commemorated in numerous events stretching over an entire "Turkish week," and at the same time, a month-long exhibition of Turkish artefacts in the new city hall attracted the interest of the Viennese public. The *Rathaus* itself was inaugurated on the very day of the victorious battle, 12 September, and according to liberal newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, the building marked Vienna's role as a defense against the "wild storm of Islam."<sup>48</sup>

In fact, Deckert did not have to go to the center of Vienna to be reminded of the Turkish siege. Just a few hundred metres away from the place where he was building his new church was the historical *Türkenschanze*, the remains of Ottoman entrenchments from the time of the siege of Vienna. In 1883, the prominent Wiener architect Heinrich Ferstel supported by private citizens and the commune of Vienna started working on the creation of a park around the site, and in 1888, the *Türkenschanzpark* was opened by Emperor Francis Joseph I.<sup>49</sup>

Deckert's concern with the Ottoman wars was not premised exclusively in their connection to the building of his church. Each year of 1896, 1897, and 1898, the Weinhaus preacher personally led a procession of around a thousand participants to the local hill of Kahlenberg to honor the liberation of Vienna from the Turks.<sup>50</sup> Kahlenberg is known for being the place where the decisive victory over the Turks took place in 1683, but the hill was renamed Leopoldsberg in 1693, and the name Kahlenberg was transferred to the nearby Josefsberg. When Deckert and others in the late nineteenth

<sup>45</sup>Plate in the St. Joseph Church in Weinhaus, ca. 1889–93.

<sup>46</sup>Josef Deckert, *Türkenmoth und Judenherrschaft* (Vienna, 1894), 3.

<sup>47</sup>Simon Hadler, "Europe's Other? The Turks and Shifting Borders of Memory," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 24, no. 4 (2017): 507–26, here 520.

<sup>48</sup>Maureen Healy, "1883 Vienna in the Turkish Mirror," *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 101–13.

<sup>49</sup>Renate Schweitzer, "Der Türkenschanzpark, Ein Abriß seiner Entstehungsgeschichte," *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 23 (1968): 309–16.

<sup>50</sup>Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 143–45.

century commemorated the victory over the Turks on the Kahlenberg, therefore, they were not actually on the Kahlenberg of 1683. Interestingly, however, the cult of Saint Joseph and the Turkish occupation had intersected in the history of the hill that carried the name of Kahlenberg in 1883. Originally known as the Schweinberg, in 1628, the hill was named Josefsberg by Ferdinand II, who founded a Camaldolese hermitage devoted to Saint Joseph on the mountain. The hermitage's chapel was burned down by the Turks in 1683. Long after the hill had been renamed Kahlenberg, in 1785, the chapel was reinaugurated by Joseph II as the Josefskirche while the settlement around the church was given the name of Josefsdorf.<sup>51</sup>

The encounter on the Kahlenberg between the cult of Saint Joseph and the Turkish wars was the continuation of a long relationship. Since Pope Sixtus IV gave his support to the cult in the 1470s, Saint Joseph had habitually been invoked in the face of the “Turkish menace.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the history of the Kahlenberg exemplifies how deeply the cult of Saint Joseph, the memory of the Turkish siege, and the connection between the two were embedded in the history and geography—some might say in the collective memory—of the lands surrounding Vienna, the lands that Deckert came from, and in which he worked.

It does not seem, however, that Deckert paid much attention to the Ottoman wars before the start of the building of the church. At least it does not seem to have been a theme in his earlier writings. In 1901, the new priest in Weinhaus, Josef Pechmann, looking back upon Deckert's work, stated that ever since the idea came to him in 1878 of building a church, he had in mind to dedicate it both to Saint Joseph and to the “heroes of 1683.”<sup>53</sup> Still, the earliest sign in the available sources that Deckert showed interest in the Turkish wars is a report from the second general assembly of the church-building association published in *Das Vaterland* in 1882. The report from the first general assembly in 1880 described the aim of the construction purely as that of honoring Saint Joseph.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the author of the report of 1882 emphasized that the church would be built next to the *Türkenschanze* and expressed the hope that the citizens of Vienna would see the 200 years' jubilee of the liberation of Vienna the following year as an occasion to contribute to the construction of the new church.<sup>55</sup>

During 1883 and 1884, Father Deckert, with the help of fellow members of the Catholic association of Lower Austria, in particular lay Catholic writer and railroad employee Hans Maria Truxa, campaigned intensively to collect funds for the new church. In a series of talks and meetings, they appealed to lay Catholics, government ministers, and clerics alike, insisting that building a church at the *Türkenschanze* had a dual Catholic and patriotic purpose.<sup>56</sup>

Father Pechmann, for his part, acknowledged that the project's, as he too put it, “patriotic aim” had helped to secure financial backing from both the army and the royal house. Archduke Albrecht von Österreich-Teschen, field marshal of the army, overtook the protectorate of the building project and both he and the emperor and other members of the court contributed with large donations.<sup>57</sup> Given Deckert's talent for social mobilization and his rather sudden turn of attention around 1883 toward the victory over the Turks, therefore, it is plausible that the “heroes of 1683” played in part an instrumental role for him.

And yet, the Austrian Catholic struggle against the Turks might have been especially meaningful to Deckert because of its historical connections to the cult of Saint Joseph. Deckert repeatedly underlined

<sup>51</sup>Karl Lechner, “Chalwenberg—‘Kahlenberg’—‘Leopoldsborg,’” *Unsere Heimat. Zeitschrift für Landeskunde von Niederösterreich* 30 (1959): 51–79; <https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/Kahlenberg> (accessed Nov. 2023).

<sup>52</sup>Wilson, “A Leonardo ‘conchetto,’” 34.

<sup>53</sup>ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Pechmann's notes, 1901.

<sup>54</sup>NN, “St. Joseph-Kirchenbauverein in Weinhaus bei Wien,” *Das Vaterland*, 14 December 1880, 6.

<sup>55</sup>NN, “St. Joseph-Kirchenbauverein in Weinhaus bei Wien,” *Das Vaterland*, 5 April 1882, 4.

<sup>56</sup>Hans Maria Truxa, “Die St. Josephs-Votivkirche an der Türkenschanze,” *Das Vaterland*, 24 May 1883, 5–6; NN, “St. Josephs-Votivkirche an der Türkenschanze,” *Das Vaterland*, 10 September 1883, 3; NN, “Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt,” *Das Vaterland*, 11 September 1883, 6; NN, “Das katholisch-politische Casino Mariahilf-Neubau,” *Das Vaterland*, 12 September 1883, 8; NN, “Vierte Generalversammlung des St. Joseph-Kirchenbauvereines in Weinhaus,” *Das Vaterland*, 25 March 1884, 7.

<sup>57</sup>ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Pechmann's notes, 1901.



this relationship in his orations in the 1880s.<sup>58</sup> Most importantly, it has been pointed out that the strong public interest in the Turks around 1883 in general had less to do with the Turks and with the past than with contemporary political and societal concerns. The idea of the Turkish siege was essentially symbolic of what was perceived as present-day threats to society, and the idea of an external foe was used in the contemporary political landscape as a way to promote alternative visions of the Austrian nation.<sup>59</sup>

In 1883, Father Deckert's faithful companion since his early years in Leopoldstadt, Hans Truxa, seeking support for the church in Weinhaus, associated the wars against the Turks and the worship of Saint Joseph with the patriotic struggle against the contemporary dark forces in Austria. In his speech at the Catholic-Patriotic Association of Lower Austria, Truxa suggested that the new church was the most appropriate memorial for the victory over the Turks. Deckert, Truxa argued, had made the devotion to Saint Joseph "the task of his life," and his idea to devote the church in Weinhaus to the patron saint of the Catholic Church and to lay the foundation stone during the jubilee of the liberation from the Turks, was "as Catholic as it was patriotic." Therefore, Truxa encouraged the citizens of Vienna to donate funds to the construction. "Our time," Truxa ended his talk, "is divided in two great armies. On the one side stand the materialists, atheists, nihilists . . . —on the other side the flowers of godliness and morality are blossoming." By contributing to the construction of the church in Weinhaus, the Austrian citizens would show to future generations that "even in the second half of the nineteenth century despite all tempests there were still men who full-heartedly stood up for God, faith, and fatherland."<sup>60</sup>

### The Jews

Who did Deckert see as the main enemies of Austrian society? In 1893, the Weinhaus preacher declared these were the Jews. At this juncture, when St. Joseph in Weinhaus was formally declared completed, the preacher held a triduum in the church—three discourses on three consecutive days—reflecting on the significance of the accomplishment.<sup>61</sup> The first of the talks was focused on the victory over the Turks in 1683, the second on the "contemporary danger," identified by Deckert as the domination of Christian society by the Jews after their emancipation, while the third treated the "possible salvation" from the Jewish peril. At that point, thus, Josef Deckert evoked the Turkish menace as a parallel to what he declared was a similar, contemporary Jewish threat.

The solution that Deckert advocated was that of the return to the special laws that segregated Jews from Christians before emancipation. This was in line with arguments that had been conveyed by illiberal Roman Catholics since the 1880s. Thus, the "salvation" proposed by Deckert was reminiscent of the ideas that the Roman bimonthly, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, had promoted for instance in a series of three articles published in 1890 on the "causes," "effects," and "remedies" of the "Jewish question" in Europe.<sup>62</sup> Through the years from 1893 until 1898, Josef Deckert held at least thirty orations against the Jews and published several anti-Jewish booklets.<sup>63</sup> His efforts included a pamphlet containing a "Lord's Prayer against the Jews" and a series of eight orations entitled *Juden raus* that were later published in a booklet.<sup>64</sup> The priest of Weinhaus explicitly declared himself to be antisemitic and did not

<sup>58</sup>NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 11 September 1883, 6; NN, "St. Joseph Kirchenbauverein in Weinhaus," *Das Vaterland*, 28 March 1886, 13; NN, "Verein zur Erbauung der St. Joseph-Votivkirche in Weinhaus," *Das Vaterland*, 1 April 1888, 7.

<sup>59</sup>Healy, "1883 Vienna in the Turkish Mirror," 102.

<sup>60</sup>Truxa, "Die St. Josephs-Votivkirche an der Türkenschanze," 5–6.

<sup>61</sup>The speeches were held on the 8th, 9th and 10th of September 1893, cf. ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1893, and later published in: Deckert, *Türkennoth und Judenherrschaft*.

<sup>62</sup>Raffaele Ballerini, "Della questione giudaica in Europa; Gli effetti," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (1890): 385–407; Raffaele Ballerini, "Della questione giudaica in Europa; Le cause," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (1890): 5–20; Raffaele Ballerini, "Della questione giudaica in Europa; I rimedii," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 4 (1890): 641–55; Miccoli, "Santa Sede," Ruggero Taradel and Barbara Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole: "La Civiltà Cattolica" e la questione ebraica 1850–1945* (Rome, 2000).

<sup>63</sup>Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert," 76–77.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

take a clear stance against racial anti-Jewish ideology.<sup>65</sup> Concurrently, Deckert launched an attempt to demonstrate the veracity of the ritual murder accusations against Jews that continued to reappear in Central Europe throughout the nineteenth century. Deckert's campaign led to a lawsuit by rabbi and politician Joseph Bloch, Deckert's defeat in court, and his being sentenced to the payment of a fine.<sup>66</sup>

In general, historians have suggested that conservative Catholics in Austria and elsewhere in Europe, who had previously identified the principal threat to Catholicism in the liberal parties and governments, gradually began blaming the Jews for what they saw as modern anti-Christian developments during the 1880s.<sup>67</sup> The studies that refer to Josef Deckert as a prominent representative of the Austrian antisemitic preachers seem to imply that he followed a trajectory of this kind. It is therefore striking that, as this research shows, Deckert hardly wrote about Jews before 1893, apart from mentions in a few general and sporadic remarks.

The Austrian school reform of 1869, which granted teachers of all confessions access to public schools, was not received favorably in the Catholic political association of Leopoldstadt. In 1872, members of the association had observed that in the girl's school in Brigittenau female Jewish teachers had let their pupils pray, while the Catholic teachers had refused to do the same.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, a member of the association, Eduard Anderski, proposed a resolution against the hiring of Jewish teachers in public schools, arguing that Jews would not be able to serve the interests of the Catholic Church and Catholic parents. The proposal was read aloud by Deckert at a subsequent meeting and unanimously accepted. In another meeting later the same year, Anderski decried attacks by the Jewish press against Catholic priests, while Josef Deckert proposed an initiative in support of small traders.<sup>69</sup> In 1873, Deckert reported that the "Jewish press" in Germany and Austria had given false statements concerning a recent allocation of the pope.<sup>70</sup>

The only notes about Jews from Deckert's hand during the 1880s seem to be a tirade in 1885 in his own church diary against two liberal communal politicians that the priest labelled the *Jud* and the Protestant, and a denouncement in 1887 in his *S. Joseph Messenger* of the introduction of laws favoring Jews over Catholics.<sup>71</sup> It is likely that Deckert contributed regularly to the *Correspondenz-Blatt* in the 1880s, though it is difficult to trace the authorship of the articles that were mostly not signed with names. However, there is no indication that he wrote anything consistent about Jews in that paper until 1896.<sup>72</sup>

There is no evidence that a specific incident or impulse caused Deckert to turn against the Jews in 1893. The question of what led the priest to embrace antisemitism at this moment is therefore difficult to answer decisively. There is little doubt that Deckert's campaign must be interpreted in the context of the ascent to power of the Christian Socials. Boyer has pointed to a rise of antisemitism around 1893 in Vienna due to attempts by the Liberals to bar the Christian Socials from seats in the city council and certain controversial measures to curb clerical influence in the schools, such as the decision by Mayor Johann Prix to prohibit teachers and pupils from raising their voice when making the sign of the cross

<sup>65</sup>Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert," 87–89.

<sup>66</sup>Josef Deckert, *Ein Ritualmord, aktenmäßig nachgewiesen* (Vienna, 1893); Josef Deckert, *Vier Tirolerkinder Opfer des chasidischen Fanatismus. Urkundlich dargestellt* (Vienna, 1893); Kieval, *Blood Inscriptions*, 142–43; David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton, 2018), 528–29; Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna*, 296–97.

<sup>67</sup>Miccoli, "Santa Sede"; Olaf Blaschke and Aram Mattioli, eds., *Katholischer Antisemitismus im 19. Jahrhundert: Ursachen und Traditionen im internationalen Vergleich* (Zürich, 2000).

<sup>68</sup>NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 3 March 1872, 4.

<sup>69</sup>NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 24 April 1872, 4; NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 2 May 1872, 5; NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 24 November 1872, 5.

<sup>70</sup>NN, "Katholisch-politischer Verein Leopoldstadt," *Das Vaterland*, 15 January 1873, 5.

<sup>71</sup>ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1885; Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert," 40.

<sup>72</sup>E.g., Josef Deckert, "Der I. internationale Antifreimaurercongress in Trient. (Bericht eines Congressmitgliedes.)," *Correspondenz-Blatt für den katholischen Clerus Oesterreichs*, 25 October 1896, 723–26; Josef Deckert, "Katholisch-antisemitisch," *Correspondenz-Blatt für den katholischen Clerus Oesterreichs*, 25 January 1898, 51–56.

in the schools.<sup>73</sup> In December 1895 a report issued by the police in the Austrian capital described the Lueger cult and the spread of antisemitism at the time as signals of corrosion of state authority within circles, which had until then been apolitical. The report listed six priests that it counted among Lueger's staunchest supporters and who most actively were diffusing antisemitism. Among these, it singled out Josef Deckert as "the soul of the antisemitic agitation."<sup>74</sup> However, whereas some of the other priests mentioned in the report, Adam Latschka and Franz Stauracz in particular, were prominent members of the Christian Social movement, this was not the case for Deckert. In fact, there is no trace in the sources of direct connections between Deckert and the Christian Socials until after the mid-1890s.<sup>75</sup>

A different source of inspiration for Deckert's turn toward antisemitism might have been his acquaintance with Sebastian Brunner. Brunner, who was a preacher at the university church in Vienna, has been regarded as one of the first clerics to diffuse antisemitism in Austria in the nineteenth century. Apparently, Brunner had been inspired by Abraham a Sancta Clara since childhood, and as an old man was strongly influenced by August Rohling, whose book *Der Talmudjude*, and promotion of the blood libel, were the objects of heated debates at the time. Thus, in his last book of 1891, *Zwei Bushmänner*, directed against Heine and Börne, Brunner put special emphasis on the theme of ritual murder.<sup>76</sup> Sebastian Brunner spent the last years of his life in the *Greisenasyl*, the old age home in Währing, and if Deckert had not known Brunner earlier, he certainly came to know him during this period. In 1891 and 1892, Brunner participated in several inaugurations of monuments at Deckert's church in Weinhaus and in 1893, upon Brunner's death, Deckert wrote in his diary that the prelate used to visit him "almost daily."<sup>77</sup> It is plausible therefore, also given Deckert's focus on Rohling and the blood libel since the beginning of his campaign, that conversations with Brunner in the beginning of the 1890s influenced his espousal of antisemitism in 1893.

While it is likely that strategic political concerns, as well as influence from Brunner and others, might have been instrumental to Deckert's decision to launch an antisemitic campaign in 1893, I will argue here that ideas cultivated by the preacher since his youth—the engagement in favor of workers and artisans and the worship of Saint Joseph, and later the remembrance of the Turkish siege—shaped his mindset in a way that made it susceptible to the adoption of antisemitism.

Historians of antisemitism, at least those who studied the Catholics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have shown little interest in the cult of Saint Joseph. Yet historically the devotion to Joseph was closely connected with Catholic preaching against both Jews and Muslims. At least since the fifteenth century, Joseph was conceived of as the first convert to Christianity and as the first converter, having converted the shepherds at the manger after the birth of Jesus. Not coincidentally, the devotion to Saint Joseph was given official recognition by Sixtus IV, during whose papacy Islam was seen increasingly as a threat to Christian Europe. Saint Joseph, besides giving a name to Ignatius Loyola's house of catechumens designated to the conversion of Muslims and Jews in Rome, was invoked consistently by a series of the most fervent converters and preachers against the Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Isidoro Isolano, Bernardino da Feltre, and Vincent Ferrer.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the ideals of hard work and middle-class values that the cult of Saint Joseph came to reflect in the nineteenth century were regarded by the antisemites as contrary to the nature of the Jewish people.

These characteristics of the cult of Saint Joseph found expression in the interior of Deckert's new church in Weinhaus. One of the side altars depicting the death of Joseph was flanked by sculptures of

<sup>73</sup>Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*, 334–35.

<sup>74</sup>Michael Wladika, *Hitlers Vätergeneration. Die Ursprünge des Nationalsozialismus in der k.u.k. Monarchie* (Vienna, 2005), 276.

<sup>75</sup>Holzer, "Dr. Josef Deckert," 66–68.

<sup>76</sup>Weinzierl, "On the Pathogenesis of the Anti-Semitism of Sebastian Brunner."

<sup>77</sup>ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1891–93; Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 138.

<sup>78</sup>Wilson, "A Leonardo 'conpetto,'" 32–34; Carolyn C. Wilson, "Some Further Evidence of St Joseph's Cult in Renaissance Italy and Related St Joseph Altarpieces," in *Die Bedeutung des hl. Josef in der Heilsgeschichte. Akten des IX. Internationalen Symposions über den hl. Josef*, eds. Johannes Hattler and German Rovira (Kisslegg, 2006), 908; Black, *Creating the Cult of Saint Joseph*.

Bernard of Clairvaux, who laid forth some of the fundamental tenets of the Church's views on Jews, and the prolific anti-Jewish preacher Bernardino of Siena, on the other side, wielding a sword. To the right of the chancel, a Loreto chapel was designed upon the express wish of Josef Deckert.<sup>79</sup> According to legend, in 1291, in order to escape the Muslim invasion of the Holy Land, the humble home of the Holy Family had been carried by angels from Nazareth to Loreto in the then Papal States. After the Ottoman annexation of the Holy Land in 1517, the prospect of reasserting Christian rule over the Holy Places through crusades waned, and the status of Loreto gained renewed importance.<sup>80</sup> In the Viennese interpretation of the late nineteenth century, expressed in the new church in Weinhaus, Loreto combined the remembrance of the Turkish menace, the cult of Saint Joseph, and the veneration of manual labor. Three stained windows adorned the chapel. The right and left ones depicted Mary's parents. The central piece was a representation of the Holy Family at work. At the centre, the young Jesus was sawing a piece of wood in front of his admiring parents.<sup>81</sup>

It appears that the process of raising funds for and constructing the church in Weinhaus brought Deckert to combine the ideas of veneration of Saint Joseph and the memory of the Turkish siege. He did not yet, it seems, directly compare the Ottoman attackers of 1683 to contemporary Jews or claim that the Jews were the primary adversaries of Christian society. However, the orations by two Jesuits, whom Deckert invited to speak at various stages of the church's construction, leave little doubt that such notions were ripening in the minds of the people surrounding the priest of Weinhaus.

At the celebration in 1886 of the completion of the bell tower, Father Heinrich Abel, later known for his popular anti-Jewish preaching, declared that "in Austria devotion always went hand in hand with patriotism." Without mentioning the Jews, he urged the small traders to turn to the Church and Saint Joseph for protection from "egoistic high finance."<sup>82</sup> Father Max von Klinkowström, like Abel, was one of the most popular Catholic orators at that time in Vienna. Apparently, he was quite closely connected to Deckert, who invited him to hold speeches three times during the church's construction: at the ground-breaking ceremony in 1883, at the foundation stone ceremony in 1884, and at the inauguration in 1889.<sup>83</sup> At the inauguration, von Klinkowström drew a direct parallel between the menace once posed by the Turks, and the threats facing present society. According to historians who have examined the work of this Jesuit preacher, he did not usually focus on the Jews in his discourses, but rather on liberal society more broadly.<sup>84</sup> In his 1889 oration, in any case, the Viennese audience would hardly have needed any explication for them to understand the implicit references to the Jews of Austria. The enemies are no longer the Turks, the Jesuit father said, the present enemies are "our own fellow citizens [Stadt- und Landgenossen]" who, like "vampires" suck the wealth of the Christians, strive toward world domination and undermine the foundations of Christian society "through subversive activities [Maulwurfsarbeit]." "We know these enemies," he added, "it is superfluous to characterize them further."<sup>85</sup>

Shortly afterward, Klinkowström professed his adherence to the Christian Social movement. All believers, he said, should now gather in the new church in Weinhaus to fight for the Lord no matter their social background—"that is in a real Christian-socialist way." At the end of the speech, Klinkowström asked the audience rhetorically who they were waiting for to pay for the completion of the church's inner ornaments. "For yourself," the Jesuit preacher went on. The people at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah spent the equivalent of 240,000 gold florins and 120,000 silver florins on building the Second Temple. "What do you think of those sums? You are going to say that they

<sup>79</sup>Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 164–67.

<sup>80</sup>Bernard Hamilton, "The Ottomans, the Humanists and the Holy House of Loreto," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1987): 1–19.

<sup>81</sup>Snizek, *Geschichte und Geschichten*, 164–67.

<sup>82</sup>NN, "Kirchliche Nachrichten," *Das Vaterland*, 13 September 1886, 2; on Abel: Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism*.

<sup>83</sup>Hans Maria Truxa, *Erinnerungs-Denkmäler der Befreiung Wiens aus der Türkennoth* (Vienna, 1891), 26–42.

<sup>84</sup>Johann Heiss and Johannes Feichtinger, "Distant Neighbors: Uses of Orientalism in the Late Nineteenth-Century Austro-Hungarian Empire," in *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History: From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. James Hodkinson, John Walker, Shaswati Mazumdar, and Johannes Feichtinger (Rochester, NY, 2013), 152–53.

<sup>85</sup>Truxa, *Erinnerungs-Denkmäler*, 38–39.

were Jews! Yes, they were that too, of course, it was their Temple that they built.” But, the Jesuit concluded, although the parishioners did not have that much money, they would take care to provide the church with a fitting decoration, because they had “hearts of gold.”<sup>86</sup>

In his diary, Deckert described Klinkowström’s talk as “fascinating.”<sup>87</sup> Significantly, in the first of his three sermons against the Jews of 1893, Deckert cited Klinkowström’s 1889 oration as a point of departure for his arguments. Referring to Klinkowström’s speech, the enemies of the Christians, Deckert declared, were “foreigners [Fremdlinge] who aspire to world domination . . . to name these enemies more precisely is superfluous; everyone knows them.”<sup>88</sup>

Apart from Klinkowström, Deckert made direct reference in his 1893 discourse to two other Catholic clerics, Theodor Kohn, archbishop of Olomouc in Moravia, and Simon Aichner, bishop of Brixen. The Weinhaus preacher specifically cited a lecture by Kohn, held in 1891 and published in 1892 in Germany and in 1893 in Vienna, in which the bishop stated that the Jews had bound the Christians with “iron shackles.”<sup>89</sup> Deckert claimed without evidence that Aichner had made a similar statement.<sup>90</sup> Whereas it appears that Deckert was inspired by Klinkowström, given the summary nature of the references to Kohn and Aichner, it seems as if he made use of the names of these highly placed clerics merely as a precaution in order to lend authority to his new theories—theories that Deckert knew might not be received benevolently by the Austrian clerical hierarchy.

## Conclusion

Josef Deckert has been depicted in the historical literature as a prominent representative of the clerical antisemites that emerged in Austria in the 1880s and 1890s. Nevertheless, this study indicates that the Weinhaus preacher only turned to antisemitism late and abruptly.

The near total absence of antisemitic statements in Deckert’s publications and writings prior to 1893 does not preclude that the priest might have harbored antisemitic sentiments or subscribed to anti-Jewish prejudice earlier. He likely did so to some degree, but it is improbable that antisemitism was important or central to his worldview. Certainly, he did not choose to advocate antisemitic ideology publicly before that point. Deckert thus was not a frontrunner of clerical antisemitism, like Rohling or Brunner. Nor was he among the clerics who committed publicly to antisemitic ideas during the 1870s and 1880s, such as priest and journalist Albert Wiesinger, one of the clerics named in the above-mentioned police report of 1895.<sup>91</sup> Rather, I would argue, Deckert belonged to those who appropriated antisemitic ideology in the 1890s and chose to propagate it after this had been normalized as part of a conservative Catholic worldview.

Josef Deckert employed antisemitism to attract support for his new church at a time when the ideology had proven most successful. It is hard, therefore, not to see Deckert’s conversion as opportunistic to some degree. At the same time, it appears that the priest did not follow a delineated strategy and that his adoption of antisemitism was not guided by the Vatican, the Austrian clerical hierarchy, or civil authorities. It does not seem, thus, that Deckert was dependent upon or coordinated his actions with the Christian Social movement in any direct way.

This study, therefore, could suggest that in the nineteenth century, the activism of ordinary Austrian clerics might have been central to the Vatican’s acceptance of the rise of the antisemitic movements. Not unlike how, on the contrary, it has been argued, in the twentieth century the reactions against racist antisemitism by some ordinary Austrian Catholics were central to the Vatican’s rethinking of the Church’s relation to Judaism.<sup>92</sup> This may encourage historians to look less at top-down policies

<sup>86</sup>Truxa, *Erinnerungs-Denkmäler*, 38–39.

<sup>87</sup>“packende Ansprache,” ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert’s notes, 1889.

<sup>88</sup>Deckert, *Türkennoth und Judenherrschaft*, 2.

<sup>89</sup>Deckert, *Türkennoth und Judenherrschaft*, 9; Michael L. Miller, “The Rise and Fall of Archbishop Kohn: Czechs, Germans, and Jews in Turn-of-the Century Moravia,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 3 (2006): 446–74.

<sup>90</sup>Deckert, *Türkennoth und Judenherrschaft*, 10.

<sup>91</sup>Otto Schiller, “Albert Wiesinger. Pionier und Nestor der katholischen Journalistik Österreichs” (Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, 1952).

<sup>92</sup>John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, 2012).

when analyzing the spread of populist movements and focus more on the dynamics between local individuals and cultures.

This research illustrates how in Deckert's case certain cultural ideas might have provided a mental framework for his adoption of antisemitism. The analysis demonstrates the profound importance for the priest of the devotion to Saint Joseph. The patron saint of Austria represented a model for the artisans and workers and the defense of Catholic society in times of social instability, and Deckert called on the saint to mobilize the Catholics and to counter what he perceived as the country's dark forces. In the process of securing backing for the construction of the church in Weinhaus, Deckert aptly turned to the remembrance of the Turkish siege, conjuring up the Turks as a symbol of contemporary threats against Catholic society. The mental image of Saint Joseph protecting against the Turkish menace in the 1680s appeared to be readily exchangeable for that of the saint countering the Jewish peril two hundred years later. Indeed, the turn that Deckert took around 1883 toward the Turks bears semblance to the one he took toward the Jews ten years later. In both moments, the change appears sudden and instrumental. The mental construction of Saint Joseph countering the Turks, thus, allowed for the Jews to be designated as enemies in a well-established, recognizable model. And the conspiracist frame lent itself excellently to populist orations, such as the three sermons that Deckert held in the Weinhaus church in 1893.

This article, therefore, raises questions regarding the dimensions of the cult of Saint Joseph and its significance in connection with the emergence of antisemitism in the modern period. In this regard, it must be asked to what extent the importance that Deckert gave to Saint Joseph and the Turks is typical for the Austrian context and whether Austrian clerics may have influenced the Vatican's promotion of the saint. Josef Deckert went on a pilgrimage to Rome and was received in audience by Leo XIII in 1888, the year before the pope issued his encyclical on the devotion to Saint Joseph, but it is not known whether the Austrian priest discussed the cult with the pope at this occasion.<sup>93</sup> More broadly the study invites further exploration into the role that the propagation of traditional cultural systems of thought may play in modern diffusion of conspiracy theories and populism.

During the last years of his life, Josef Deckert received considerable public fame. He was named honorable citizen of Weinhaus in 1889 and received the Salvator Medal for service to the city of Vienna by Karl Lueger in 1899. After his death, in 1901, the square in front of the St. Joseph Church was named after the Weinhaus preacher as the *Pfarrer-Deckert Platz*.<sup>94</sup>

Due to his talent for social mobilization, Deckert left his successors a transformed parish. The most monumental manifestation of his influence was the new church that towered over Vienna's eighteenth district. The St. Joseph Church continued to convey a set of meanings into the future that Deckert had inscribed upon it: The cult of Saint Joseph, both as a humble artisan and as a converter of and protector against Muslims and Jews, the remembrance of the victory over the Turks in 1683, and, less directly, by implication, the Catholic struggle against the Jews.

A long time would pass after World War II before local citizens began questioning the legacy of the Weinhaus preacher. In 1989 after lengthy polemics in the press, Deckert's name was removed from the square and tram stop in front of the church. This only happened after several years of resistance by members of the Weinhaus parish as well as by the politicians from the Austrian People's Party who made up the majority of the local city council.<sup>95</sup> While Deckert's antisemitism was not orchestrated by the Vatican or the Austrian authorities, it was not suppressed by these either. Thus, Deckert's legacy was long carried on unabated to impress itself on future generations, in Währing and beyond.

<sup>93</sup> ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1888.

<sup>94</sup> ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Deckert's notes, 1899; ASJW, Pfarre Weinhaus Memorabilienbücher, Josef Pechmann's notes, 1901; Rudolf Geyer, *Handbuch der Wiener Matriken. Ein Hilfswerk für Matrikenführer und Familienforscher* (Vienna, 1929); Währinger Heimatkunde, ed., *Währing. Ein Heimatbuch des 18. Wiener Gemeindebezirks* (Vienna, 1923–25), 752.

<sup>95</sup> Peter Pelinka, "Ein Prediger des Hasses: Der "Pfarrer-Deckert-Platz" in Wien-Währing soll endlich umbenannt werden," *AZ/Tagblatt*, 29 June 1989, 17; NN, "Pfarrer Deckert-Platz": Tafeln zurückgeschickt," *Der Standard*, 30–31 December 1989, 7.

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