

Memorials to Credit and Blame

By Charles Tilly

My brother Richard has become more or less German. Despite his having grown up in Illinois, his nearly fifty years of analyzing German history and nearly forty years of living in Germany have left him with a German family, a German accent and a German perspective on world affairs. Meanwhile, my family has become French, although not to the extent that Richard's has become German. My son Chris was born in Angers, France, and all of us eventually accumulated years of French residence. When our families get together, we often compare notes on French/German/American differences.

In the 1970s, a few years after Richard and his charming Würzburg-born wife Elisabeth moved from Connecticut back to Germany, my family visited them from France. During the visit, we all went on an excursion into the thick Teutoburg Forest near Detmold. There we joined hundreds of Germans picnicking at the Hermann Monument. Two million people visit the monument each year, the most popular in all Germany.

“Hermann” is a mistranslation of Armin, a Germanic warrior and sometime Roman ally. In the very first decade of the Common Era, Armin defeated three Roman legions under Publius Quinctilius Varus in the Teutoburg Forest. Tacitus described the former Roman ally as the rival of the German leader Segestes, who remained loyal to Rome:

But Varus fell by fate and by the sword of Arminius, with whom Segestes, though dragged into war by the unanimous voice of the nation, continued to be at feud, his resentment being heightened by personal motives, as Arminius had carried off his daughter who was betrothed to another.

For “Romans”, read “French”: During the 19th century, Armin became a national symbol of resistance to the French forces that had invaded and conquered much of Germany during the Napoleonic Wars. Sculptor Ernst von Bandel began the patriotic monument in 1838, but he didn’t finish it until 1875. By then, Prussia had trounced France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, Napoleon III’s Second Empire had collapsed, Prussia had taken Alsace and much of Lorraine from France as spoils of war, and Germany had united under Prussian leadership.

Including its base, Armin’s commanding statue towers 175 feet above the ground. The huge sword in Armin’s right hand bears the inscription, “Germany’s unity is my strength, my strength is Germany’s might,” and it points toward France. We tourists couldn’t see the inscription, however. Despite its hollow interior, with a steep stairway reaching to the statue’s head and arms, tourists can’t go beyond the 69 steps that lead up to the base. But we did see the monument’s cornerstone and, inscribed on it, a message calculated to chill Frenchman and Francophile alike:

An Arminius. Über den Rhein hast du einst Roms Legionen getrieben, und Germanien dankt dir, dass es heute noch ist. Schwinge ferner dein Schwert, wenn Frankreichs plündernde Horden gierig lechzend des Rheins heimische Gauen bedrohn.

[To Arminius. Thou once drove Rome's legions beyond the Rhine, and Germans now thank thee for Germany's existence. If France's plundering hordes greedily threaten the homeland's Rhenish lands, swing thy sword again.]

In these vividly vindictive words, the concepts of credit and blame join forcefully. In 1875, united Germans took credit for humiliating presumptuous France. They retaliated monumentally for decades of French scorn.

The French took a while to reply. In 1867, as Garibaldi led the drive for Italian unification, Emperor Napoleon III's troops defended the Pope from Garibaldi's forces. But in 1870, war-torn France withdrew its soldiers and Italian patriots seized the Papal States. Then German troops humiliated French armies and took the French emperor prisoner. How could the French restore their national honor? Immediately after the disastrous Franco-Prussian War, French Catholics proposed to wash away national sin and shame by two measures: a campaign to encourage popular devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the construction of a Parisian church dedicated to those devotions. Naturally enough, they called the church *Sacré Coeur*.

The plan's originator, Alexandre Legentil, had fled Paris as Prussian armies approached. While in the provinces he had sworn that "if God saved Paris and France and delivered the sovereign pontiff, he would contribute according to his means to the construction in Paris of a sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart." In 1873, a very Catholic National Assembly authorized the church's construction on the city's highest hill, Montmartre—the Martyrs' Mountain, in one disputed etymology. It took another decade to raise the funds, clear the site and lay the foundation.

Montmartre already had a religious history. Popular legend made it the site of martyrdom for the first bishop of Paris, St. Denis, at the end of the 3rd century. As for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, its veneration had originated during the 17th century under King Louis XIV. In 1864, Pope Pius IX beatified the cult's 17th-century founder, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque. By 1873, she and the site had become favorites

of monarchist, anti-revolutionary Catholics. The joining of the Sacred Heart with Montmartre therefore had powerful resonance in the France of the 1870s.

Yet Montmartre also acquired anti-religious significance as the starting point of the 1871 Paris Commune. The Commune began in March of that year when the defeated government ordered troops to remove cannons from Montmartre's heights. Parisian workers resisted the order, and the soldiers on guard refused to fire on them. Members of the crowd later seized and killed generals Lecomte and Thomas near the hill. Lecomte had ordered the troops to fire, and Thomas had commanded troops who had slaughtered workers during the Revolution of 1848. Furthermore, as national troops massacred communards in May 1871, a vengeful detachment of their ranks murdered the archbishop of Paris. On Montmartre's heights, the secular image of the Commune confronted the religious image of the Sacred Heart. Despite fierce secular and republican opposition, the Sacred Heart project won.

The new archbishop of Paris took responsibility for the project in January 1872. He wrote to Legentil:

You have considered from their true perspectives the ills of our country. . . . The conspiracy against God and Christ has prevailed in a multitude of hearts and in punishment for an almost universal apostasy, society has been subjected to all the horrors of war with a victorious foreigner and an even more horrible war amongst the children of the same country. Having become, by our prevarication, rebels against heaven, we have fallen during our troubles into the abyss of anarchy. The land of France presents the terrifying image of a place where no order prevails, while the future offers still more terrors to come. . . . This temple, erected as a public act of contrition

and reparation . . . will stand amongst us as a protest against other monuments and works of art erected for the glorification of vice and impiety.

The archbishop got his basilica, and he got it located on Paris's highest hill.

The foundation stone for Sacré Coeur was laid in 1875, the very same year that Germans finished building the Hermann Monument. Construction of the striking white travertine building ended in 1914, just in time for a war that would end in German humiliation, not French. After Germany's defeat, Sacré Coeur, like the Hermann Monument, became a favorite tourist destination. In case anyone should miss the church's national significance, equestrian statues of Joan of Arc and Saint Louis recall France's military destiny.

The great divide in the French political soul is such that Sacré Coeur inevitably became a split metaphor in an on-going contestation. While Catholics and monarchists adored the church, secularists and republicans ridiculed it. In his 1898 novel *Paris*, Émile Zola called Sacré Coeur a "citadel of the absurd." Eugène Ogé drew one of the era's best-known anticlerical posters as an advertisement for the republican newspaper *La Lanterne*. It showed an immense, devilish priest wrapped around Sacré Coeur and blotting out the rest of Paris. Its motto: *Voilà l'ennemi* ("Here is the enemy"). For believers, however, Sacré Coeur came to represent the intermingling of credit and blame in both history and religiously informed meta-history: credit for sustaining faith, blame for sins that weakened France. And Sacré Coeur did more than represent: It aimed to teach future generations of Frenchman what to believe about their past. Believers aimed to beget more believers, and on balance, they succeeded.

We Are Our Stories

Not just French and Germans but everyone remembers some humiliation for which it would be gratifying to exact vengeance. We all carry at least a chip or two on our shoulders, yet few of us build monuments to credit or blame. We leave that sort of work to priests, poets and politicians. Some of their monuments go up stone by stone, like the Hermann Monument and Sacré Coeur. Others consist of widely shared stories, symbols or artistic representations. All, however, are involved in the construction of collective memory, and that construction depends above all on the universal human proclivity to construct narratives—to tell stories—whose essence is that they assign credit and blame.

We learn about credit and blame as children, though without being told that this is what is happening. From early on, parents blame their children for misdeeds, praise them for accomplishments, and take credit for their good qualities. Kids pick up the message by expecting credit when they accomplish something, but also by blaming others when they can. We grow up demanding credit, avoiding blame if possible, ourselves in turn blaming and giving credit in myriad ways. A few people receive highly visible credit or blame in the form of Nobel Prizes, Academy Awards or prison sentences. But on a smaller scale, everyone plays the game of credit and blame, and we do it virtually every day.

Assigning credit and blame involves the universal human tendency to perceive, describe and remember social experiences as stories: simplified cause-effect accounts in which A does X to B, with outcome Y. Credit- and blame-giving follow parallel logics that run backward in a few discernible steps: from some negative or positive outcome to the assignment of a value (large or small) to that outcome, to the identification of some agent that caused the outcome, to a judgment of that agent's competence and responsibility for the action that produced the outcome. This logic awards someone who deliberately kills many people (unless they happen to be official

enemies of the state) a large negative score—blame—and someone who knowingly saves many lives a large positive score—credit. The logic works as a sort of elemental justice detector.

Most of the time, we assign lesser scores for smaller derelictions and delights: Failure to meet daily obligations receives blame, while unexpected generosity receives credit. Much the same logic applies in gossip, psychological counseling, court proceedings, responses to job performance, deliberations of prize committees, online discussions, political speeches and public opinion polls. In all cases, the act of giving credit or (especially) assigning blame draws us-them boundaries: We are the worthy people, they the unworthy.

The most dramatic versions of crediting and blaming take up the responsibility for major public events, and responsible authorities naturally seek ways to evade blame. Obviously, then, assigning credit and blame is no mere game. In life, who gets credit and blame matters both retroactively and prospectively. It matters retroactively because it becomes part of the stories we tell about good and bad people (including presidents), good and bad behavior (including political behavior), and where we come from (including the fundamentals of our political tradition). It matters prospectively because it indicates whom we can trust, and whom we should mistrust.

Most broadly, such attribution matters because the process of collectively discussing and assigning credit and blame defines the boundaries of what we believe about the nature and possibilities of social life. In the stories we hear and tell reside the imaginable totality of what we and others can and cannot do, for good or ill, in the world. Since no individual can try out all available choices and behaviors and judge their consequences, we “fill in” our understanding in a process of socialization that starts when we are young, but that in truth never really stops. When elders or leaders tell stories to others in society, essentially the same process is at work: using narrative

to explain causality in terms of credit and blame—just as when adults tell stories to children, only at a different level. Some say we are what we eat, and that may be so by some physiological measure. When it comes to the social and political lives of human beings, however—lives suffused by the human capacity for creating and manipulating symbols—we are what our culture's stories say we are.

Our stories of credit and blame take many forms but also exhibit some commonalities. One is that the storytelling process is inherently social. Even when we tell stories as individuals and about individuals, we cannot begin to do so in the absence of a social context that makes such judgments meaningful. A second commonality is that we don't assign credit and blame for its own sake, just to create some kind of cognitive closure. We want more than closure; we want justice. We don't settle for clever or comprehensive explanations of the behavior that caused the outcome in question. We ask that the punishment fit the crime, that the reward recognize the accomplishment, that the parties involved get their just deserts. In other words, the stories of all human cultures say we are moral beings.

Do we believe this because it is true, or it is true because we believe it? On the one hand, standards of justice vary from one population and period to another, sometimes dramatically so, which suggests the latter. On the other hand, justice is far more universal than cultural relativists imagine, suggesting the former. Those universal properties, moreover, work across a scale ranging from arguments among friends to the creation of national commissions and tribunals for the pacification of fierce political disputes.

Just as consensus on the moral idiom of credit and blame in our narratives has the effect of binding families and workmates and small groups together, so does the construction of consensus on societal and national levels bind a people together. It is not too much to say that consensus about some narrative is what makes a nation into

a nation, for a nation is by definition a group of people who believe they have enough in common to share a common destiny but who, unlike a tribe or an extended family (clan), are not necessarily blood relatives and who comprise a group so large that coming physically into contact with each person is not possible. A nation, after all, can only be symbolized, since it is too large to be perceived by our immediate senses.

One way that societies achieve consensus on a national narrative has been to combine concrete and symbols in the form of war memorials, as we have seen. This is a more complex process than is often recognized. As we approach memories of victory and defeat, we enter rough ground. Our individual memories are bad enough: selective, self-serving and sometimes invented. Collective memory complicates things further. Every collective memory emerges from a contest among advocates of competing accounts concerning what happened and why. (Think how long it took, for example, for war memorials built in the United States after April 1865 to come to some roughly common equipoise of meaning between North and South.)

Every monument to the past advances some interpretations of its meaning and suppresses others. This struggle over meaning is precisely how a society wrestles with and often (but not always) arrives at some consensus over what it all means. Thus, reaching some minimal requirement for the social glue that holds people together presupposes controlled contention. It is a process that requires some selective forgetting as well as selective remembering. The monumental statue of Armin suppresses the fact that he served for years as a Roman ally who spread the use of Latin among Germans. The white domes of Sacré Coeur make no reference to the deep divisions within France dug by the Franco-Prussian War, the Commune and the basilica's very construction. Maybe that is not as it "has to be", but that is how it always is, in any event. In the end we are our stories, but there is nothing simple about how those stories get written or how future generations understand them.

Credit and Blame in War

Struggles over collective memory pivot on credit and blame. Both, as usual, involve the identification of outcomes, competence, responsibility and us-them boundaries. Advocates struggle over each element. On the credit side, competition concerns which outcome added how much value, who had the competence to produce that outcome, to what extent they did so deliberately with knowledge of the likely consequences, and who else deserves to receive the credit if only because of a shared commitment to the cause. France's Catholic royalists congratulated themselves for maintaining a faithful remnant in the face of national adversity—and perversity, as they saw it.

On the blame side, competition to win control of a symbolic narrative concerns which outcome damaged some valued activity, and by how much. It also concerns who had the competence and intention to produce the damage, and who else should share the blame if only through guilt by association. Blame took up more space than credit in French national discussions of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. Two accounts agreed on the outcome that needed explaining: the political collapse of 1870–71. But judgments of competence, responsibility and value came close to being mirror opposites. On one side, Catholic royalists lumped together the defeated empire, republicans, communards and secularists on the wrong side of the us-them boundary, accusing them of having almost destroyed France. Secular republicans blamed the remnants of a corrupt empire and their ecclesiastical hangers-on for undermining national commitments to muscular democracy.

In general, of course, collective credit and blame often interact: We take credit for saving a situation that our enemies had made toxic. In any normally complex social situation, credit for someone or some side implies blame for someone else, and vice versa. When a society as a whole can agree on who deserves credit and who deserves blame, us-them boundaries are drawn *between* nations. When a society cannot agree,

those boundaries are drawn *within* a nation. Internal boundaries can lead to secession and even civil war, but they do not necessarily do so. Sometimes the very act of disagreeing, if it proceeds within a symbolic process understood and accepted by all, can itself bind a society together: People can agree to disagree without impugning the right of the other to belong to the society. Or to put the matter in more homely terms, all spouses sometimes argue, but not all marriages end in divorce.

Disagreement is put to the greatest test in times of war. War stimulates collective attributions of credit and blame more often than any other human activity. Even revolutions, bungled natural disasters, political corruption and economic crises produce less collective fingerprinting stories of villains and heroes. Wars begin, after all, with built-in divisions between us and them. They continue with losses of life and property that some people always think unjustified. Win, loss or stalemate, wars always end with participants making collective claims about responsibility. Costly but unsuccessful wars, such as the French and American adventures in Vietnam, compound the problem of assigning credit and blame; now we have to deal not only with the military enemy, but with the question of who among our own people got us into the mess, and how.

War memorials extend the argument beyond the peace treaties. Despite most frequently and visibly awarding credit, war memorials always display the interaction of credit and blame. In their own distinctive ways, both the Hermann Monument and Sacré Coeur serve as war memorials. Behind the glorification of German warriors we detect the vilification of France. Behind the sanctification of the French faithful we detect the condemnation of secularists, republicans, radicals and German invaders. A stark us-them boundary marks the difference, though who gets defined as “us” and who as “them” is rarely a singular or simple decision.

Across the Western world, when communities and countries pool their efforts to build symbolic structures, they most often erect churches, war memorials or both at once. Valley Forge National Park, for example, commemorates George Washington's legendary 1777 winter encampment in preparation for engagement with British forces near Philadelphia. Its Washington Memorial Chapel features carvings that represent Washington's brigades, flags for the Army, Navy and French forces, seals from the fifty states, pews dedicated to different patriots, a window portraying periods of Washington's life, and a tablet with the Declaration of Independence over the door. Beside the door tourists see

a statue of Washington showing ' . . . him bearing the burdens of war— anxiety in his face, determination in the grip of the sword, confidence and hope in the pose of the entire figure.' The chapel is easily interpreted as a political expression of the concept of God and country. The architectural message is that the United States was the righteous result of obeying God's will under the leadership of George Washington.

Despite enormous architectural differences, Parisian tourists who visit Valley Forge can recognize surprising similarities with the symbolism of Sacré Coeur. God defends our national cause, and the ungodly undermine it. On one side of the us-them boundary stands Washington alongside his soldiers, their allies and patriots in general. On the other side squirm America's enemies. In 1777, those enemies included Great Britain. Enemies change, of course, but the us-them boundary remains. In many cases, the boundary becomes more abstract over time. American visitors to Valley Forge are no longer riled up against British people; they are riled up abstractly (if they are riled up at all) against tyrants and despots, or better, the concepts of tyranny and despotism.

Even when they don't incorporate chapels or churches, war memorials breathe sacredness. Corrupt them with commercial, secular or unpatriotic themes at your peril, as the Walt Disney Company discovered when it tried to build a "history" theme park near Manassas. The controversies over the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington are also a case in point.

Vietnam veterans took the initiative in pressing for a memorial. Once Congress authorized the two-acre site, however, a committee without a single veteran ran the architectural competition. Yale architecture student Maya Lin won with a v-shaped granite structure containing the names of all the military dead in order of reported death. While it eventually became one of the most visited and admired memorial sites in Washington, organized veterans initially complained bitterly about the abstract design, arguing that by failing to represent heroism directly it perpetuated the picture of the soldiers as losers. The veterans prevailed, winning a second memorial 120 feet away from the first that includes a flagpole and a sculpture of three GIs looking grimly determined.

The arguments were clearly all about assigning credit and blame, and that is also, no doubt, what most of the tens of thousands of visitors to that memorial still do. Americans still disagree about the war and about the memorial, but the process of disagreement, ironically, brings us closer together. We struggle together to find the meaning. It shows we all care. But how we deploy and manage our care, it turns out, matters a lot.

Reconciliation, Retaliation or Reparation

As people construct collective memories of victory and credit, loss and blame, they sometimes settle for monuments and other reminders that lean toward political positions on one side or the other of the us-them divide. More often, however, they activate one of three other logics: reconciliation, retaliation or reparation. Here is

precisely where disagreement over the meaning of the past can drive societies toward social separation.

Reconciliation typically involves some ritual encounter followed by a declaration that bygones should be bygones. Two friends blame each other for some bad outcome, then a third friend persuades them to make up. The victor treats the vanquished generously, and the two combatants go off for a ceremonial drink. In the most spectacular version, a truth and reconciliation commission brings together victims and perpetrators from a great civil conflict, perpetrators confess their crimes in response to some guarantees of immunity and absolution, before participants ritually symbolize forgiving and forgetting. If the reconciliation routine works, the parties then get on with collaboration in new collective enterprises.

Advocates of reconciliation often make three arguments for public apologies followed by mutual commitment: catharsis, justice and expediency. Public discussion of past wrongs, goes the first line of reasoning, allows aggrieved people to stop grieving and wrongdoers to assuage their guilt. The justice argument fixes blame in the style of jail sentences, punitive damages and shaming ceremonies when the perpetrator shows remorse and commitment to better behavior. The expediency principle focuses on the future: Unresolved conflicts impede cooperation. So let's agree on what happened and why, and then get on with life.

Collective *retaliation*, however, depends on a strict logic of tit for tat: You did us wrong, so you should suffer as badly. Where the line between perpetrators and victims is clear, collective retaliation has two advantages: It corresponds to an individual sense of justice that cuts across cultures and historical periods; and it involves a simple calculus—you stole our cow, we take your cow. But it also has two enormous disadvantages. It allows the rasher members of one side to score hero points by acting aggressively against vulnerable members of the other side. And it

escalates easily, because members of a newly victimized side regularly interpret a retaliatory attack as disproportionate to the offense, and as a threat to their side's credibility and honor. We know about escalation from legendary feuds between the Montagues and Capulets or the Hatfields and McCoys.

Indeed, without a firm stopping rule comparable to the clock's running out in football—which is to say, in the absence of strong governments—ritual killing could continue for years. Blood feuds once disfigured large areas of southern Europe, for example. Remember that German generals Armin and Segestes were feuding in 9 C.E. over Armin's capture of Segestes's daughter. But starting in the 16th and 17th centuries, European governments either suppressed feuds or channeled them into judicial proceedings from which rulers could collect significant fines or confiscate property. In the Balkans, central governments rarely achieved that kind of control, so blood feuds continued to occur there until recently. Collective retaliation often causes long-lasting damage, and this has been so not only in southern Europe but also, for many years, in much of the Middle East.

Reparations follow a modified logic of tit for tat: You did us wrong, so you should compensate us proportionately. Along the way, you should apologize for doing us wrong. Discussing books on reparations in 2006, *Times Literary Supplement* critic David Lowenthal deplored the practice. Forgetting that U.S. President Ronald Reagan had apologized in 1988 to Japanese Americans the government had incarcerated during World War II, Lowenthal complained that:

The Age of Apology came to a head with 1990s contrition chic: Bill Clinton apologized for slavery, Tony Blair for the Irish Famine, the Pope for the Crusades, Australia declared a 'National Sorry Day' for past mistreatment of Aborigines, with little to show by way of present improvement. Posthumous *mea culpa*s dispense cheap cheer. They show how venial are our own sins by

comparison with our forebears' crimes. Past sinners are excoriated for not thinking and acting as right-minded people do today. Censorious tracts name and shame perpetrators of history's atrocities, demanding remorse and redress for victims' heirs.

The complications start there, on both sides of the us-them boundary: Who are the victims? Who are the perpetrators? Do today's descendants or relatives of victims deserve compensation for the victims' losses? Do today's descendants or relatives of perpetrators bear responsibility for the perpetrators' evils? What counts as adequate compensation? How to compensate 9/11 families begins to look like a simple task compared to assigning reparations for losses that occurred generations ago.

Yet in recent years, demands for collective reparations have become mainstream in the United States and elsewhere. The sociologist John Torpey cites the confluence of two main factors to explain this: compensation to Jews and the State of Israel for the Holocaust, and the generalization of the practice to include compensation paid by states to groups that have suffered wrongs in both war and peace. "The spread of reparations", Torpey concludes in *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed* (2006), "thus parallels the rise of human rights thinking, the emergence of substate groups and individuals as subjects of international law, and the juridification of politics in general." Once one group successfully presses a claim for recognition of its victimization, other groups can follow the same path. Demands for reparations typically combine the principles of catharsis, justice and expediency. Substantial payments, in this view, allow victims to move past victimization and perpetrators to purge their guilt. Categories of people who have suffered call for just compensation that requires oppressors to feel some measure of the pain that they or their predecessors inflicted. Political organizers say that reparations will promote reconciliation and future collaboration.

No doubt these outcomes do sometimes occur. But reparations politics involves two great dangers: It provides great incentives for people, lawyers for one, to hoard rewards for themselves rather than redistribute them to genuine victims; and it reinforces us-them boundaries instead of dissolving them. When Native Americans receive compensation for past wrongs in the form of property rights, exemption from taxes and direct governmental subsidies, both scenarios come about. Lobbyists and lawyers make money as differences between Native Americans and other Americans sharpen.

The public assignment of credit and blame has profound implications for democracy. Democracy can live with us-them differences, in part because the public assignment of credit and blame provides a means of temporarily bridging social differences of class, gender, religion or race without abolishing them. But writing us-them divisions into law and politics undermines democracy. That is why we count the abolition of property requirements, of racial exclusion and of male-only electorates as historical triumphs for democracy.

Narratives of credit and blame pose difficult problems for democracy, however. All of us spend much of our lives assigning credit and blame, for justice matters to everyday personal relations as it matters to public life. Those of us who seek the proper assignment of credit and blame often turn to the courts, legislatures and other governmental institutions to back up our judgments of right and wrong. Indeed, Americans and their lawyers regularly call for courts to award not only material compensation but punitive damages.

Within limits, successful pursuit of legal redress reinforces democracy. It establishes that even relatively powerless people can get justice and that government officials care about their welfare. Beyond those limits, however, use of public power to fix credit and blame writes us-them divisions into political life. It also reinforces the operation

of the same divisions in private life. The vengeance called for by the Hermann Monument helped bring on World War I and, eventually, the Nazi rise to power. The struggle over Sacré Coeur and the Catholic Church's place in French public life promoted the virulent anti-Semitism of the Dreyfus Affair twenty years later, fueled a crisis of state-church relations in 1905–06, and left echoes in France's conservative revival during the 1930s and 1940s.

We should therefore be very careful when asking authorities to officially sanction our assignments of credit and blame. One day, for sure, there will be some kind of memorial for the Iraq war, and perhaps the Afghanistan war as well. We had better be very careful how we design those monuments and the stories of credit and blame they invariably will tell. We can only hope that, when all is said and done, we will build and tell stories about those monuments in a way that creates consensus instead of separation. It is not always easy or obvious how to do that.