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Ha'aretz—or of his own response to it. See “A legendary commander,” 22 June 2007. There is no mention of this text in Arens’ book. Arens restricts himself to a single reference to an earlier text by the same authors, one written *before* they had exploded the Apfelbaum story. See Dariusz Libionka and Laurence Weinbaum, “Deconstructing Memory and History: The Jewish Military Union (ŻZW) and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 18:1–2 (Spring 2006).

14. Phillip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York, 1980), p. 508, as quoted in Stauber, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

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A BITTERSWEET SUCCESS STORY: THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR WHO ALMOST BECAME A POPE

Henri Tincq, *Jean-Marie Lustiger. le cardinal prophète* (Jean-Marie Lustiger, The Prophet-Cardinal), Paris: Editions Grasset, 2012, 364 pp.

Reviewed by Michelle Mazel

Had it been told in a novel, the story of the little Jewish boy who survived the war years in France, converted to Catholicism, became a priest and rose to the top of the Catholic hierarchy in France, would have been dismissed as too fantastic to be credible. The fact that it did happen is a source of wonder, and the remarkable book devoted to Cardinal Lustiger does not quite explain the meteoric rise of a man, who, though undoubtedly gifted, labored under the double handicap of being a convert to Catholicism and a Jew. He was also not known to have easy temper. Yet the author, Henri Tincq, who knew Lustiger personally, was singularly qualified for the task of helping us understand Cardinal Lustiger, the man and his work. Tincq is the author of a number of books on the church and its history and was for many years the religious specialist of *Le Monde*, where he started working after he left his previous post at *La Croix* (The Cross), flagship publication of the Catholic press in France. For this biography, Tincq has drawn heavily on the

dozens of books and articles written by Cardinal Lustiger as well as on his own meetings with the man.

Much of the book is devoted to the impact of the charismatic prelate who revitalized the aging church of France, which had been reluctant to accept change, and literally dragged it in the twentieth century. Riding roughshod over his adversaries, promoting clerics who accepted his leadership, making use of modern media to broadcast his message, Lustiger energized the faithful, achieving the impossible during the visit of John-Paul II in 1997 by having a crowd of more than one million welcome the aging pope on the grounds of the Longchamp racecourse. However, it is not because of his admittedly admirable work that Cardinal Lustiger made headlines and was alternately hailed and reviled.

A scant few days before his death, the Cardinal drafted the text of the tablet that was to be affixed to a pillar of Notre Dame of Paris, the cathedral where he had served for more than two decades and where he is interred.¹ “I was born a Jew, I received the name of my paternal grandfather Aron, when I became a Christian through faith and baptism, I remained Jewish, as did the Apostles; my patron saints are Aaron the High priest, Saint John the Apostle, Saint Mary full of grace. Appointed the 139th archbishop of Paris by his Holiness pope John-Paul II, I was enthroned in this cathedral on February 27, 1981, where I exercised all my ministry. Passers-by, pray for me.”

This insistence on having remained a Jew while becoming a Catholic priest angered many—Jews and Catholics as well. Tincq dwells at length on what he calls “a singular destiny,” the story of a bright youngster born in 1926 to Jewish Polish immigrants who did neither keep a kosher home nor celebrated Jewish festivals. Aron Lustiger did not wear a *kippa* and attended the local elementary school before being admitted to the prestigious Lycée Montaigne. One cannot but wonder, as Tincq did not, what would have been the fate of the boy if war had not intervened. For it is to protect Aron and his little sister that their parents sent them in October 1939 to Orleans, and it is in Orleans that a chance visit to the town’s cathedral led Aron Lustiger on the path to conversion. His father, aghast, brought him back to Paris. However, the danger of the German occupation became so menacing that the Lustigers relented: “They had thought for a long time that their French citizenship would give them a right, a defense” recounted the Cardinal, as quoted by Tincq.² “They could not believe that their French passport would not protect them against the Nazi power. So yes, they yielded in front of my determination, but in fact they were telling themselves: it will protect them. The time would come when they would apply the same reasoning for themselves.” Aron and his sister were baptized in August 1940, and his parents, Charles and Gisele, did the same in October—not out of conviction but for the protection they thought it would afford. Unfortunately, Tincq wrote, it did not help. Aron’s mother, denounced by a woman who wanted her apartment, was deported to Auschwitz and

never returned. After the war, Charles repudiated his own conversion and did his best to stop his son from becoming a priest, but to no avail.

Was it due to his excellent work that Lustiger was made first, archbishop of Orléans, and then of Paris? Was it because John Paul II felt a special kinship to a fellow Polish speaker? Was it because he had been born a Jew? Lustiger himself seems to have believed that it had been a contributing factor in the Pope's decision, a decision which was greeted with stupefaction in France. The headline in the *Quotidien de Paris* said it all: "The Pope has appointed the new archbishop of Paris. He is Jewish."³ Not the least, the Jewish religious establishment rejected this affirmation. That a Jew having converted to Catholicism still considered himself as Jewish was perceived as an outrage and a threat. When Cardinal Lustiger came to Israel at the invitation of the University of Tel Aviv, Chief Rabbi Lau had harsh words for the visitor: "He who used to be called Aron represents evil, for he may incite other Jews to convert."⁴

Cardinal Lustiger was nevertheless instrumental in promoting greater openness of the Vatican towards the State of Israel and he is credited with persuading the Pope to visit the country. However, the theological divide was too deep to be bridged, and though relations with leading Jewish personalities improved with time, Lustiger to the end was regarded with deep distrust by the majority of the rabbinic establishment.

After the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, Cardinal Lustiger participated in the conclave and was considered one of the possible successors of the pontiff. Another candidate was chosen, and Lustiger who was already suffering from cancer died two years later.

Though Henri Tincq has given us a faithful and highly documented biography of a remarkable man, there is something lacking -- a real "feel" for the flesh and blood Lustiger, and a better understanding of what set him on such an unlikely journey.

NOTES

1. P. 155.
2. P. 39.
3. P. 159.
4. P. 172.

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