

Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries

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It is almost as painful to read or write of the mutual antipathy between Christians and Jews as it is to learn of the horrible events of the Nazi period sixty years and an ocean's distance away. Many in this country have childhood memories of those horrors. Others who were not in Europe have relatives who were put to death there. There are, moreover, not a few escapees living among us who were never in death camps but who made their way here via Switzerland, the Low Countries or England, in some cases all three. Americans in their seventies and upwards, gentiles and Jews alike, have the uncomfortable role of being guilty bystanders. What did they [we] know, if anything? What did they [we] do about it, if anything?

Probing the root causes of the irrational hatred that led to the death of millions is terribly important, if only to give some small assurance that nothing like it can happen again. An open wound can be cauterized. A hidden, festering one cannot be healed.

Many of today's Jews are convinced that the horror of Hitler's days was simply the culmination of centuries of Judenhass ("Jew Hate"). They may be right but the question needs examining. Books appear regularly that explain the *Endlösung*, the "final solution" worked out at Wannsee, Berlin in 1942 and referred to as a plan for the total liquidation of European Jewry. The "final solution" is understood by many to be the result of the contempt for Jews that had been taught for centuries and taken root in Austria, Germany, France, Poland, and Lithuania. But is this what happened? Were the baptized Christians of Europe ripe for the pagan nationalism of Hitler, Rosenberg, Göring, Himmler, and the rest? Were they eager to be rid of their Jewish merchant, artist and professional neighbors, finally and forever? If not, were they willing to rid themselves of Jews as threats to their economic wellbeing in the Europe that followed Versailles?

Volumes have been written on all these questions. The most one can hope to do here is provide a distillate of the history leading up to those horrible days.

Tension Up To and Following the Sack of Jerusalem

A place to begin is the position Jews held in the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome. Jews were thought to be people that dressed differently and, in Palestine, spoke in a strange tongue; although outside Palestine, they spoke Greek like the rest. They were labeled atheists because they did not believe in any of the Graeco-Roman gods or goddesses. Worse still, they were called "enemies of the human race" because they did not eat the foods that others did or mingle with them in gymnastics, the theater, race courses, or similar social pursuits. These accusations left them despised and at the same time grudgingly admired for their love of learning, their sagacity and, in the case of a few, their skills in the art of medicine. A sprinkling of pagan philosophers commended them for their belief in one God.

In its political wisdom, the Empire exempted Jews from army service and several other burdens laid on its subject peoples. Despite these administrative concessions the Galilean historian Josephus, the Alexandrian Jewish thinker Philo, and the Christian historian Eusebius all report that there were massacres of Jews in that Nile delta city culminating in riots in 66 of the Common Era and a bloody revolt in 115-17. The unsuccessful bids for freedom Jews made in 67-70 and 135 in Palestine are well known to

Jews and non-Jewish students of history.

The Jews of Palestine (the Roman name for the land of Israel) who believed that God had raised Jesus from the dead, were viewed as a Jewish sect when they first emerged. At this time there was relatively high tolerance for difference. With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 and the consequent emergence of the Rabbis, who supplanted in authority both the priests and the Herodian house (puppet Jewish kings), all that began to change. It then became important to ask the question of who was a Jew and, "Are there any Jews among us who might betray us further into gentile hands?" The claim of Jesus' followers that their Master was the sole authentic interpreter of Mosaic Law was not unusual. His teaching that the intention counted for the deed as well as his compassion for the downtrodden and the disenfranchised was not new. What set his followers apart was the claim that God had raised him up from the dead. Most Jews could hear this with amusement and, in the early days, without any violent reaction. As Pharisee-oriented Jews knew, the resurrection of the just would occur on the Last Day once it was heralded by Elijah's return. There was no mention of the resurrection of one individual well before Elijah's announcement. The Jesus Jews were convinced that their people's Scriptures had foretold it. Most Jews were not.

Very shortly a Jew of Tarsus (in modern Turkey) named Saul/ Paul--he would have had both names from infancy--reports various violent reactions to his teaching that Jesus was the Christ (i.e., Messiah). He writes of having five times received thirty-nine lashes, the punishment decreed in Deuteronomy 25. Paul catalogues his many indignities suffered from gentiles, as well. The book called "Acts of the Apostles", written at second hand, explains Paul's punishment by both Jews and gentiles as a result of the rioting he fomented among Jews in all the cities he visited. Paul's confrontational style surely had as much to do with the reaction as did his message. The major part of the controversy was the claim that gentiles could be of the religion of Israel on a par with Jews without fulfilling the conditions of the proselyte movement: circumcision and the observance of written and oral Torah.

The Jesus-believing Jews from the start faulted fellow Jews for not believing that the crucified and risen Jesus was the Christ, God's Messiah. The sole written testimonies to the tensions over Jesus in various Jewish communities are the writings in Greek by ethnic Jews compiled around 135, later called the New Testament. They were written at a time when the language of the gentiles that had produced so much Jewish post-biblical writing was being disavowed by the newly authoritative Rabbis. The Christian writings were produced roughly between 50 and 125 and came to be called by what they were believed to have given witness to: namely, a "new" or, better, "renewed" covenant (in Latin, but a not quite accurate translation of *B'rith: Novum Testamentum*). The seven letters of Paul that are indisputably his contain phrases like the one that deplors those among his fellow-circumcised who are Jews outwardly but not by a genuine circumcision of the heart. Although this was a good rabbinic sentiment, it had a tragic, unforeseen outcome. In two of his letters, Paul accuses his fellow Jews of substituting their own "justness", resulting from Mosaic observance, for the only true justness: the one that comes from faith in what God had done in Christ. By "faith" he means perfect trust in God as the One who raised Jesus from the dead. Paul in effect accuses of bad faith any Jews who have heard his message and not accepted it.

Similar and even harsher language is directed at "the Jews" in the Gospel according to John. This late first-century writing features bitter internal Jewish argumentation. The offense of those "Jews" the writer has in mind is the failure to believe as he and his community do about the preexistent Word of God born as Jesus. They have added to this refusal the harassment and expulsion from the community (termed "the synagogue") of any who profess faith in Jesus as Messiah. Whatever resistance Jesus may have met as a teacher in his lifetime is now couched in terms of the rancor over who is a Jew, and what are the limits of commitment to the faith of Israel. Uncircumcised gentiles and even the despised Samaritans are now thought capable of professing Israel's faith. Hard fighting and harsh words were no strangers to religious strife among post-70 Jews. There was about this exchange, however, one tragic detail. Within a century one of the two litigants ceased to be ethnically Jewish. That changed everything. Not even the ban leveled by the Rabbis on the Samaritans in Mishnah and Talmud could match it for the bitter antagonism it both described and led to. The fact was that many Judean Jews knew little of Jesus; and most Jews in the diaspora never heard of the movement until more than one hundred years had passed. This did not keep the new, largely gentile proclaimers of the Gospel from assuming that they understood the Jewish lack of response as a failure to acknowledge what they should have known from their Scriptures.

Gentile Predominance in a Newly Emerging Religion

Ignatius of Antioch was an early Syrian bishop who, in correspondence from shipboard on his way to martyrdom in Rome around 110, distinguished between “Judaism” and “Christianism”. He further wrote that Christians should not retain any Jewish practices, which must have meant they were doing so. Justin was a Palestinian gentile who came to Rome in the mid-second century and there wrote a *Defense* of his new Christian faith. He stated in it that Jesus was crucified by the Jews (chapter 35). He later qualified this by declaring that “Herod [Antipas], the king of the Jews, and the Jews themselves and Pilate” had conspired against Christ (ch. 40) as Psalm 2:2 had prophesied. In a later written, reconstructed Dialogue with Trypho, a learned Jew, Justin asserted that the ritual precepts of the Mosaic books were imposed on the Jews because of their sins and hardness of heart (18). There followed the theory that circumcision was given to the Jews by God’s foreknowledge so that the Romans would not recognize them and grant them reentry to Jerusalem, “the capital of their desolate land ruined by fire “ (16; ch. 19). Something that cannot be cross-checked is Justin’s charge that “you dishonor and curse in your synagogues all who believe in Christ... [and] as often as you could you did employ force against us” (16; cf. 96). Further, he speaks of “certain picked men dispatched from Jerusalem to every land to report the godless heresy of the Christians” (17). Numerous texts in that longer treatise make the undiluted accusation that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion. (32, 67,72).

The extensive treatise of Irenaeus of Lyon, a man of the East who had lived in southern Gaul before coming to Rome around 177, was entitled Against the Heresies, meaning the teachings of various gnostic sects. When he spoke of the Jewish people it was not with the bitterness of a Justin but in stock phrases that sounded as if they had become catechetical formulas. Thus, in a passage acknowledging the God who is Father above any demiurge—the lesser deity who, the gnostics said, created a world of matter—Irenaeus inserts almost as a matter of course the charge that the Jerusalem mob was “slayers of the Lord” (111.12.6).

Some Landmark Theological Anti-Jewish Writings

A long poem by Melito of Sardes written some time around 190 proved more lasting as Christian anti-Jewishness by its very beauty than any accusations in prose. It is known as his “Easter Homily” and is a sustained piece of typology, that is, its discovery of the fulfillment of types from Israel’s history in the antitype of Jesus’ sufferings and death. A portion of the homily reads:

O Israel, why have you committed this unheard-of crime? You have dishonored him who honored you... you have put to death him who gave you life... Was it not for you that it was written: “You shall not shed innocent blood, lest you die a wretched death...

"He had to suffer"
but not at your hands...
" He had to be hanged [crucified]"
but not by you!...

You gave a drink of gall to a noble mouth that had fed you with life
and you put your Savior to death during the great feast!

Very probably this poem with its rich imagery from the two Christian Testaments, set in the framework of Micah 6:3-5, served as the model for the anonymous 9th to 11th century improperia (“Reproaches”) in the Good Friday worship service. The Catholic Church eliminated them some thirty years ago. Set to a haunting melody, these verses told any Christians who heard good preaching that *they* were “my people” who had crucified their Lord by their sins. But many clerics who had an imperfect theological education could be counted on to interpret the reproaches as spoken to ungrateful Israel in the spirit in which they were written. That spirit was a reproach for having crucified Jesus.

Two third-century writers took up the tale of Christian anti- Judaism, one a Latin speaker of North Africa, the other a writer in Greek from Alexandria who ended his days in Palestine. Tertullian (d. ca. 225) was the first of these, Origen (d. ca. 254) the second. Tertullian never missed an opportunity to speak ill of the Jews of the Hebrew Bible or the gospels, although there is no evidence that he was in contact with any Jews in his native Carthage. A Christian heretic named Marcion (d. ca. 160) saw no good in the biblical record of Israel's history and concluded that the wrathful God of the First Testament could not be the same as the compassionate Father of Jesus Christ. Tertullian had a dilemma when trying to answer him: he had to prove to Marcion's followers that the Mosaic Teaching (Torah) which Marcion thought base and inferior was the work of the true God. Tertullian was convinced that the crucifixion of Jesus, which Marcion denied, was real and that it was the work of the Jews. His way out of the dilemma was to maintain that since God's Law and cult could not be laid to any inferiority on God's part, the need to replace both must be accounted for by the inferiority of the people with whom God was working. Tertullian's anti-Jewishness was literally the conclusion to a theological syllogism. The God of the Bible was by definition blameless; therefore, the people were blameworthy.

Origen of Alexandria was a Greek writer who cast as long a shadow as Tertullian. He made a move to Caesarea in Palestine after 200, where he encountered Jews. Not many Jews lived in Alexandria because they had been decimated in the war of rebellion (115-17). He began to study with "my Hebrew teacher", as he called him, with scholarly intent. Origen above all wished to master Jewish techniques of interpretation, among them the use of allegory. He favored the Jew Philo's pattern of parallelism or typology but then regularly charged Jews with a "carnal" understanding of their sacred writings. He meant that they viewed their narratives as literal history. Despite his mastery of the Jewish Scriptures, Origen used his learning not only to defend Christianity against the pagans but also to charge the Jews severely with their failure to believe in Jesus as the Christ. Origen was capable of critical history, as his numerous commentaries on books of the Hebrew Bible show. This talent was nowhere in evidence, however, as he took the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles to be detailed accounts of the last days of Jesus. These narratives tell of the pressure on the Roman prefect Pilate to be rid of Jesus by a small number of Jerusalem Jews, chiefly the Temple priesthood and the Great Council. Origen makes no distinctions and considers all the Jews of that city to be the primary agents of Jesus' crucifixion.

He goes further. He derives from this false assumption the damning conclusion that, since the crucifixion, Jews have been subjects of a providential punishment: the destruction of the Temple and their city, not once but twice. Some Christians before Origen had tied Jerusalem's destruction to Jesus' death. But the sober learning of Origen made later writers take for granted this theory of the inherited guilt of all for the actions of a few.

The Altered Balance of Population and Influence

Constantine and Licinius, co-emperors of the East and West, gave Christians the freedom to practice their religion without harassment in the winter of 312-13. Their supposed "Edict of Milan" was not an edict and it did not come from Milan, nor was this the "Constantinian settlement" that changed everything, as one often reads in otherwise dependable histories. That emperor promulgated four surviving laws that applied to Jews, two of them threatening punishment for attackers of Jewish converts to Christianity. The drastic change came in 380. At this time Theodosius I decreed Christianity to be the official state religion. By then, the earlier imbalance of population of Jews over Christians was a matter of distant memory, even if pagans in the empire still far outnumbered the favored newcomer. But the Jewish position became precarious with this declaration. The victors thought, as the pagans had not, that they had a divine mandate to oppose the Jews. Political measures against the Jews did not immediately follow, but the circumstance did not bode well for Judaism or any religion other than Christianity.

The popularly elected Ambrose, bishop of Mediolanum, opposed the efforts of Theodosius to acknowledge the civil rights of Jews, pagans, and heretics as equal to those of Christians. The opposition was part of a struggle between throne and altar. Ambrose chose to argue it on theological grounds. In the wake of the burning of a synagogue by a mob in Callinicum on the Euphrates, he sided with the local bishop who, despite the emperor's command, resisted rebuilding it. For Ambrose, who had previously been the

imperial consul of Liguria and Aemilia in northern Italy, the Mesopotamian synagogue was “a site of unbelief”. He wrote that there should not continue in existence a place where Christ was denied. One of his letters has an ominously modern ring in accusing Jews of insinuating themselves in the highest councils where they disturb the ears of judges and other public figures. But, he continued, that had been their way as far back as their betrayal of the innocent Jesus. In a public confrontation in his cathedral, Ambrose made the emperor back down. He asked rhetorically in one of his epistles (40): “Whom do [the Jews] have to avenge the synagogue? Christ whom they have killed, whom they have denied? Or will God the Father avenge them, whom they do not acknowledge as Father since they do not acknowledge the Son?” This kind of writing typifies the shape the Christian argument had taken over the course of two centuries.

Among the fathers of the Church John of Antioch has the Jews as the most evident target. When he was made Patriarch of Constantinople, he became known as Chrysostom (the “golden mouth”). In 386, new in the office of priest at Antioch, he launched on a series of sermons against the Arian heretics. He interrupted those sermons with two additional sermons against the Jews on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These were triggered by the widespread local phenomenon of the participation of Christians in the Jewish festivals. Chrysostom’s series of eight sermons indicate that he considered this participation an apostasy. Not leaving well enough alone—for Jews would have thought becoming Christian the same sin—he got carried away by rhetorical excess. The special damage was done not by his familiar arguments but by the violence of his language. The young cleric learned he could hold his congregation transfixed by his colorful invective. “Not only the synagogue but also the souls of the Jews” were the dwelling places of demons (Serm. 4). In the same discourse, he pleaded with Christians to rescue their fellow believers from the clutches of the Christ-killers (Christóktionon, possibly a word of his coinage).

Chrysostom had evidently heard from some of his Catholics that Jews were holy and that oaths taken in synagogues were especially sacred. He could not let either view stand. “Is it not folly for those who worship the crucified to celebrate festivals with those who crucified him?” (Serm. 5). “They killed the son of your LORD, and yet you dare to gather with them in the same place?” (Serm. 7). There is more than this totally false accusation; he further charged Jews with drunkenness and other moral improprieties. Chrysostom’s eight years of solitude in the desert before he returned to Antioch had evidently not taught him much. The theological conviction of the succession of Judaism by Christianity was already firmly fixed and his sermons added to it an obloquy and a coarseness in order to fire the imagination of his hearers. These words, Jews have long remembered.

The North African bishop and rhetorician Augustine (d. 430) would employ his skills against Judaism in an equally memorable fashion. Paradoxically, although his view was as anti-Jewish as those already cited, he is better recalled by Jews for his caution that Jews have a place in Christian society. His writings dealt extensively with Jews and Judaism, always in the traditional antagonistic fashion. In a sermon delivered within the last five years of his 75-year span he acknowledged that, on his own principles, the Jews must first believe in order to understand. What Christians must do, he said in Sermon 43, is preach to Jews in love, not insultingly but exultingly. It never occurred to him that Jews considered being preached at an insult. The paradox of Judaism’s memory of Augustine was that, although in his Sermon Against the Jews, he could say harshly, “You killed Christ in your ancestors” (8.11), in the same writing he could quote Psalm 59 [58]: 11 [12] whose Latin translation he knew: “Slay them not, lest my people forget”. Although it continued with, “Scatter them by your power and bring them down,” Augustine concentrated on the first phrase that commanded Christians to do no harm to the Jews in their midst. This was to become a standardized reminder that Jews have a place in Christian society.

Peaceful Coexistence, Animus, and Papal Intervention

There is no popular writing extant to tell us how the ordinary Christians of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa thought of Jews and acted toward them in Christianity’s first six hundred years. We have only the writings of the educated, chiefly churchmen and rhetoricians. It was a feudal society, however, and the rural peasantry and urban artisans alike took their cue from the imperial authorities and the clergy. We have no remnants of village preaching from that era, but the homilies of the bishop preachers

were repeated endlessly by a not too well educated lower clergy. It must have fixed in the popular mind the conviction that the Jews had crucified Jesus and that their descendents bore hereditary guilt for the deed because they had never repudiated it. A fair presumption is that Jews and Christians got on fairly peacefully at the neighborhood level knowing that pagan idolatry was the common enemy; much as Jews, Christians, and Muslims got along in pre-Zionist Palestine in the face of first Turkish, then British administration.

The correspondence of Gregory I tells us something about attempts at the forced conversion of the Jews. Some thirty of his eight hundred letters deal with the Jewish people. He favors their becoming Christians, unsurprisingly, but demands justice in their regard under the terms of Roman Law. Gregory takes a strong line against duress, which means that cases of submitting Jews to baptism have been reported to him. From his letters we learn a few things about Jews in the empire toward the year 600: that some were deeply involved in the slave trade; that Jews lived untroubled lives among Christians in certain regions and were dealt with cruelly in others; and that close living brought irritations in its wake because of over-vigorous chanting in adjacent synagogues and churches. Gregory was both pious and judicious in office but this did not keep him from employing the standard, formulaic clauses that spoke of Jews with theological animus. In those passages the terms “superstition”, “vomit”, “*perfidia* (faithlessness)”, and “enemies of Christ” occur. The venom of these words is shocking. At the same time, Tel Aviv historian Shlomo Simonsohn can write in his eight-volume collection of papal documents: “[Gregory’s] practical treatment of problems connected with the presence of Jews in Christian society laid the foundations of papal Jewry policy in the Middle Ages” (*The Apostolic See and the Jews: History, Studies and Texts* 109 [Toronto, 1991], 10). The papal correspondence was, by and large, protective of Jewish

Such was not the case in the century that followed Gregory’s papacy. The Eastern emperor Heraclius (d.642), having lost Jerusalem to the Persians, forbade all practice of the religion of Israel in the empire because of charges of Jewish conspiracy with the Persians against the Byzantines. At the same time the expulsion of Jews was beginning in Europe; from France under King Dagobert (626) and under the Spanish monarchy—with church collusion—when in 694 the Jews were required to choose between baptism and slavery. These moves appear to be based on religion but history has shown that all such expulsions and persecutions are dependent on other factors such as politics, xenophobia, and scapegoating. The unique factor was that the Christians arrived early at the erroneous conclusion that the Jews were being divinely punished for not having come over to their way of belief. Even when religious difference had little or nothing to do with specific Christian antagonisms to Jews, it could always be alleged as the root rationale for Christian behavior.

The remarkable Simonsohn achievement is a winnowing of the papal archives from the time of Gelasius I (496) to Leo X (1521), providing all texts pertinent to relations with Jews. It is important for people today to realize that the bishops of Rome had nothing like the control over the bishops of Christendom associated with the modern papacy. Papal influence over the Christian East came to an abrupt halt with the mid-eleventh century breach that divided Catholics and Orthodox. It experienced a measurable slowdown in northern Europe with the emergence of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Reformation churches. Despite all this, the Roman bishopric continued throughout Western history to be the most influential of spiritual offices. The relation of any given pope to world Jewry was unique. The world’s Jews considered the pope to be the spokesman for Christianity and looked to him as adjudicator of their grievances. In the years 500-1500 the Jews, as a religious and a cultural minority, were often preyed upon by the Christian majority in a familiar sociological pattern. The papal record is consistently mixed. Harsh infringements of Jewish rights are censured at the same time that restrictions are imposed on their full participation in society. The vocabulary of guilt for Jesus’ crucifixion and charges of stubbornness and blindness recur. However, they do not seem to be directly related to the particular inhibitions of Jewish religious or economic freedom. The accusations were of long standing, however, and had just as long a history of justifying the social settlements—even though the relation may have gone unexpressed.

Still, as many historians of Judaism have observed, these infringements of civil and social liberty never approached the point of the elimination of the Jewish people entirely—a terrifying first from the Nazi era.

Medieval Actions Against Europe's Jews: Mass Expulsions

The closest to which this murderous decision came was the successive expulsions of the Jews in the Middle Ages: first from France in the early thirteenth century, then England in 1290. In the continental case, the Jews were allowed to return several times on the payment of large sums but they were withheld from England for several centuries. Their situation in Spain, under Muslim rule of long standing, was reversed in the thirteenth century with the Christian reconquest of large parts of the peninsula. Although Jews and Christians had heavy taxes imposed on them by the sultans, the Jews were protected against forced conversion in their ghettoized condition. They began to experience expulsion in 1265 with the introduction of the Inquisition, which made it its chief business to determine which Christians of Jewish stock professed Christianity publicly, while privately practiced Judaism. The Inquisition was reactivated two centuries later under the united kingdoms of Aragón and Castilla. Often the grandchildren of those baptized by force had become committed Christians, some of them priests, monks, nuns, and friars; as in the Nazi period, this afforded them little protection from the Inquisition's long arm. A decree of 1492 said that all Jews were to be baptized and those who refused, along with the Muslims, should be deported.

To return to medieval origins, after a few centuries of freedom from harassment during the Carolingian period (800-1000), the Jews of western Europe began to suffer new indignities as the crusades came on. The Muslims were the "infidel" targets in the attempted recapture of the holy places in Palestine. However, the pillage and slaughter committed by Christian mobs against Jews on the way linger long in Jewish memory. It is questionable whether these hoodlums were much influenced by sermons about the complicity of the Jews in the death of Jesus, although they had surely heard the charge in the street, if not in church. They grew up hearing myths about Jewish wealth from money-lending and the pawning of possessions. These were activities into which Christians had driven Jews by blocking them out of the trades and professions. At the same time, the church legislated against interest-taking by Christians from other Christians (at the Third Council of the Lateran, 1197), similar to the biblical prohibition of Jews doing the same with Jews.

A conflicting current all through the middle ages was the phenomenon of debates in the market square between a rabbi and a mendicant friar. There the Jew's arguments were invariably branded insufficient to show why all Jews should not become Christians. At the same time, the popes were issuing largely ineffectual edicts against their baptism under duress at the hands of bishops and princes.

The Jews of Germany were subjected to many indignities after the crusades including accusations of poisoning of the wells and ritual murder. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these slanderous charges often led to massacres. Many German Jews fled eastward, bringing with them a particular dialect (*Jüdisch*, hence Yiddish), possibly of Bavarian origin. The Jewish situation was not notably improved by the humane studies that marked the Renaissance, even though small numbers of Christians in that period began the study of biblical Hebrew. Chief among them were Nicholas of Lyra, a Franciscan friar (d. ca. 1350) who was steeped in the Hebrew Bible and commentaries by Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo ben Yitzak of Troyes, d. 1105) and others, and Johann Reuchlin (d. 1522), a scholar who produced two grammars of the Hebrew tongue and at his death had succeeded at least in turning the tide of Catholic humanism in a Hebraic direction.

Jews in Poland, Russia, Germany

Several Polish noblemen of the middle ages showed special favor to Jews who immigrated because of persecution in Germany, coupled with a Polish desire for Jewish expertise in commerce. Autonomous systems of Jewish community government (the *kahal*) flourished in Poland, while the lower or grade school (*heder*) and Talmudic academy (*yeshiva*) were found everywhere. A deterioration of Jewish life set in during the long reign of Sigismund III (at the turn of the seventeenth century), partly as a result of measures taken in the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The previous centuries were certainly the high point of Jewish intellectual life in Europe, a fact that made more recent Polish anti-Judaism the more tragic.

The long reign of German-born empress Catherine the Great (d. 1796) saw the influx of perhaps a million Jews into Russia and was marked by her giving them their first political rights in Europe. She settled them on land, however, as a device to keep them out of economic occupations and the professions. The early nineteenth-century tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I pressed 12-year old Jewish boys into military service for up to twenty-five years. The Orthodox Church subjected them to conversionary sermons, leading to riots and slaughter later in the century. Many an older U.S. Jew has heard vivid tales from grandparents of repressive measures in the old country, including the need to lock oneself in one's house on Good Friday against marauding ruffians.

In 1905 a certain Serge Nilus who had a position at court wrote an account of a supposed conspiracy of "elders of Zion" under twenty-four headings ("Protocols") in which all Christian society, education, and the press would be corrupted and brought low by Jewish economic power. Nicholas II, no mean anti-Jew himself, discovered them to be a forgery but nothing prevented their diffusion as a document taken seriously on the eve of the Russian revolution in German, French and English translation.

Returning to Germany, we find Martin Luther in his early days naively imagining that the Jews, to whom he was attracted by his studies, would flock to the Church in his reformed version. When nothing of the sort happened he denounced them in a set of pamphlets written in vituperative fury. He had produced the early, favorable "That Christ Was Born a Jew" in 1523 but after he turned on this so-called "damned, rejected race," he wrote Against the Sabbatarians (1538) and On the Jews and Their Lies (1543). Luther learned nothing new or true about the Jewish people but reverted to the popular scapegoating in which he had been reared. The last-named of these writings recalls the medieval burning of Talmudic scrolls in the public square. The pamphlet said that rabbis should not be allowed to teach or to travel; banking and commerce should be professions closed to Jews; and, to settle the matter finally, this people ought to be expelled from German lands as France, Spain, and Bohemia had done.

Luther's 1543 treatise accepted as fact the slander that Jews had been responsible for the deaths of many Christian children. This "blood libel" was the charge in the middle ages that Jews slaughtered Christian babies to mix their blood with matzoth at Passover time. A well-known instance was the legend of the boy Hugh, supposedly martyred in 1255 and buried in the cathedral in Lincoln. The Prioress's Tale in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1386 and following) gives a graphic simulation of the supposed happening which kept it alive in literary memory.

The Situation of Jews in Spain

The Visigothic Kings of Spain, Arian heretics in their Christianity, forced the Jews in the seventh century to be baptized under threat of banishment. After the Muslim army conquered Toledo in 711, a symbiotic relation between Muslims and Jews began that peaked in the 900s when Jews occupied important positions in the courts of Córdoba and Granada. Under the new freedoms ensured by the caliphs of Córdoba, Jewish philosophy, poetry, and religious writing flourished. Judah ibn Gabirol (Avicbron, d. 1050) gained eminence in the first of these fields and the twelfth-century Judah ben Samuel ha-Levi the second. Moses ben Maimon (d. 1204) produced the Mishneh Torah, a clear summary of all Talmudic teaching, and the better known Guide to the Perplexed which set philosophy in harmony with religion. When Christian sovereigns in the early fourteenth century reconquered all of Spain, the situation of the Jews in Granada began to deteriorate, culminating in the enforced baptism of many in 1412. This led to a Jewish community that openly professed Catholic faith but whose members were committed in their hearts to the ancient religion. These were the *conversos* (called opprobriously along with Muslims *marranos*, "pigs", by the larger population). Their Christianity was a simple protection for their commitment to Judaism. There was at the same time a considerable number of ethnic Jews whose families had been committed Catholics for centuries.

By the late fourteenth century many Jews of the Iberian peninsula who practiced their religion openly were integrated into Spanish culture. A wave of anti-Jewish sentiment erupted in 1391 that was the result of resentment at the prosperity of this population that thought itself thoroughly integrated. The antagonism led to the massacre of an estimated 50,000 and the enforced baptism of another bloc of

perhaps 20,000.

A decree of Pope Lucius III in 1184 against the heretics in Europe led to Pope Innocent IV's setting up the Roman Inquisition in 1252. It was not concerned with Jews. The better known Spanish Inquisition was introduced in that same century with Dominican and Franciscan friars empowered to interrogate Catholics suspect as to their orthodoxy and, if they found them wanting, to hand them over to the secular arm. This submission of Jews (and Muslims) to Church authority could only happen because medieval Spanish Catholics thought Judaism and Islam to be heresies— departures from right faith about Jesus Christ. After a period of relative dormancy, the Inquisition was reactivated in 1480 and culminated in the ejection after 1492 of Moors and Jews from the territories of Ferdinand and Isabella, united by the marriage of these two cousins. The papal decree that set up the Inquisition in Spain had been preceded by two centuries of various harassments, both of the new Christians who were sincere in the profession of Catholic faith and those suspected of being crypto-Jews. With all avenues of society open to the *conversos* by their baptism, many had then risen to positions of influence and importance in the law, the army, the civil service, and the Church. Some came, in a word, to dominate Spanish life, not only because of their skills but through intermarriage with the nobility. Meanwhile, many stayed in touch with Spain's openly Jewish community which had lived at peace there for a thousand years. This made life hard for the latter because the resentment of the Spanish gentiles against the religiously intermediate population spilled over onto the Jews. Their persecution in a country where Jewish intellectual and cultural life had peaked in the eleventh through the thirteenth century was for that reason doubly deplorable.

The inquisition in Spain, so well and so brutally organized, continued for the next three hundred years to have as its target the country's Catholic subjects whom it deemed heretical, namely the *conversos* or their descendants. Most of the Jewish exiles of 1492 fled to Portugal and were admitted by paying a poll tax. However, in 1497 King Manoel reversed himself because he was angry with Queen Isabella. Then, he embarked on the fanatical forced baptism of all his new Jews aged four to fourteen. Many parents killed their children and themselves rather than submit. Some 20,000 adults who did not take this extreme measure were herded together and embarked from Lisbon in a new diaspora: to Morocco or Egypt, to the Ottoman Turkish empire or Greece—where Salonika shortly had 30,000 flourishing Jews—to Italy, the Low Countries, France, Germany, and England. All around the Mediterranean they brought their Spanish tongue which, in its fifteenth-century form, became known as Ladino. These southern exiles were soon at home in many lands, becoming the Sephardim (from the Hebrew word for Spain). In Muslim Turkey they were received best of all; some becoming "Court Jews" serving the sultans. As a result many Jews were able to return to Spain in the 1500s, among them the great Kabbalist Isaac Luria and Joseph Caro.

Poland Again

Any recall of the high point of Jewish life in Poland must feature the honor in which Talmudic learning was held: the scholar was a hero, every town of any size had its rabbinic academy. These pursuits meant a self-imposed isolation of the Jewish communities from the larger population, a development that was to have tragic results. Poland was a very large territory in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The King placed the total administration of the Jewish population in the hands of a Council that was, in effect, an independent state. Under this arrangement the Jews managed their own fiscal affairs. A rebellion in 1648 of the Ukrainian Cossacks--Orthodox rather than Catholic in religion--against the Polish hegemony included among its targets those Jews who acted as the regimes administrators, chiefly of finance. The revolt went on for three years and included successive massacres on an unprecedented scale. Poles and Jews alike were slaughtered. Of the latter, an estimated more than 200,000 were murdered. Sweden and Russia moved in to battle over and dismember Poland, rendering the central government incapable of continuing the protection it had long afforded Jews. There followed a Jewish persecution inspired by churchmen that repeated papal protests could not stem. In addition, the Polish middle class became resentful of Jewish commercial and financial success. Dark days for Polish Jewry followed these events. Poland's partition by neighboring powers went on for a century and a half until 1919 when a Minorities Treaty in the independent state, now one year old, guaranteed civil rights to, among others, three and one half million Jews. Despite this guarantee on paper there were many anti-Jewish manifestations in the post-war period. Various extremist elements of the Catholic Church had a part in them, including some

popular religious publications edited by the clergy.

European Antisemitism Since 1800

The antipathies of Poles, Germans, Russians and others against Jews are often explained as if they were religiously based in the patristic and medieval manner: Christians infuriated by the mythological Judaism they themselves had devised and propagated. From the early 19th century on, however, anti-Jewish sentiment of Catholic and Protestant Europe, itself increasingly secularized, had other roots no less mythical. The proper term for it is Anti-Semitism (sometimes spelled antisemitism). Its target was Jewish ethnicity. It was primarily politically and economically motivated. Demagogues, however, were only too happy to put the ancient Christian rhetoric of anti-Judaism in its service. The Church began to lose its advantage in the so-called Catholic countries, first with Napoleon in France and then through the *risorgimento* in Italy. In achieving the unification of Germany, Bismarck was no more friendly to Prussian Protestantism. Concurrently with these developments, the civil rights of Jews were being affirmed. The popes, beginning with Pius IX, began to deplore this widespread secularizing trend as "liberalism".

French Catholic publicists argued that Freemasonry was under the influence of Jews, even though there is no evidence whatever for Masons and Jews making common cause. In Germany, Jews had been identified with liberalism. This happened because of Bismarck's enlistment of some prominent liberal Jews in his government's protested attempts to establish religiously neutral public schools, secularized public hospitals, and liberal marriage and divorce laws. The targets of these protests were the Freemasons, freethinkers, and all those of liberal political bent.

In twentieth century Poland there was a steady coupling of liberalism, Freemasonry, and influential Polish Jewry which was understood by ordinary Poles as a cry of their leadership for the political, cultural, and ethnic cleansing of the region. It encompassed an antisemitism far more refined than the physical attacks on the shtetls on Passover or the High Holy Days because it was presented as a plea for safeguarding Polish, that is, Catholic culture. In effect, throughout Europe, there arose societal antagonism to Jews with a tenuous religious basis.

Jewish integration into the national life made its greatest progress in France. After the Napoleonic conquests it began to progress everywhere. As Jews acquired wealth and political power in France, anti-Jewish sentiment inevitably followed. A new complication arose with the racial theory of the diplomat Joseph Gobineau. His 1854 four-volume work on the inequality of the races gave currency to the myth of the superiority of the Nordic peoples. He was referring to the Germanic strain found in England, Belgium, and northern France rather than Germany itself. In later writings he eliminated Jews from the "white race" where he had first placed them. Shortly before Gobineau's death in 1882 Edouard Drumont published La France Juive, which made him a chief contributor to a popular fear and loathing of the Jewish people. France badly needed a scapegoat in the wake of the Third Republic's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. They found it in the Jews.

With Bismarck's unification of Germany in 1871, Jewish emancipation became a settled matter. But certain events in his long rule as chancellor were ominous for Jews. The economic panic of 1873 was blamed on their financial dealings. The journalist Wilhelm Marr published a pamphlet in 1879, The Victory of Jewry over Germanism, that blamed all German ills on the dominant Jews and, incidentally, coined the euphemism "Anti-Semitism". Until then the term Semitic had designated a language group, not an ethnic one. It should be noted that all racial Anti-Semitism and some modern political Anti-Semitism was also anti-clerical.

A Lutheran chaplain at the Hohenzollern court in Berlin, Adolf Stöcker, became an advocate of a "healthy" Christian socialism that fought Jewish supremacy under the cloak of pietism. His rabid anti-Jewishness was adopted by some in the dominant Conservative Party even though Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm II were favorable to the Jews. Stöcker's Catholic counterpart in the empire of Austria-Hungary was August Rohling, who revived every medieval charge against the Jews. He had as a disciple Karl Lüger, the pre-war

mayor of Vienna. Lüger, in turn, influenced the young Hitler and was the leader of an anti-Judaic party that was dominant in the Austrian parliament until 1938.

After 1881, many Russian Jews fled pogroms and came into Germany, feeding popular sentiment against them. Antagonism toward Jews peaked in the election of 1893 when sixteen virulent opponents of Jews were elected to the German parliament. This seems to have subsided by the onset of the 1914-18 World War. Largely responsible was the attempt of leading German Jews to build bridges to the wider culture. Many among them favored a total assimilation and were so successful at it that, with Hitler's rise, they were stunned to learn that their position in the professions, commerce, and the arts was not assured. Until 1933, they had every reason to think of themselves as good Germans.

Germany was populated with more Jews than any country in Western Europe when Hitler came to power. It also had the same ugly heritage of anti-Jewish sentiment as all Christian Europe. France and Russia might have been thought better seed grounds for a movement like Hitlerism. There were, however, certain important differences between these countries. The short-lived Weimar Republic could not deliver Germany from the severe economic hardships it experienced after World War I. Jews had been the Republic's strong supporters and a few of them were the architects of its constitution, a fact that Hitler capitalized upon. Huge inflation in 1923 and the depression of 1929 increased Germany's problems. Some leading capitalist families, gentile and Jewish, managed to escape these problems but the eyes of the angry populace were trained on the Jews rather than the gentiles.

Hitler's virulent anti-Judaism was an Austrian, specifically a Viennese, import. Looking for a scapegoat in his rise to power, he seized on the twin threat to German prosperity of communism and rapacious capitalism. The names of some Jews were easily identifiable with both.

Hitler's propaganda machine incorporated the racist theories of Alfred Rosenberg as well as medieval Christian slanders against Jewry to convince the populace that Jews were responsible for all of Germany's ills. The plan to eliminate them and the gypsies from German lands and later the face of the earth, to be followed by what Hitler considered the equally verminous Slavs, developed from this propaganda. The people of Germany gradually learned with horror that millions were being transported to what continued to be called "labor camps". But by then it was impossible to undo the support they had given the demagogue who held out the hope of a greater Germany, one which had risen from the ashes. It was to be freed from the threats of communism and Jewish "domination" alike. That much, at least, the majority favored, but by then they were firmly in the grip of a sadistic police state.

The Ever Present Sub-Text

Was there a direct line from the anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament to the gas chambers at Auschwitz as some have alleged? Probably not. The line was indirect, beginning around 150 with gentile misreadings of the bitter intra-Jewish polemic contained in those writings. The theological anti-Judaism of the Church fathers, repeated endlessly in medieval and Renaissance-Reformation preaching, was the far greater culprit. It was the continuing rationale for the indefensible Christian conduct of the middle ages onward that was xenophobic and angry at Jewish resistance to absorption into the cultural mainstream. There was resentment, that ugliest of human vices, at the perceived successes of Jews and their grudgingly acknowledged intelligence and skills, reinterpreted as wiliness and conspiracy. But because the Church's preaching and its catechizing had long shaped the popular mind a new phenomenon was able to come to birth, modern antisemitism.

Some Stirrings of a Better Kind

Can the mischief of eighteen and one half centuries be reversed? Yes. However, it will take a very long time and it needs to be worked at much more vigorously. Catholics point to statements like section 4 of the Vatican II statement on non-Christian religions (Nostra Aetate, October, 1965) which exculpated the

Jews of all time of the charge of deicide ("killing God") and warned Catholics against thinking that anything in their Scriptures taught that Jews were a people accursed or rejected. A series of guidelines on religious relations with the Jews emanating from various Vatican bureaus followed over the next decade. In March 1998, a document entitled We Remember was produced that reflected on Catholic action and inaction, chiefly papal, during the Hitler period. Jewish observers have seen in all of them certain insufficiencies, and at times backward steps as well as forward. Numerous statements have come from Protestant bodies in the U.S. and Europe deploring Christian antisemitism. Documentation of this sort is important, but it is ineffective unless it is implemented from the pulpit, church publications, and educational materials. Christians need to become aware of their almost total ignorance of postbiblical Judaism, the hatred some have for Jews, and the violence perpetrated against Jews by their fellow Christians.

Visitors to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and other exhibits from the Nazi period usually say: "Why has no one told us of these things?" It may well take centuries of education and prayer to reverse the evils of two millennia. The Christian communions have at least made a start.