



## Antisemitisms: Facing the Longest Hatreds in a post Holocaust World



This introduction to the “world’s longest hatred” is not meant to be comprehensive and will be generally restricted to my own focus, research, personal experience, and imagination. I will explore the role of antisemitism in the context of the development of Western European individual and collective identities that created an “imaginable” foundation for the Nazis. What are the roots of antisemitism? How do individual and collective identities shape its various expressions? How is it similar to and different from racism, bigotry, and prejudice? How has it manifested itself in different times and places? Were the Nazis different or part of a continuum? What is the role of imagination? How does antisemitism allow perpetrators to morally justify their actions by shifting their moral universe?

### Focus questions:

- Where does antisemitism come from and how does it give meaning to individual and collective identities?
- How does antisemitism act as a “virus” – mutating to penetrate societal norms?
- Hate cannot be publicly aired without some form of justification. What sources of authority within cultures have legitimated and sanctioned antisemitism?
- What made central and eastern European antisemitism lethal?

### For classroom discussion:

- What was surprising and/or interesting about this reading?
- What questions do you have of the text? What needs to be clarified for you?
- What are the important ideas and themes for you?
- How to deal with issues of identity?

Antisemitism, broadly defined, are feelings, attitudes and acts of prejudice and hatred against Jews. It contains elements of racism, prejudice and discrimination, but is more than that. For instance, how does one explain the power of antisemitism in places where Jews do not even live? It is therefore difficult to encapsulate antisemitic attitudes, imaginary constructs, expressions, fantasies, and behaviors in a single definition. Wrestling with definitions will encourage reflection on what it means to be a targeted people, what is at stake if antisemitism is not recognized, and how irrational and laughable ideas come to “make sense.”

Antisemitism in many of its manifestations fixates on an apocalyptic logic that fantasizes destroying a “secret, mythical Jewish power” before such imagined power destroys “us.” This moral construct of “the enemy” echoes throughout genocides. Antisemites often stake a moral claim by demonizing “Jews” while seeking some sort of vengeful reckoning against the imagined and perceived Jewish threat. Although its poisonous accusations are irrational and counterfactual, they are often presented in terms of “salvation,” “redemption,” or “renewal.” This framework provides the antisemite with a self-affirming yet false sense of “decency” and moral agency. These constructed myths are often embraced when individual or collective identities are threatened or shattered. This is why ordinary people can embrace antisemitism or, for that matter, any conspiracy theory, and why a ‘positive’ identity can be constructed against the abstract ‘other’ of, in this case, the “Jew.” This abstract construction can provide explanations for any fear or perceived threat while empowering the antisemite with a sense of control in times of confusion. Most significantly, antisemitism is not imposed from above, but finds expression within culture and is product shaped by the individuals who accept it.

Rabbi Jonathan Saks argues that antisemitism acts like a virus, mutating to find new expression. His metaphor of antisemitism as a “mutating virus” will be helpful in giving some shape to the diverse phenomenon of antisemitism.<sup>1</sup> His metaphor will allow us to frame how different antisemitic ideas – some even discredited – can exist alongside each other. It will help us to understand how, when society provides an “antidote” for a particular strain, antisemitism reemerges, thrives, grows, and festers to infect people in a new ways. This is a good starting point, but it is a construct to reduce complexities into an imaginable starting point. Antisemitic myths resist reason and once sanctioned, never go away. Instead, like a virus, the myths lay dormant waiting for the next outbreak.

Antisemitism cannot be publicly aired or socially/culturally accepted and internalized without some form of mainstream justification, sanction, or logical construct. What institutions, ideologies, sources of authority, collective mentalities and loyalties justify and promote antisemitism as something “decent” within cultures? Antisemitic ideas repeat, but the language shifts to suit cultural norms. Antisemitism exists and is accepted within cultural structures of expression, hopes, emotions, and symbolic meanings. Often these are implicit or even unconscious (racial, religious, national, historical), but they form the framework of cultural reference points. This is especially true within constructed memories or national identities whose motives in retelling history are never pure. It is very difficult to deconstruct antisemitic myths and fantasies that are “imagined” or more to the point, “imaginable” within the hearts of minds of those seeking explanations. Thus confronting it is a difficult, but necessary task. Perhaps our goal is not to find a “cure” for the antisemite as much as it is to educate so that we hold a mirror to ourselves to expose our implicit prejudices. Perhaps we can contain its spread through identifying the different strains and the institutions, norms, and beliefs that sanctions their expression.

I have purposefully not defined antisemitism, but will note the spelling of antisemitism without a hyphen. Unlike anti-Judaism, which is an aversion to Judaism (religion), Wilhelm Marr’s 1879 “League for Anti-Semitism” was focused only on Jews as a “racial” threat. Thus, Marr’s views and agenda targeting Jews are clarified by removing the hyphen. Otherwise, as Holocaust deniers do, one could blur the meaning of the term and deflect its challenge by claiming that *anti-Semitism* is a war against all “Semites” – a linguistic and ethnology grouping that includes Akkadians, Phoenicians, and Arabs.

### **Overview: Before the Mutations**

As the first monotheistic religion, Judaism was an abnormality in the ancient, polytheistic world. After the destruction of the first Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (585BCE), the period of the **Babylonian Exile** reshaped Judaism. In Babylon they were called “Jews” (‘from the kingdom of Judah’) and never gave up their connection to the land of Judah. A basic religious question they faced (to paraphrase Psalm 137) was “How can we sing the songs of Zion in a foreign land?” Their response began to shape their tradition. In Babylon, they began to preserve their community through reaffirming their belief in one God through practice and rituals, writing their history, and developing courts and institutions.

In 538 BCE Cyrus of Persia issued an edict allowing Jews to return to their land and build a Temple in Jerusalem. A small minority returned from Babylon and began rebuilding the Temple in 515 BCE. The **Torah** (Written Law, 1<sup>st</sup> five books of the **Tanakh**, the Hebrew Bible) became the authoritative code of the Jews and Judah became a vassal state of Persia.

In 332BCE things changed dramatically when Judah suddenly found itself the vassal state of Macedonia, a Greek state led by Alexander the Great. This was the beginning of the **Hellenistic Period**. An infusion of Greek peoples and cultures dramatically changed the region. These Greeks encountered ‘curious’ people who lived scattered around the hills of Jerusalem and around the Temple, who did not speak Greek, used smoky lamps and had no statues to their God. “*Judaism*” (all isms are Greek) is the Hellenistic interpretation of what and who these people were. Feelings against Jews, often in urban areas, were part of a larger phenomenon: Greeks did not like foreigners and attached no special significance to Jews.

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<sup>1</sup> Saks, Jonathan. *Future Tense: Jews, Judaism, and Israel in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Schocken Books, 2009.

In general, the Greeks left the Jews alone. They allowed the Jews to run their own country, declared that the law of Judah was the Torah, and attempted to preserve Jewish religion. The Greeks set about translating the Torah, calling it the **Septuagint** after the number of translators it required (*septuaginta* is Greek for "seventy"). The Septuagint is a watershed in Jewish history. This translation would make the Hebrew religion into a world religion by making the Hebrew Scriptures available to the Mediterranean world.

Jews faced a constant struggle between observing their religious customs and being sensitive to local traditions. As a group, Jews were sometimes blamed for the "anger of the gods" when natural disasters befell a community. A common reaction to Jews was that they were "lazy" (not working on the Sabbath) and were "strange" due to their food and purity laws. Others saw them as "atheists" who, having no statues, "worshipped the clouds." However, being different did not mean that ancient peoples were necessarily hostile to Jews. In fact, Judaism attracted followers. Many Greeks and Romans were fascinated by Judaism's philosophical elegance. Despite this, Roman stereotypes of Jews reflected ancient prejudices. Ideas circulated that Jews were exclusive and chose to isolate themselves. One factor contributing to this belief may have been circumcision which violated the Greco-Roman aesthetic.

After two centuries of peace under the Persians, the Hebrew state found itself once more caught in the middle of power struggles between two great empires: the Seleucid state with its capital in Syria and the Ptolemaic state, with its capital in Egypt. Once more, Judah, the vassal state, would be conquered and would change hands seven times between 319 and 302 BCE.

### **Watershed: Jewish reaction to Hellenization**

For Jews in the *Diaspora* (dispersion) a choice had to be made about how to live in the Greek world. Like others in the region, many Jews bitterly resented the Greeks. In a state founded on maintaining the purity of the Hebrew religion, the gods of the Greeks and Greek customs seemed wildly offensive. However, the Greeks brought a new concept of citizenship that would allow foreigners to become part of society. All that was needed, potentially, was to speak Greek, be accepted by a community, and participate in Greek civic rituals.

Was assimilation possible? Although many Jews lived in the numerous Greek cities and spoke Greek, they could not remain traditionally Jewish and also take part in Greek civic rituals. In the end, many Jews accepted Greek ways: They sacrificed in the public arena, played games and went to the gymnasium. Jews who did not conform (although many spoke Greek) were now seen as a threat to the survival of the Greek world and its dream of a universal Hellenistic culture.

There were degrees of assimilation (using the fork and knife, dramatic arts, literature, and internalizing views), but in the end, Jews would have to give up their way of life to become assimilated. Jews therefore were faced with the choice of either collaborating or resisting. A crisis had come to Jewish identity.

In 167 BCE the Seleucid king Antiochus IV forbade the practice of "Judaism." He outlawed: Sabbath/festivals (historical memories); sacrifice to one God; Jewish dietary laws; circumcision; and Temple worship. Antiochus desecrated the Temple, imposed idolatry and the eating of pig. Those who did not eat the pig, he declared, were Jews! In response, the Maccabees (a group led by Judah Maccabee) rebelled against Antiochus IV and for a brief time, reestablished Judah as an independent state. Their revolt is marked by the festival of *Hanukah*.



Samuel anoints David. Synagogue fresco shows a congregation of Hellenized Jews, clean-shaven and without tassels on garments. (Syria, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.)

In the next thirty years, the new Jewish state stabilized itself. A new ruling dynasty, the Hasmoneans (Greeks out) and new high priests became leaders of a sovereign state of Judea. With a new focus for the Jewish people, pilgrimages to Jerusalem increased, as did Temple support. Judea was once again a political power and could make alliances. A major alliance was made with the Roman Republic.

The Romans expanded throughout the Mediterranean and eventually gained control of approximately two million Jews. In 63 BCE Pompey invaded Judea and Jerusalem after siding with one of two brothers who claimed the throne of Judea. Eventually, Herod the Great would secure power over the region from 37-4 BCE by collaborating with Rome. Jews were granted certain rights. They were allowed freedom of religion; the right to a communal life - and all the institutions of communal life, such as a place of assembly (**synagogue** – Greek word for assembly), holidays, and meals; a system of justice – based on *patrious nomos* (“ancestral law”). Jews did not have to appear in court on or before the Sabbath, were not required to perform military service and were allowed to collect funds for the Temple in Jerusalem. Jews knew that their rights relied upon the whims of the ruler in Rome. Jews were not granted the right of Roman citizenship, but could gain that status by buying it, being a freed slave, through inheritance, or through political favors. The Christian disciple Paul (Saul), for example, probably inherited his Roman citizenship while continuing his Jewish beliefs and practices.

Growing Jewish demands for citizenship caused tensions. Greeks resented Jews who were allowed to keep their own traditions and yet still ask for their citizenship. Deadly riots against Jews broke out in places like Alexandria. Into this world, a Jew, Jesus (Greek form of Joshua) was born in Roman occupied Palestine.

### 1<sup>st</sup> “Mutation”: Anti-Judaism and the Christian Imagination

I remember once hearing Elie Wiesel say that he never met any Christians around Sighet, his hometown, but he knew he was afraid of them. Fr. John Pawlikowski’s (retired Professor of Social Ethics. Director, Catholic-Jewish Studies Program, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago) observed that, “By themselves, Christian anti-Judaism and antisemitism did not generate the Shoah, but, they were the indispensable “seedbed” for Nazis.” How did Christianity create the initial framework for antisemitism? How do I, as someone raised Catholic, wrestle with and confront the antisemitism in my own tradition? Why is it important to have an informed religious identity?

It is important to first ground Jesus as a Second Temple Jew living in the eastern Mediterranean. Jewish life then, as today, was diverse. Jewish customs and traditions varied throughout the Roman Empire. Within Judaism a main tension in the first century CE was the different views about Jewish identity expressed by “Hellenistic” Jews and the Jews in Palestine. Hellenistic Jews were assimilating into Roman life and presenting Judaism within the context of Greek philosophy. These were Torah missionaries teaching that God could be found in the home and synagogue, not necessarily within the Temple and its ritualistic, priestly sacrifice system. While Hellenistic Jews were making Judaism more culturally appealing by redefining the world in spiritual, not national terms, Jews in Palestine were rejecting assimilation and seeking instead to renew and purify Judaism. The Tanakh and the Temple in Jerusalem continued to unite the ever-changing Jewish world.

When focusing on Jewish life in Roman Palestine one can see a crisis in Judaism fomented by Roman occupation. Around the time of Jesus’ birth, approximately two thousand Jews were crucified at the gates of Jerusalem by the Romans. The Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate later delighted in violating the Temple, whipping up the furor of Jews, and sending in troops to slaughter the “troublesome” Jews who had gathered in protest. Judaism around Jerusalem was understandably focused on resisting the Roman occupier. The many Jewish sects in Palestine often saw the world as corrupted and shrouded in darkness. Messiah sects sought to ‘purify’ Judaism from the corruptions caused by occupation in order to restore a “true” Israel. Some sects talked of open rebellion (ie: Maccabees, Zealots, Essenes) and envisioned a renewal and rebirth of a purified Jewish nation. The **mikveh** (ritual bath) became a symbolic way to spiritually cleanse members while demonstrating that Judaism was not a birthright, but something earned and demonstrated through renewal.

Palestine Jewry was opposed to the Roman Empire and those working with it. The High Priest, appointed by the Roman procurator, was seen as a collaborator. Interestingly, when Pilate was reprimanded and dismissed by Rome, the High Priest Caiaphas left with him. The High Priest served under the bidding of the procurator and Roman authority (not the other way around). The Temple, viewed as central to Judaism, was also seen as

having been corrupted by the **Sadducees** (aristocrats) who ran the Temple and had worked to keep Jewish ritual practices alive through ongoing accommodation with the Romans. As resentments and tensions grew and the line between accommodation and collaboration grew narrower, a new spiritual movement began to galvanize support amongst the general Jewish population suffering under Rome. This movement was led by the **Pharisees** who preached an alternative vision of Judaism that grew into a popular movement.

Believing that Roman occupation was a punishment from God, the Pharisees preached that freedom would come only when Judaism was emancipated from the “corrupted” Temple system of atonement. They believed in a traditional Jewish messiah (one who would bring peace and freedom to the world) and life after death. They preached about Torah study, acts of repentance, thanksgiving, and loving kindness. They were concerned that the extremist and often apocalyptic messiah sects in Palestine might bring destruction in their zealous drive to purify the faith through confrontation with the Romans.

How were Jews viewed by others? Stereotypes about Jews were prevalent in the Greco-Roman world. Jews, claiming that there was one God, were seen as peculiar in a polytheistic culture. Many saw them as atheists. Jews seemed to “worship the air” (praying to heaven). And yet, due to their ancient heritage and the Tanakh they were held in certain esteem by the authorities. Of course, this prestige was reliant on the whim of the Roman leader. Julius Caesar, for instance, granted special waivers to Jews to be exempt from certain taxes or serve in the military. With Jews already perceived as “different” this special status created resentment. Additionally, the Romans recognized the Sabbath thus giving Jews something truly incomprehensible in an empire built on slavery; a day off. Jews, it was thought, must be lazy. Many even began to believe that Jews were only using their “religion” to secure special benefits. Some Roman leaders became worried that a group, whose festivals continually spoke of freedom, were being given the opportunity to organize. Tension continued to grow.

Dr. Robin Scroggs describes the movement begun by Jesus and continued after his death as another reform movement within Judaism. There is little evidence that Christians had a separate identity apart from the Jews during this time or defined themselves as a religion over and against Judaism. They were a Jewish messiah sect shaped by ideas of renewal and rebirth with a singular mission to spread the Tanakh to gentile communities. Like the Pharisees, they believed in renewal, life after death and the seeking of religious purity. Paul (Saul) was a Pharisee who never rejected his Jewish identity. Paul maintained a high regard for Torah and for the ritual dimensions of Judaism. This tradition was similar to Hellenistic Jewish efforts and scholarship suggests that Jesus envisioned developing a special religious community within Israel, not as a separatist sect removed from it. The majority of Jews (reflected by the weeping women along the path to Jesus’ crucifixion) would have seen Jesus’ life within their common experience as Palestine Jews.

The development of a separate religious identity would evolve over the coming centuries through very difficult experiences. A crucial turning point was the Jewish-Rome war in Palestine in the decades after Jesus’ death. In **64CE** the Jewish leadership of the Jesus movement was annihilated by the Romans. Peter himself was crucified upside down. When the Jewish rebellion broke out against Rome two years later, the Jesus movement remained generally on the sidelines due to the lack of any cohesive leadership. In **70CE** Roman legions destroyed the Second Temple and by 73CE destroyed the remaining Jewish sects including the



zealots on Masada. It is estimated that well over a half million Jews were slaughtered in the rebellion. The only groups surviving intact were the Jesus movement and the Pharisees. Each was suspicious of the other.

The destruction of the Temple raised fundamental questions for the traumatized survivors of the rebellion against Rome. Had God abandoned them? If so, why? Could Judaism survive? Mainstream Judaism turned towards the popular Pharisees who had been preaching a vision of Judaism without the Temple. There was a natural



and understandable inclination to accept their portrait of messianic sects (the ones that drove the rebellion) as dangerous to Jewish life. Judaism began to embrace the Pharisaic ideas of “moving mountains” (Torah?) from the Temple to the home and synagogue. Rabbinic Judaism under the leadership of the Pharisees began to reshape Judaism. They developed the oral Torah that would eventually become the **Talmud** (“teaching” or “study”). Talmudic tradition, rooted in Jewish belief in an all-powerful God, fostered debate and textual interpretation (midrash) around the question of why Jews suffer. Jewish thought sometimes concludes that suffering is a punishment by God for sin. Jewish spiritual life also recognizes, however, a loving God who recognizes human imperfection and seeks to give people the freedom to find the path home. The Tanakh and Talmud serve as guides along that path to reconciliation for Pharisaic Judaism. Over time, with this renewed focus on learning and with the rejection of messianic movements, Rome was eventually able to accommodate them.

Followers of **The Way** (Christianity’s original designation) begin to see renewal in different terms. They drew different conclusions from the meaning of the destruction of the Temple and became disturbed by mainstream Judaism’s apparent acquiescence to the Romans. It is important to restate that the Pharisees become the true leaders of Judaism only after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple. It is in this aftermath of destruction and trauma that the both the Talmud and Gospels were written. The **Gospels** were written to fledgling communities who saw emerging rabbinic Judaism as unwelcome competition and were traumatized by the rebellion as well as the death of Jesus and his initial disciples.

Both the Talmudic and Gospel traditions can be seen as positive assertions of hope from trauma, but need to be read as post-trauma texts. Both use the storyteller’s art of revisiting scriptural stories to discover new meanings as survivor peoples. That was how the Tanakh was originally constructed. It is perhaps useful to read these texts as post-traumatic texts. However, through their different approaches, they also became competing ideas. Rooted in real memories and oral history the Gospels were also shaped by the realities of life in post Temple Palestine. Reading the Gospels in this context, one could read Gospel stories of ‘evil’ Pharisees rejecting Jesus as perhaps reflecting the growing animosity and tension arising between rabbinic Judaism and “the Way” at the time of their writing. As many of Jesus’ teachings reflect Pharisaic thinking and the Gospels often cite conversations Jesus had with Pharisees, it is likely that Jesus and his followers would be confused by the degree of enmity with which the Gospels treat the Pharisees. In much the same way, Gospel stories depicting large Jewish crowds assembling outside Pilate’s house calling on him to deal with the troublesome Jesus during his arrest seem problematic. It is difficult to envision the brutal Pilate allowing a Jewish mob to assemble and intimidate him during Passover, well known to the Roman authorities as the festival of freedom.

A separate Christian identity began to crystalize around the writing of the gospels. Written after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple (Mark’s gospel perhaps begun just before) the gospels conclude that this was a time of a new beginning. According to L. Michael White, Professor of Classics and Director of the Religious Studies Program University of Texas at Austin,

The gospels are not biographies in the modern sense of the word. Rather, they are stories told in such a way as to evoke a certain image of Jesus for a particular audience. They’re trying to convey a message about Jesus, about his significance to the audience and thus we have to think of them as a kind of preaching, as well as storytelling.

This “New Israel” was to be revealed and shaped through Jesus’ teachings and the revelations of a New Testament. The gospels were seen as the “fulfillment” of the scriptures and thus another “answer” to the question of Jewish suffering. Jesus had suffered for all in order to free humanity from sin. The destruction of the Temple symbolized the end to one phase of Judaism as divine punishment for sin. Jesus, it was believed, offered a new beginning by “fulfilling” the Tanakh. Living word had become living flesh. Christianity came to see itself as having displaced Judaism in the eyes of God. This understanding and new identity created a terrible legacy of rejection of rabbinic Judaism while promoting the superiority of gospel Christianity. Indeed, as Regina Schwartz, Northwestern University, suggests, monotheistic religious traditions often create a social memory based upon a belief in the “scarcity of truth”; that one religious tradition exclusively holds and

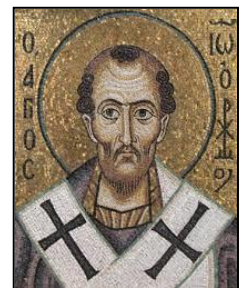
dispenses the only truth. This is often a recipe for violence. Jews played an important role in Christian theology, to the point of obsession. Jews became symbols of betrayal and, to Christians, traitors to their own tradition. To Christians, Jews had rejected the messiah that they had prophesized.

Today, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Christian churches have tried to unpack the implications of this theological understanding. The Catholic Church has developed a different understanding that the covenant with Jews was never broken; God does not break promises. The recent changes in the **Nicene Creed** (the expression of Christian faith written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE in an attempt to unify the Church during the time of Constantine) reflect this growing sensitivity. No longer do Christians profess that Jesus came “in fulfillment of the Scriptures” but now “in *accordance* with the Scriptures.”

The Jewishness of Jesus revealed itself as a difficult issue early on. When Greco-Roman followers of Judaism (who would often gather outside synagogues to overhear ethical teachings) became attracted to Jesus, they had a singular problem: Did they need to convert to Judaism to become followers of Jesus? The question was deeply debated by the apostles and by Paul at the Council of Jerusalem in 49CE. The conclusion – specifically dealing with the issue of circumcision – was no. Greeks and Romans began to flock to the new tradition. But here, context is everything. Being an apocalyptic movement (Paul especially) it was determined that there simply was not enough time to adhere to traditional Jewish practices. From the Council’s point of view (made up predominately of Jews) it was more important to save souls in the limited time left for humanity than to follow traditional practices. Judaism teaches that under certain circumstances, Jews must choose life over ritual and tradition. In the Nazi concentration camp, for example, if a starving Jew came across pork, the rabbi could easily encourage its consumption. Thus, the Council’s ruling certainly reflected a Jewish approach to this difficult question.

As Greeks and Romans gradually assumed leadership of the movement in the wake of the war against Rome, a separate identity, “Christianity” (from the *Greek*, meaning “follower of Christ”) developed. When did the separation become clear? When did church separate from synagogue? It is difficult to find conclusive answers. Certainly by the 5<sup>th</sup> century, The Way had retransformed itself from a Jewish movement into a Greco-Roman one and had adopted its Greek title. Laws developed that were framed within the context of pre-existing Greco-Roman anti-Jewish stereotypes by bishops who later possessed legal authority within the Roman Empire. Christian identity and thought evolved through Melito, Constantine, the Nicene Creed, St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine. Christians began to identify themselves as against Jews (**Adversos Judeos**) by claiming that Jews had failed to recognize their messiah; were thus spiritually blind; and were the new Cain, condemned to wander. One example from St. John Chrysostom’s Commentary on Romans 9-11:

How dare Christians have the slightest intercourse with Jews, those most miserable of all men. They are lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits – pests of the universe! Shall I tell you of their plundering, their covetousness, the abandonment of the poor, their thefts, their cheating in trade? The synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater, it is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts...the dwelling of demons...their condition is not better than that of pigs or goats because of their wanton ways and excessive gluttony...The Jews are the odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no explanation, no indulgence, no pardon. Christians may never cease vengeance...It is incumbent on all Christians to hate the Jews.



St John Chrysostom  
Born 347 CE

The popular Catholic hymn the “Lord of the Dance” (written in 1963) illustrates how Christian self-identity came to equate the rival Pharisees as “evil” and Christianity as “triumphant” with a New Covenant:

I danced for the scribe & the Pharisee  
But they would not dance & they wouldn't follow me  
I danced for fishermen, for James & John  
They came with me and the Dance went on: ...  
  
I danced on the Sabbath & I cured the lame  
The holy people said it was a shame!

They whipped & they stripped & they hung me high  
And they left me there on a cross to die! ...

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black  
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back  
They buried my body & they thought I'd gone  
But I am the Dance and I still go on!

These lyrics also illustrate one of the most powerful and damaging Christian myths about Jews: the **deicide** charge that Jews, not the Romans, killed Jesus. This tradition which allowed for the spread of Christianity through the Empire was reshaped by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and more specifically with **Nostra Aetate** ("In our Age") at the Second Vatican Council in 1965:

[N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. . . Consequently, all must take care, lest... they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth...

This was reinforced by the "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching the Roman Catholic Church" in 1985. These statements, however, did not "exonerate Jews" but rather acknowledged that the Church had falsely accused and victimized Jews over time.

Despite these contemporary canonical statements and growing understanding that Jesus lived and died as a Jew and was executed by the Romans, Christian tradition had embraced the deicide charge as "proof" of Jewish evil. The deicide myth entered Christian imagination at least by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE through the teachings of **Melito of Sardis**. Melito wished to solidify a new identity for his followers by separating them from "those" Jews. Jews soon became portrayed as an evil cabal forcing a weak-willed Pilate into killing Jesus. Vatican II and the subsequent documents are clear that this, of course, is bad history. Regardless, by the medieval period, Christians, far removed from the fall of the Roman Empire, took this teaching to heart, despite its inversion of history. It was customary by the 9<sup>th</sup> century for Christians to seek out a Jew on Good Friday (the day Jesus died) and punch him in the face.

The following will illustrate the tropes (a rhetorical device, as metaphor) historically used by the Church to teach the deicide myth:



This 15<sup>th</sup> century mural (left) from St. Catherine's Chapel, Landau, Germany shows Jews nailing Jesus to the cross. Note the sinister look on the faces of the executioners and the distinguishing hat. The hat and other distinguishing markings were created to identify and separate Jews at the Church's 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran Council in 1215.

This depiction (right) of the deicide myths from the *Nuremberg Chronicle* from the early Renaissance. In medieval art, size denoted importance or power. Note that the Jew has no beard (see previous image) perhaps suggesting the danger from assimilated Jews.

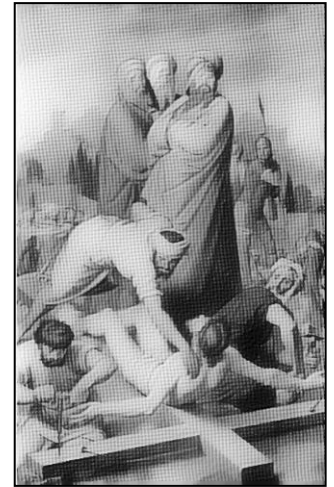






This single-leaf woodcut (left) by an unknown artist before 1500 again uses similar tropes. Jesus' passion is clearly depicted as a 'Jewish' act.

Johann Friedrich Overbeck's (right) 1854 "The Nailing to the Cross" (right). Note the emergence of two interesting developments. In the middle, dominating the proceedings, almost emerging from the earth are three powerful Jews (a cabal) organizing the execution. Meanwhile, the Romans finally make an appearance. They cower at the power of the Jews! Of course, this is an inversion of history. The Romans slaughtered the Jews and Jesus died like many of his fellow Jews.

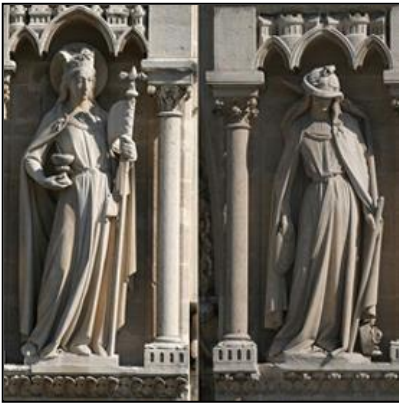


Hungarian artist Mihály Munkácsy's 1884 painting *Golgotha* shows similar iconography. Three Jews, with their backs turned on Jesus walk away into the darkness. Central is the image of the ladder held by a man with a beard (a Jew?) while the rest of the Jews, in dark clothing symbolizing their separation from the pure Jesus on the cross, are led by a man fitting the trope of Judas holding a bag of money. Christian belief was that Jews were forced to wander forever in punishment for deicide.

As Christian theological and spiritual identity grew, Christians came to understand the newly defined covenantal relationship with God in terms of replacing, or superceding what had come before. **Supercessionism** is the teaching that the New Covenant, established by Jesus, replaced the Old Testament's Mosaic Covenant. Christians became the "new Israel" purified by Jesus' sacrifice. As Christian identity embraced this triumphal vision, it often expressed itself as "against the Jews." Interestingly, Christian tradition since Paul had taught that Jews were "fallen" not necessarily rejected by God. This "fall" had made it possible for Gentiles to be saved by the new covenant. One day, Jews too, it was believed, would come to see the "truth" revealed to the Gentiles. A classic trope used to illustrate the cultural and theological understandings were two women, **Ecclesia** (Church) and **Synagoga** (Synagogue). These symbols are most often found in churches and especially cathedrals.



These two statues (left) from the south entrance of the Strasbourg Cathedral were created around 1230CE. These were meant to teach the illiterate masses about Christian identity. To the left is **Ecclesia** holding the symbol of the new covenant, the chalice, which holds the Eucharist (Greek for, body of Christ). The Church is triumphant with crown and imperial robe on her shoulders. With chalice and staff (cross) she has divine authority while she looks ahead assured of her mission in the world. **Synagoga**, on the other hand, looks down in shame having chosen to abandon her role in God's divine plan. She is defeated, with her staff broken and the Torah slipping from her hand. Interestingly, she is blindfolded with a veil. The veil has a multitude of meanings both scriptural and metaphoric. The Church asserts that she is blind to her messiah due to the fact that Judaism died with the destruction of the Second Temple. Contemporary Jews, it was believed, were ignorant slaves, unable to read their own texts which, to Christians, predicted Jesus as messiah. Note that Synagoga is in fact beautiful. In this early depiction, Jews, once the chosen people, could be beautiful again if they accepted conversion to Christianity.



These statues can be found at the West entrance to Notre Dame Cathedral (ca.1240) in Paris. Note that Synagoga is not blindfolded, but her hat does cover her eyes. It is actually interesting to see how earlier cathedrals had almost beautiful images of Synagoga. After all, through conversion to Christianity, it was believed that Jews could once again assume a relationship with God. If not, they would remain spiritually dead. This framework is reflected in songs such as the popular Christmas hymn: "O come, O come, Emmanuel (Hebrew, "God is with us") and ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lonely exile here. Until the Son of God appear Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel."



Note the difference between the thinly veiled Synagoga from Strasbourg and this later version.

As time passed, the trope became more violent and vicious. Note that Ecclesia rides a creature with the heads of eagle, human, lion and bull, symbolizing the four Gospels while Synagoga rides an ass. Synagoga is now stabbed from the heavens which forces her crown to fall. Significantly, the blindfold has become much thicker and is also tied in a knot. Now Synagoga actively defies the Church by tying her own blindfold. In her right hand she holds a he-goat, a symbol of unbelievers.

St. John's Church, Werben/Elbe River Germany (ca. 1414-1467).



Ecclesia on a horse is attacking Synagoga with a lance. Her shield carries the Christian symbol of a fish. The Synagogue is symbolized as riding a pig, the "Judensau." Her eyes are closed and with her left hand she holds on to a branch. This is a wood carving at the choir benches of the Erfurt cathedral in Thuringia, Germany (ca. 1400-1410.)

If the goal of this teaching had been to ostracize Jews and force their conversion the trope had failed and had outlived its usefulness. Jews, as a small minority in medieval Europe, had not converted and were being targeted for having rejected the "loving efforts" of Christians to "save" them. Medieval tropes began to shift to more sinister depictions of Jews.



## 2nd “Mutation”: 11<sup>th</sup> Century Demonic Anti-Judaism

Christian thought about Jews became more distorted over time. Jews, perceived by Christians as having “rejected” conversion, now became a demonic force in Christian imagination. Jews, seen as opposing Christianity, were portrayed as responsible for the evils of a troubled age. Generally, two major events shape this thinking: The Crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the Black Death of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

When Crusaders took up the call to “liberate” Jerusalem (and plunder the Byzantine Empire en route) many chose to venture first to Jewish towns in the Rhine River Valley before proceeding east to the Holy Land. Believing that infidels (Jews) would seek out and rape the women they left behind, Crusaders preemptively slaughtered tens of thousands of innocent Jewish families along with some priests and bishops who attempted to stand up in their defense. Scholars suggest that many knights felt guilt – having butchered entire families – and justified their actions by claiming self-defense from a demonic foe. They argued that they had to attack “evil” Jews to protect their own families who would be defenseless while their men were fighting in the east. Preemptive attacks against a demonic Jewish foe seem to be something embraced by antisemites. The Nazis, for example, would constantly argue and self-justify their warped “war against the Jews” as nothing less than preventative self-defense. The Crusades were also a response to plague and crop failure and a surge in religious passion that not only blamed Jews, but was perceived as the wrath of God for tolerating Jewish life in Christendom. Christians sanctioned violence not despite of their faith, but because of it.

We know that after the First Crusade there were structural similarities between European images assigned to Satan (previously a fallen, cherubic angel) and those assigned to Jews. Jews became a symbol of evil that “decent” Christians felt obligated to combat.



Belief in the myth of the “evil Jew” is embodied by the 12<sup>th</sup> century **blood libel** or ritual murder fantasies that emanated from Norwich, England in 1150. Jews, it was claimed, drained the blood of pure and innocent Christian children in order to make matzah bread for Passover. This became a bit of an obsession which is illustrated in the “Martyrdom” of Anderl” (left). He was a 3 year-old boy in Austria who became the focus of a blood-libel cult in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This cult continued until the 1990s, when Bishop Reinhold Stecher had the images removed from church. Some churches still have the remains of a child on display with the blood libel charge posted for all to see.

The myth of blood libel is particularly strong today and has mutated into the somehow acceptable stories of supposed “organ harvesting” by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). This is a potent myth that continues to echo despite its rejection by Christianity. Blood Libel is an expression of Christian ritual understandings: The Eucharist as the body and blood and Christ and the crucifixion as the beginning of



new life in the Easter season. How has this myth gained life in an Arab Muslim community that does not have this religious construct as part of their heritage?

This late 15<sup>th</sup> century antisemitic painting (left) from Frankfurt-Main accuses Jews of ritual murder and bestiality. Note the child tied down as though crucified. Note also the Jews, with identifying badge, eat the excrement and suckle from the pig while Satan, also wearing the same badge, watches. This is the legend of the **Judensau**, or Jew pig, portraying Jews in intimate contact with the “impure” swine.

The inscription on this Judensau at Martin Luther's church in Wittenberg, Germany. "Schem Ha Mphoras" refers to the belief of Jewish mystics that revelations of the nature of God could be found in secret combinations of numbers and words. (right)



Blood libel fresco in St. Paul's Church, Sandomierz, Poland. (left)

1250 French Bible illustration depicts Jews being massacred by Crusaders. Note the religious justification as Jesus supports the slaughter from heaven and earth as the image is sanctified in an official Bible.



From the Hortus Deliciarum (Latin for *Garden of Delights*). It is a medieval manuscript compiled by Herrad of Landsburg at the Hohenburg Abbey in Alsace, better known today as Mont Sainte-Odile. It was an illuminated encyclopedia, begun in 1167 as a pedagogical tool for young novices at the convent. It is the first encyclopedia that was evidently written by a woman. It was finished in 1185, and was one of the most celebrated illuminated manuscripts of the period. In this image Jews burn in hell. Note the distinguishing hats and cauldron marked "Juda".



As myths about evil Jewish behavior (the justification for preemptive actions) spread, Europe faced the horror of the Black Death. The trauma and dislocating nature of this cataclysm had a devastating impact on anti-Jewish thought. Now, it was imagined that Jews were part of an evil conspiracy against Christendom. They were seen as the offspring of Satan. This was fed by the preexisting myths and reinforced by the fact that some Jews could travel/had to travel in order to make a livelihood. Here in this 16<sup>th</sup> century French woodcut, the Jew is conjuring up Satan from a vat of Christian blood. Note the close proximity of the crucifixion linking this new conspiracy myth with the deicide myth.



This image of burning Jews from the Flemish Chronicle around 1350 is one of the many European images testifying to the attacks on Jews in the years after the Black Death. Some 200 Jewish communities were destroyed.



Other fantasies about “evil Jewish behavior” took hold, such as the desecration of the Eucharist. This accusation arose after Pope Innocent III had recognized (1215) the doctrine of transubstantiation, which resulted in the public and general worship of the consecrated host. The Eucharist plays a primary role in Christian spirituality and religious identity. The first desecration accusation was made in 1243 at Belitz, near Berlin, and in consequence of it all the Jews of Belitz were burned on the spot subsequently called "Judenberg."



Jews of Sternberg desecrating the Hosts. It can be argued that this is an illustration of the connection between blood and religion/race. Medieval myths insisted that Jews believed that Christian blood could chase away demons. This would later emerge in the mythical vampire who could only live through draining the blood from their Christian victims. Note the symbolic power of the cross to ward off the vampire. The irrationality of this thinking is made plain by the contradiction that it was believed that Jesus' blood could be transformative and a powerful force for conversion to the “truth.” The mythology developed that Jews were somehow resistant to this sacred power. Centuries later, Nazi racists will wrestle with similar questions regarding the power of Jewish vs. Aryan blood. (From a woodcut issued by M. Brandls, Lübeck, 1492)



This image is from the Nuremberg Chronicle in 1493. The Franconian knight Rindfleisch's six-month rampage of reprisal for an alleged host desecration (1298) devastated 146 Jewish communities across southern Germany and left thousands dead. 728 Jews were murdered in Nuremberg alone. Hartmann Schedel, *Liber chronicarum*, Nuremberg, 1493.



Purifying through burning became more prevalent throughout the Middle Ages. The Talmud posed a real threat to the Church and its notion of the role of Jews. Jews had been tolerated as a people who stood in witness to the past and to the Old Testament which, in Christian belief, foretold the coming of Jesus. The Talmud, created in the years after the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, suggested to Christians that Jews were not simply maintaining the sacred scriptures, but creating something new. To Christians, the only continuation of Judaism and revelation came through the Gospels and the redemption offered by Christ. Thus, the Talmud must be “false” writings that undermined the role Jews were assigned to play in Christian theology. Suddenly, Jews looked less like a witness to the past and more like a heretical challenge to the present. Here, Dominican monks burn confiscated Talmud. (Panel by Berruguete, 15th century.)



This image is from one of the most popular Catholic prayer books of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It depicts the French legend of a Jewish boy thrown into the oven by his father. Each devotional prayer book had a slightly different take on the story, but the basic idea was that a father discovered that his Jewish son had attended mass. In his fury, he threw his son into the fire. Clearly, this myth demonstrates repulsive behavior and creates the myth of the Jew as an active destroyer of innocence. In another version of the story, Mary descends from heaven, removes the boy from the flames, converts him, and then throws the father into the oven.



At this stage, as someone raised in a liberal Catholic tradition, I feel shame, but no guilt. I am forced to pause and reflect upon one of my guiding principles from Rabbi Greenberg: “No statement, theological or otherwise, ought to be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children (of Auschwitz).”<sup>2</sup> There is something quite disturbing, but also revealing in this medieval prayer of consigning a Jew to the flames in the name of a higher moral good. What is at stake for Christian identity and practice after the Holocaust?

In medieval Europe other Jewish stereotypes and tropes emerged which were self-fulfilling and circularly reinforced. Much of this was rooted in the economic realities of the day. Markets were regulated by guilds of artisans and there was no demand for economic freedom. Christian merchants were given more economic freedom when they requested it, but Jews were seen as subversive if they sought similar rights. There was a fear that giving Jews special status would allow them to prosper and therefore confuse the masses who were taught by their clerics that God was punishing them. How could one reconcile the belief in the divine rejection of Jews if they began to prosper? The clergy began to target and isolate Jews and threatened anyone who sold land to Jews. Likewise, guilds worked to exclude Jewish artisans and forced them into “shoddy” trades not sanctioned by the guilds. As Christians became “honest” businessmen, Jews were seen as peddlers who sought to undercut them. Jews were excluded from the military and civil service and their absence in all these institutions became “evidence” of Jewish disloyalty and laziness. Facing the wrath of the countryside Jews often found safety, communal structures and proximity, and opportunities in the emerging cities being developed by secular rulers who sought to protect them as they developed their own base of influence and money away from the church. In turn, small businessmen, guilds, and artisans embraced antisemitic myths fearing free competition. Money-lending, dominated by Christians (wealthy clerical and monastic communities and secular city-states) and never seen as “Jewish” in Muslim lands, became another myth embraced by those seeking to undermine the competition. Jews did loan money to peasants after church businessmen refused to (perceived as a sin denounced by the clergy) which set up another antisemitic bias. These stereotypes, rooted in religious idealism, were immune from rational criticism. Interestingly, antisemitism seemed weakest in the Netherlands and Italy where commerce and trade stood in marked contrast to the underdeveloped and agrarian traditions of central and eastern Europe.

At the same time **Passion plays** depicting the torture and death of Jesus became prevalent in European cities. Though not officially sanctioned by the Church these week-long plays would be performed usually in ten year cycles. Oberammergau Germany was the grandfather of them all was created in thanksgiving for surviving the bubonic plague. Like any performing art there was license to expand upon the story to make certain that the message went home. The use of devil imagery (*devils, ravens*, and other satanic symbols) in connection with Jews originates with Passion Plays. The plays were notorious for their antisemitism and ability to rile crowds as the actor playing Jesus died on the cross. Often, at this moment, the narrator would remind the audience, “remember who has done this” and the shaken and self-righteous mobs would descend upon Jewish neighborhoods.

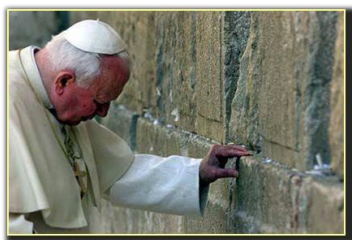
In 1934, Hitler attended the 300th anniversary play. His comment: “It is vital for the Passion play to be continued at Oberammergau: for never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed as in this presentation of what happened in the times of the Romans. There, one sees Pontius Pilate, a Roman racially and intellectually so superior that stands out like a firm, clean rock in the middle of the muck and mire of Jewry.”

Typically, Christian holy week, the period after Holy Thursday (the Last Supper) to Easter Sunday, were some of the most dangerous times for Jews. Sometimes Passover came at a similar time and Christian mobs sought out Jewish homes that were suspected of conducting ritual murders. This dark history is reflected today in the **Haggadah** (“Telling”), the Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder (prayer). During the Seder Jewish families “open the door” to welcome Elijah who has a place at the table. Though not part of the

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<sup>2</sup> Knight, Henry. *Celebrating Holy Week in a Post Shoah World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. P. viii.

original Seder, this became a staple during and after the middle ages. If the door was opened, it was hoped that Christian mobs could look in to see that no ritual murder was taking place and spare the occupants. Christianity and Christian identity has been wrestling with this history in light of the darkness of the Holocaust. When Pope John Paul II visited Israel and the Western Wall in March 2000 it was a significant moment for Christian-Jewish relations. For the first time the Church recognized the land of Israel as crucial to Judaism and thus rejected the “wandering Jew” myth that Jews were condemned to be homeless due to their supposed role in deicide. Additionally, the pope recognized rabbinic Judaism and its ongoing covenant with God. There was also something powerful in the once athletic pope limping in humility and respect to the place where the Jewish-Christian divide may have begun. Sadly, some in the Catholic hierarchy and bishops in the United States see John Paul II’s teachings and *Nostra Aetate* as merely “pastoral” without any theological significance.



This is the prayer that the pope placed in the Western Wall.

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of Yours to suffer and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine fellowship with the people of the Covenant.  
- Jerusalem, 26 March 2000. *Joannes Paulus II*

### The Reformation and Roots of Nazism

In the 1510s Germany (the Holy Roman Empire) experienced the Protestant Reformation that would culminate in the devastation and religiously-fueled cruelty of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). Luther was the lightning rod whose inner turmoil, uncertainty, anxiety, and desperate urge to find purity and certainty, led to a violent and antisemitic outburst that struck a chord amongst those facing economic and religious uncertainty. Seeking a personal relationship with Jesus drove his emotional needs for certainty and validation. The more turmoil he felt, the more he projected it onto others, especially non-Christians. “...the Jews, once again, failed to provide the necessary validation to those who had gained certainty.”<sup>3</sup> Luther declared the Jew the enemy and the “spawn of Satan.”<sup>4</sup> Significantly, he shifted religious thinking by writing and preaching that Jews could not be converted. Baptism could no longer be used as Jews, to Luther, were impermeable to its power. The self-fulfilling cycle continued. The more anger Luther felt, the more he blamed Jews for provoking it, and the more violence against them could be justified. He began to argue that the only solution – and one that the coming religious wars would embrace – was for Jews to die. Luther was the only major reformation leader who believed that Jews were irredeemable and his ideas would later be embraced by Nazi eugenicists and race theorists. Luther detested the urban and humanistic cultures of the Renaissance and saw it as a threat to the inherent goodness of isolated German peasants. Capitalism and commercialism were, to him, direct threats to the spiritual nature of individuals and a threat to piety. Facing the encroachment of new and merchant-based economies, artisans and peasants, facing difficulties, embraced Luther’s targeting of the Jews as the cause of social ills and fears. “International Jewry” was already being articulated as the single cause of German economic and agrarian woes and Germans earnestly discussed the “Jewish problem.” This was not the case in places like France where Huguenots looked favorably on the Jews both as victims of persecution and as targets of Catholics. Likewise, Calvinists and Puritans held Jews in a much more favorable light than Lutherans.

The Thirty Years’ War was an appalling, shocking, and devastating religious war that devastated much of Germany. Its mass atrocities spurred on the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment – intellectual attempts to reign in the violence by subverting religion and placing limits on the actions of the emerging states that came out of the smoldering ruins. Secular, civic ideals would be framed in a world where religious freedom would be

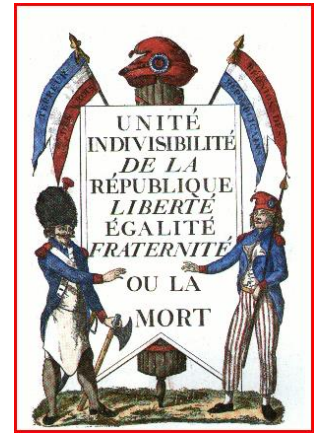
<sup>3</sup> Weiss, John. *Ideology of Death: Why the Holocaust Happened in Germany*. Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

the general mantra. The Enlightenment flourished in England, France, and the Netherlands, where commercialism flourished, but was rejected by Germans as an assault on their deeply felt religious piety. France became an implacable enemy with the 1789 revolution that destroyed institutions and did the unthinkable: legislated an end to all civic disabilities leveled at Jews.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> “Mutation”: Racial Antisemitism

One could argue that Christian anti-Judaism was well on the way toward greater racism (the *Judensau*) and large scale violence towards Jews. However, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment and “Age of Reason” provided a partial antidote for this Christian antisemitic progression. Religious teachings and traditionally accepted dogmas now had to stand up to the light of “reason.” Rationality replaced revelation. Science displaced superstition. Religiously based hatred was replaced/supplanted with non-religious criticism. The Church was weakened as the Enlightenment embraced the potential of the individual in what was seen as a new age of tolerance and freedom from “oppressive” religious authority and ignorant superstition. The French Revolution ushered in the era of nationalism and encouraged selfless loyalty to the nation and assimilation as the paramount virtues of patriotism. “Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood to the death!” was a popular revolutionary slogan. Those who were reluctant to embrace this revolutionary identity were seen as suspect.



The Revolution and the Enlightenment opened up new opportunities. Old ways that were seen as restricting liberty were attacked. Jews gained citizenship in many states, began to assimilate with movements such as Reform Judaism, and with growing confidence began to speak the language of the land and live outside of Jewish districts. Clermont–Tonnerre’s “Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions” (23 December 1789) stated that, “We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals.” However, the price of assimilation was to reduce one’s loyalty to other traditional identities. Despite this seeming progress, Christian imagination, though marginalized, still shaped perceptions and mistrust of Jews while Jews struggled with the age-old challenges of assimilation.

Give them civil rights? I see no other way of doing this except to cut off all their heads one night and substitute other heads without a single Jewish thought in them. How shall we defend ourselves against them? I see no alternative but to conquer their promised land for them and to dispatch them all there. If they were granted civil rights they would trample on other citizens.”

- Johann Fichte, a leader of the German Enlightenment, late nineteenth century

German philosophes rejected citizenship for Jews. Secularism, especially enlightened ideas, had little power to counterbalance extremist beliefs. German intellectuals rejected the idea of inalienable rights believing that individual rights were determined by factors such as history, ethnicity and its traditions, and institutions created to represent the needs of those experiences. Undermining tradition was tantamount to undermining morality. Equating peoples and liberating Jews would be an imposition by radical secular forces whose goal it seemed was to undermine traditional piety. Pious Christians could choose between good and evil, and were not simply “blank slates” to be manipulated by radical, superficial, and subversive secularism. The enlightenment represented selfish, commercial, and individual motives that, in their view, was determined to undermine the common good.

Enlightened philosophes in France and England shaped the values and practices of the educated, professional, and business classes as did German intellectuals. Germans, however, would focus on the idealism of the German soul and the rejection of liberalism. Although German philosophes were not generally concerned with Jews and focused more on the German spirit, it did not take long for German academic institutions to take on a decidedly antisemitic tone. Clerics escaped the anticlericism of Western Europe and retained their role as interpreter of daily life and pious symbols of traditionalism. Intellectuals defended the hierarchical structures of patriarchy, village life. Liberalism was increasingly perceived as un-Christian and the

Grimm brothers soon wrote stories that showed the purity of the German soul while villainizing republican cosmopolitanism.

Prussia, initially defeated by Napoleon, grew in influence. As Napoleon's troops and administrators occupied German states and began implementing reforms, Prussia inspired a nationalistic, reactionary movement that galvanized German pride around the idea of the uniqueness of the German spirit and freedom from foreign influence (including language, culture, liberal reforms, free markets, and imports). Youth groups burned books and embraced antisemitism while "storm troopers" and Prussian death's heads hussars fought the occupier. The movement venerated self-sacrifice for a greater good hardened through battle, a rejection of enlightened and commercial values, and removing the invaders who were determined to undermine the German spirit. Fearing Jewish assimilation (inspired by German Jewish patriotism) the King of Prussia tried to prevent the rise of Reform Judaism in 1810.

With the French defeat reactionary nationalists, rooted in xenophobia chauvinism, called for unity and purity. Lacking an overseas empire and the commercial middle class engaged in colonial trade, entrepreneurs prided themselves in working within the established order. Guilds retained some influence and became a bastion of conservatism and antisemitism. Antagonism towards Jews (even though many had fought against the French) was intensified by the Jewish migrations from Eastern Europe (1816-1848). Antisemitic riots took place in more than 30 German cities, synagogues were burned, and roving bands of thugs, often guild members or small businessmen, beat Jews in the streets.<sup>5</sup>

As revolutions once again swept Europe in 1848 German peasants and artisans rioted due to bad harvests and food shortages enhanced by the relatively feudal nature of the economy. Guildsmen blamed their troubles on Jews. Prussian aristocrats and military leaders used the Conservative party to voice their reactionary, anti-liberal and antisemitic views and gleefully suppressed the Left when the Prussian parliament directed them. As "Jewish liberalism" was being cited as the threat, the Prussian king received the right to rule without parliament if a national emergency was declared. The Fatherland Society was created to prevent parliamentary attempts to tax aristocrats, the leaders of the German artisans and peasants, the soul of the nation. Despite this, liberal progress continued to influence Germany and ironically made the status of Jews more precarious. As opportunity and assimilation grew, nationalists perceived this as a threat. After all, had not French republicanism had been defeated by Prussian aristocrats? German Jews, unwelcome in the countryside, flocked to cities which began to flourish outside of traditional structures. Aristocrats tried to fight back.

In 1876, Otto Glagau, organizer of antisemitic groups created the slogan (later to be used by the Nazis), "Today the social question is essentially the Jewish question. All other explanations of our economic troubles are fraudulent cover-ups."<sup>6</sup> German conservative intellectuals stressed the un-Christian nature of liberalism and its apparent sponsor, the liberal Jew.

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries brought additional dislocating trauma through the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. Church authority, less able to shape public opinion or, as in the past, restrain behavior through its ethical teachings, was unable to limit new antisemitic violence that emerged. Churches often embraced nationalism to promote their own place in society and viewed "modernism" as a threat evidenced by the depravities and exploitation of Industrial life. European power grew through industrialization and the era of High Imperialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which found small European countries conquering and claiming enormous territories overseas. A new ideology emerged to justify the brutalities and benefits of colonial rule.

**Social-Darwinism**, adopted from Darwin's "struggle for superiority and survival" was applied to states and their conflicts. States that flourished and survived did so, social-Darwinists argued, because they were organically and "racially" superior. In that these countries were white and their victims were non-European,

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<sup>5</sup> Weiss, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

racial stereotypes became grounded in a mainstream ideology. States that flourished did so because their “race” had demonstrated “superiority” and those that did not, somehow proved that they were inferior. States that could not compete or that crumbled simply “proved” they were unfit to survive.

This transfiguration of Darwin’s ideas allowed Europeans to distance themselves from questions of “right” or “wrong”. By concluding that progress came through a racial struggle for survival that followed the “natural” order of things, it became acceptable to claim that annihilating and subjugating others was ‘natural’ and had nothing to do with morality or immorality. Ethical considerations simply did not apply. This was a significant shift. Genocide was now implicitly justified and would unleash the powers of the modern state against foes that not only stood in the way of a nation’s self-interest, but whose destruction was justified as “progress”. This was true of racial inferior peoples outside the nation as well as suspect individuals within the nation who might prove a threat to the progress that national and racial unity promised. Like the Crusades before them, a self-justifying ideology (let us not forget the power of European weaponry and economies) presented a socially and politically acceptable world view.

Wilhelm Marr’s 1879 creation of the term “antisemitism” was the outcome of this paranoid thinking. Previously, antisemitism could be defined as anti-Judaism: that is, religious contempt for Judaism, Jewish life and faith. Jews could be ‘saved’ through conversion to Christianity. Marr and his “League for Anti-Semitism” was focused on the supposed racial, as opposed to religious, characteristics of “the Jews” and the threat to the nation of Jewish assimilation. Antisemites embraced the new pseudo-science of “race” and argued that Jewishness was not a religion, but a racial category. Racial antisemitism sought to prove the superiority of the white “race” while “proving” the inferiority of the Jewish “race.” That racial inferiority was demonstrated “naturally”, they argued, by the fact that Jews had not formed their own nation or state. Instead, they argued, Jews simply lived off foreign cultures and nations like inferior life forms.

The continuity between Christian and national attitudes towards Jews was that both, for their own reasons, were suspicious of the sincerity in which Jews sought to coexist. Christians were still suspicious of the motives of Jewish converts while racists did not believe that assimilation necessarily admitted you into the nation. In fact, racial beliefs did not allow for “conversion.” One either belonged to a certain race or did not. This was seen as “natural” and had nothing to do with ethics or motives. As Christians had felt a religious duty to convert Jews to save souls, racists felt a duty to isolate Jews to preserve the “natural” order. Not coincidentally, 19<sup>th</sup> century antisemitism was marked by the idea of “racial” struggle.

Hostility towards Jews now grew on a national scale. New horrors and confusing transitions spawned new reasons to identify the culprits behind it all. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian pogroms – violent attacks on Jewish communities with the aid or indifference of the government – signaled a new phase of deflecting national crises by scapegoating Jews. States could tap into previous religious views as well as newly defined racial ones. It was relatively easy for those in power to stoke the fire of antisemitism whenever they needed to distract people from their own failings, explain away confusing and disruptive times, or provide an outlet for fear.

Austrian Catholics, fearful of their polyglot empire, were also relatively immune from the counter-attacking forces of liberalism. Pope Pius IX’s 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* condemning liberalism, science, and modernism, resonated in Austria. Still peasant and artisan-based as late as 1890, Austrian Catholics embraced a virulent, peasant-based antisemitism. In the 1880s and 1890s, an artisan movement formed to fight “Jewish liberal plutocrats”<sup>7</sup> and called for boycotts against Jewish businesses. Austrian elites were even more willing to use antisemitism as a political weapon than were the Prussians. Austrians would later represent a disproportionate number of Nazis, including 14% of the SS and 40% of death camp staffs.<sup>8</sup> A young Hitler would learn his antisemitism from the streets of Catholic Vienna.

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<sup>7</sup> Weiss, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 173.





This 1894 depiction of Alfred Dreyfus in France illustrates the “3<sup>rd</sup> mutation” of antisemitism. Dreyfus, the only Jew on the French General Staff, was accused of being a traitor for having supposedly given secrets to the Germans. Years later he was found innocent, but the depiction of Dreyfus as a serpent, something less than human, shows the cultural shift to racism. The French Catholic Church, promoting their “patriotism”, supported the French military in denouncing the innocent Dreyfus. The snake images revealed the curiously acceptable mixture of Christian ideas of Satan with the new concept of racism. Although the Catholic Church rejected racism, the imagery still spoke to long-held beliefs. Jews were both evil and non-human. Anti-Judaism and antisemitism could coexist.

Perhaps the most notorious and pernicious antisemitic invention was the ***Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion***. Begun in Russia in 1902, this fraud plagiarized other poorly written works – having nothing to do with Jews – and forged together a powerful myth of Jewish world conspiracy. Supported by Tsar Nicholas II, the forgery “revealed” in spectacular fashion the “protocols” Jews use to destroy and control the entire world. This was a modern, racially charged version of the Jewish conspiracy theory that had first emerged centuries before in the wake of the Black Death. All modern evils were revealed to be part of a global Jewish conspiracy. This fantasy book has proven to be both durable and transferable. When identity is threatened or things are unclear or frightening, conspiracy theories seem to provide easily understood explanations. Conspiracy fantasies provide the believer with a ready explanation to confusing realities and offer a false sense of control. Today the *Protocols* are currently a top seller in the Middle East and amongst antisemites globally. Until recently copies could even be purchased at Wal Mart.

The basic themes of “Jewish” conspiracies in the *Protocols* (as they have evolved). Jews:

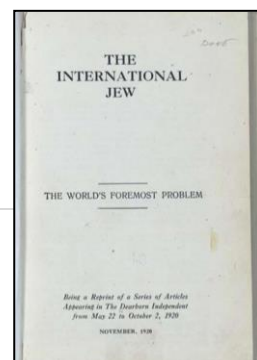
- 1 invent alcoholism
- 2, 9, 12 propagate ideas of all possible complexities with the task of undermining established forms of order including Darwinism, Marxism, Nietzsche-ism, Liberalism, Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, and Utopianism.
- 4 Create materialism
- 5 Invent world government
- 7 Initiate the world wars
- 10 Create universal suffrage
- 11 Curtail civil liberties with the excuse of defeating the enemies of peace
- 11, 12, 17 Create the impression of the existence of freedom of press, freedom of speech, democracy and human rights, all of which are subsequently undermined and become mere illusions or deceptive smokescreens behind which actual oppression lies
- 13 Create distractions
- 14 Create pornographic literature
- 14,17 Destroy Christianity and other religions. This is followed by a transitional stage of atheism, followed finally with the hegemony of Judaism
- 16 Brainwash people
- 20 Create economic depressions, progressive taxation on property, and decimate states by foreign loans (that they secretly control)
- 23 Unleash forces of violence under the mask of principles of freedom, only to have the ‘King of the Jews’ demolish those very forces to make him appear the savior



1930 Spanish version of the *Protocols*. Note the similarity between racial tropes to Christian ones. An evil (devilish) Jew is squeezing the life blood out the world (a desecrated host?) in a kind of ritual murder.



1934 French version of the *Protocols* purports a Jewish world conspiracy. The sinister looking Jew is not human, but a poisonous spider.



American version of the *Protocols* purporting to reveal the “World’s Foremost Problem” was a reprint of articles published in the *Dearborn Independent* from May to October 1920 by Henry Ford.

Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg summed up this progression:

The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews.  
The secular rulers that followed had proclaimed: You have no right to live among us.  
The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live.

### **Nazi Germany:**

The devastation of the First World War shook Western civilization to the core. Racism, social-Darwinism, industrialism and national identity had come together in a vortex of destruction. Germany, recently forged as a state (1871) was divided along jagged fault lines (religion, region, social class, urban vs. rural). The Reichstag (Parliament) represented these contentious sociopolitical blocs with all-consuming, dense networks of insular clubs and organizations with perhaps ¼ of them hostile to democracy. Other elites promoted the war with Anti-Slav racism mixed with antisemitism as a vehicle to unify the nation and block liberal democracy. Upper class Austrian and Germans, conservatives and nationalists saw the war in terms of a struggle between Teutonic tribes and Slavs. Field Marshal Hindenburg had embraced the war as a test of German racial superiority. The War had radicalized the dysfunctional and poisonous political system. By 1917 German literature was declaring the war a struggle between Germans and Jews.

The military's aggressive war aims had sought to conquer land in east in order to enable German colonizers to raise healthy families and breed soldiers. At the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Germans finalized their land and industrial grab and solidified their use of foreign and Jewish slave labor. The need for land and labor was embedded in the German military psyche as was the manipulation of antisemitism to cover their failings. German industrialists had profited from the war, many army units refused to fight (and jeered those who did) by the war's end, and the generals had bungled the war. Despite that, with their aims of seizing land in the east intact as postwar doctrine, the aristocrats were able to utilize the "stab in the back" myth that Jews, never loyal to the German nation or spirit, had been the ones who had sold out the country. Jews had been exempt from the officer corps until 1914 and once again, a self-fulfilling logic was utilized. The German army had conducted a secret survey about the lack of Jews fighting in the trenches – only to discover that a disproportionate number of German Jews were serving loyally in the front lines and the Pan-German League set up a Jewish affairs committee. German antisemitism was not created by the resentments and trauma of World War I. The war deeply impacted artisans and small businessmen that would become the foundation of the Nazi Party.

Hitler served in the Army propaganda section after the war and it is no accident that the Nazi Party's worldview reflected the militant, racist nationalism of the prewar elites. Their ideology and call for a leader/savior appealed to nationalists, eugenicist, antisemites, conservatives, colonialists, Christians, and opportunists. The concept of the "Volk" had a uniquely German appeal/force in informing a communal and national identity that connected "Germans" to history, the soil, even "race." This need for a communal identity, although deeply present before, was particularly felt in the chaos following the First World War. The Nazis were driven by a paranoid fear of the past, present, and future. From the dehumanization of the trenches they came to believe that war and violence were methods to solve issues and solidify the identity of the "Volk." Preemptive attacks were justified in a self-perceived struggle for survival. The front line soldier ideal of hardened, violent, dispassionate, cold-blooded comrades would appeal to postwar Germans and would be the formative myth of the SS. Celebrating emotional distance from victims, holding compassion and pacifism in contempt (ideals assigned to a "Jewish conspiracy") and embracing the war myth meant that murdering enemies required not the worst of society, but to men like Himmler, the best. Nazism was deeply rooted in the German experience.

Nazi ideology rooted itself in racial science, anthropology and biology to create a worldview that would explain the confusing post-war world. Nazi ideology divided the world into the **Übermenschen** (worthy of life) the **Untermenschen** (subhumans to be enslaved) and it was the duty of the **Übermenschen** to subjugate the **Untermenschen** and enslave them. This touches upon national trauma in an era shaped by the ethos and logic of colonialism which valued subjugation to establish a racial hierarchy. Jews were identified as the **Ungeziefer** (vermin). This would become something different than colonialism or the Jim Crow South which sought to

preserve differences through institutional racism. More importantly, with the failed Weimar state this construct made logical sense.

The Nazi revolution succinctly articulated German Volk nationalism (picking and choosing from a symbolic repertoire from “remembered” history) that described who they were, are, and what the future would be. Using contemporary ideas and inventing and constructing memories of a mythical German past, they gave meaning to the process that would evolve into the Holocaust. It was not ideology that shaped people as much as it was an imagination that “made sense” of the ideology being presented. Nazism was shaped in the crucible of German culture and defeat in war, but even before 1933, some German theologians and scholars were exploring ways to “de-Judaize” and therefore “purify” the Protestant churches. Nazism, according to Rudolf Hess, was “applied biology” or, in other words, the creation of a new humanity struggling to eradicate perceived threats to its survival. German racial supremacy and the Volk would be based on eradicating not just Jews, but Judaism and all that it supposedly entailed. Thus Nazi racism was not solely about biology, but was also focused on perceived threats to the future “Aryan blood.” Nazi antisemitism liberated the conscience of many Germans (and others) by removing the individual Jew (and any historical memory of life with Jews – good or bad) and supplanting it with the urgent need to fight the symbolic power of “Judaism” and the Jewish “spirit.” This would be a revolution that, as my friend and survivor Tom Weisshaus likes to say, would remove conscience from human interaction. It would expand the possibilities of a human imagination unrestrained by the ethics of the Bible which had informed Jewish and Christian identities. This “perfect storm” would be driven by trauma, Nazi ideology (to the degree it became an expression of cultural desires), and the power of a modern nation-state. Claudia Koontz writes that the “road to Auschwitz was paved with righteousness.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Hans-Juergen Schultz, “The wiping out of the Jews would be inconceivable without the cooperation and participation of the Christians. It came neither suddenly nor unexpectedly. It is no accident that the ideologues of antisemitism borrowed their symbolic weapons extensively from the arsenal of Christianity. Society had been deeply conditioned by, among other things, religious teaching to the idea of targeting Jews. Although the Nazis rejected Christianity (in part because the Nazis recognized Jesus as Jew) the Nazis often used Christian symbols and language and operated within the thought processes of Christian imagination and tradition when speaking to their mostly Christian population.

Consider which parts of Nazi antisemitism is new and which are parts of a continuum.



“Crucifixion” in *Der Stürmer*, January 1939. *Der Stürmer* was the most notorious newspaper in Nazi Germany. It published not only vulgar antisemitic articles, but also loathsome anti-Jewish caricatures created by Philipp Rupprecht. This image depicts the “Jew” as a warmonger who looks on approvingly as the non-Jewish world is crucified on a cross marked “war” (Krieg). USHMM Collection, Gift of Virginius Dabney

Which mutations of the antisemitic imagination does Rupprecht tap into? How does it also illustrate Alon Confino’s view of Nazi revolution?

<sup>9</sup> Koontz, Claudia. *The Nazi Conscience*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.





Inside page: "When you see a cross, then think of the horrible murder by the Jews on Golgotha..."

While the cover's overt racial antisemitism was often rejected by some churches, the interior illustrations were perhaps less problematic.

How did this Nazi children's book tap into "acceptable" antisemitism? Why mushrooms? They are plentiful in Germany, but without expertise, could be dangerous?



May 1939 cover from *Der Stürmer* depicts "Ritual Murder".



This page was submitted as evidence at the Nuremberg war crimes trials after the war.

How were Nazi propagandists utilizing the imaginations of their Christian citizens? What did the perpetrators think they were doing?

"The Standard Bearer", by Hubert Lanzinger, circa 1935. USHMM  
 This portrait depicts Hitler as a messianic crusading figure gazing toward a better future for Germany. It was first displayed at the Great German Art Exhibition in Munich in 1937. Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's official photographer and an exhibition judge, had the image made into a postcard around 1938. After the war, a U.S. soldier pierced the painting with a bayonet. U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C.



How does this image speak to questions of German, European, and Christian identities?



How does this Nazi propaganda poster “Long Live Germany!” embody and appeal to a positive Christian identity in the construction of a new world and a new humanity? Note the symbolic image of the Holy Spirit anointing the movement. How does the messiah figure illustrate that ideology only makes sense within an imaginable construct?

It is a consistent response by Nazi perpetrators that Jews had to die in order to stop their growing “world domination.” Germans, however unpleasant the task was, imagined and justified preemptive strikes at “the Jews” in order for the German nation to survive. Thus, the Holocaust became a “moral act” in the minds of the perpetrators.

I have argued that antisemitism is often embraced by people driven by fear and confusion who are seeking explanations to make sense of a troubling world. This is only a partial explanation as to why antisemitism continues to flourish. Nothing is easily explained away – especially antisemitism. But it is helpful, I think, to explore antisemitism from issues of identity and imagination. Humans seem to need to create an ‘other’ as they establish their own identity. The pressing issue is whether we see difference as a problem to be solved or as an opportunity to find, as Regina Schwartz phrases, a “plentitude of truth.”

Recently a photo album was discovered and verified by the USHMM as the album almost certainly belonging to and created by SS-Obersturmführer Karl Höcker, the adjutant to the commandant of Auschwitz, SS-Sturmbannführer Richard Baer. Höcker was stationed at Auschwitz from May 1944 until the evacuation of the camp in January 1945. As the Soviet army closed in the killing at Auschwitz continued. While the gas chambers were operating, the album shows daily life among the SS. It is a chillingly disturbing collection of how life for the perpetrator had been normalized. This December 1944 Auschwitz photo shows SS officer Karl Hoecker lighting a candle on a Christmas tree. The caption reads "Julfeier 1944" (the Nazi name for a pre-Christian Yule celebration). Although the Nazis rejected Christianity, this picture illustrates a continuum of identity from Hoecker's past that is both revealing and deeply troubling. The perpetrators were by-and-large very “normal” people.



The antidote for the third mutation of antisemitism seemed to have come with the liberation of Nazi camps, the Nuremberg Trials, the UN Genocide Convention, the Eichmann Trial and subsequent scholarship and growing public connection to the trauma of the Holocaust. “Never again!” signaled that public attitudes had shifted to no longer tolerating the mainstream acceptance or expression of antisemitism. It was no longer socially or culturally acceptable. Of course, that only meant that this mutation had been weakened, not eliminated. A new virus would mutate around this antidote and allow for a new, publically accepted expression of antisemitism. This new mutation, like those in the past, would find mainstream justification, be seen as redemptive and decent, and thrive and spread alongside previous mutations. Antisemitism since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is framed within a genocidal and eliminationist mindset.



## The “4<sup>th</sup> Mutation”: Anti-Zionism

Arguably, the previous expressions of antisemitism are more easily identifiable than what Rabbi Saks’ identifies as its most contemporary strain. The state of Israel certainly is an excuse and/or conduit for expressing antisemitism in our world today. During the 2014 war in Gaza against Hamas, a terrorist organization whose mission it is to “obliterate” Israel<sup>10</sup>, some Europeans (Germans included) marched in support to ‘send Jews to the gas.’ We have heard antisemitism constructed in the imagination as the explanation for an abstract symbol of evil. Now, we see the transference of that thinking away from “Jews” and onto Israel. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century racists justified their social-Darwinist, antisemitic thinking by reasoning that Jews were stateless and thus unfit to survive. Today the state of Israel is projected as a new and singular “evil” in the world which antisemites use to justify attacks on Jews. Not all criticisms of Israel are antisemitic. There are many cultural, geopolitical, national, religious, and ideological motives (to state just a few) that give and allow for the expression of identity and the venting of frustration at the expense of Jews and Judaism. As antisemitism is often expressed through accepted norms of constructed (and contested) memory claims it is often difficult to untangle, let alone identify and condemn its contemporary expressions. Are we witnessing a fourth mutation with new norms that sanction its expression?

The question is important because it signifies something has changed. It also allows us to wrestle with the danger of antisemitism today in contrast to the world of the Holocaust. There is something significantly different. As we witness and try to respond to a resurgence of antisemitism in Europe and the Middle East we must be very careful to not trivialize the Holocaust in the process. Berenbaum correctly asserts that antisemitism *in* Europe is not the same as antisemitism *of* Europe. In France, for example, Muslim minorities that are not acculturated, are unassimilated, alienated, and frustrated, bring Middle East concerns and hatred of Israel into their confrontations of their Jewish neighbors in Europe. As the Middle East gets hot, so do antisemitic attacks. Although discredited antisemitic myths have migrated as an alien import to Arab Muslims (Christian blood libel for example) that does not mean they are embraced by Europeans.

We must be responsible in telling what the Holocaust was and what antisemitism looked like then. We must fight trivialization of the Holocaust and its manipulative use to score cheap points. We must tell what it is and what it is not. Over a twelve year period twenty-two countries helped to perpetrate the Holocaust. It was the antisemitism of the powerful, top-down and bottom-up, within societies using the political, medical, and legal systems, indeed, all of society, to annihilate the defenseless. That is not the case today. When antisemitic hate crimes occur it is news. People react. Note how the leadership in France and Germany has publically stood in defense of their Jewish communities. Indeed, the French have asserted that French Jews are French. Even Marie Le Pen is distancing herself and her party from her father’s vitriolic antisemitism. She does not want to score points with that group and this is indeed progress. The Holocaust has become the absolute touchstone for human evil. One who calls out that something is a “Holocaust” is seeking to bring attention while recognizing the moral absolute. Within western cultures, acceptance, empathy, and pluralism are the norm – generally speaking. What is the most radical difference between antisemitic events of the Holocaust and today? Jews are not powerless. Bluntly speaking, if you are a Jew and had to bet your life between weighing whether Iran will strike Israel or that Israel will preemptively strike Iran to deter its nuclear capability, how would you choose? The fact that you have a choice demonstrates the difference between then and now. Jews are an empowered people today. The world needs Israel especially due to its knowledge-based economic products including cell phones, intel, apple computers, immunization medicines, and water conservation and preservation techniques. This does not make the threat less or irrelevant, but it casts it in a different light.

As my experience has been through a Catholic perspective I do not claim to address the complex Muslim world with any authority. The history of Muslim antisemitism needs to be explored through other sources. I will attempt to give a broad outline of two origins of modern antisemitism as “anti-Zionism.” Let us begin this final

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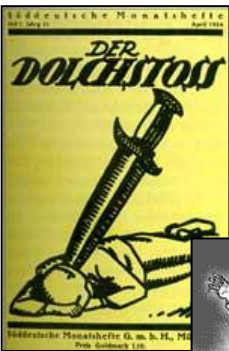
<sup>10</sup> Hamas Covenant, 1988.

section with the guidance of Michael Berenbaum. This framework will help to summarize where we have been and help identify current expressions of antisemitism.

### Michael Berenbaum’s Common Elements of Antisemitism:<sup>11</sup>

- Antisemitism is ongoing and builds upon previous constructs
- The Jew as absolute evil expressed according to prevailing worldview  
(Christianity: Jews are killers of God, anti-Christ, and Satan. Nationalism and racism: Jews as aliens. Universalism: Israel as nationalist, racist, post-colonialist expansionist evil.)
- Desire for power  
(ie: conspiracy theories, thirst for blood, infanticide, lust for money)
- Genetic deficiency
- Verbal or physical attacks

The twentieth century saw the expansion of the concept of human rights. New laws were formed and treaties were signed. All this was progress. For the antisemite, it became the new language through which antisemitism must be and could be expressed and understood. A certain twisted logic of the antisemite in the post Holocaust world began to argue that: antisemitism is evil; racism is evil; the Holocaust was the *worst* (privileging it) crime *ever* (feeding into an initial postwar reaction) committed; Nazism was evil; therefore, Israel, being a “racist state” is similar to Nazi Germany and for the good of the world, must be destroyed. I cannot explore the complexities of ideologies and identities expressed unilaterally vis-à-vis Israel. Nor will I attempt to explain the complexities of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Instead, it might be helpful to identify the origins of such pernicious thinking to identify what is at stake. Today all the previous expressions of antisemitism can be found in many attacks on Israel and Israelis. It is common to see old Nazi propaganda (ie: stab in the back myth) or debunked Christian myths (ie: deicide, ritual murder) twisted against Israel today.



Nazi Germany (left) and (below) the daily Arabic news *Al-Watan (Homeland)*, January 29, 2003



Nazi Germany (left) and (below) *Al-Istiqlal (Palestinian Authority)*, June 1, 2001



Even at the 2013 Oscar ceremony, comedian Seth MacFarlane flippantly used a crude antisemitic myth and joked about the ‘Jewish control of Hollywood’ after a skit honoring Christopher Plummer had an SS soldier in full regalia come up on stage to reenact a scene from the *Sound of Music*. People laughed. I felt sickened. If we can identify these expressions of antisemitism and their origins – that we dare not say in front of the burning children – then perhaps we can recognize the deeply rooted sense of targeting that Jews constantly live with and therefore live responsibly in the shadow of the Holocaust (and violations of human rights).

<sup>11</sup> Berenbaum, Michael. *Not Your Father’s Antisemitism: Hatred of the Jews in the Twenty-First Century*. St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008. .

## Origins of “Anti-Zionism”

I am aware of my failure to address Muslim origins of antisemitism and will instead focus on those contexts that emanate from what we have previously explored. I will use broad brush strokes here as we have already created an analytical framework. Each of the following needs further exploration.



Haj Amin al-Husseini (1895-1974) was among the first post-World War I “Arab nationalists” opposing colonial British and French rule. He was appointed the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem under the post-World War I British mandate system. As mufti, his most successful project was the restoration of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque which greatly enhanced the status of Jerusalem in the Muslim world. But al-Husseini was an extremist who, having fled Palestine, found a home in Nazi Germany and befriended Hitler, Himmler and Eichmann. From Berlin he broadcast Nazi antisemitism with an Arabic flair into the Middle East from a radio station funded by the SS. When four Einsatzgruppen units (special action killing squads) were active in murdering the Jews of the Soviet Union in the first mass wave of executions in 1941, al-Husseini volunteered to help coordinate the extermination of Jewish settlers in Palestine through a fifth Einsatzgruppen, E (Egypt) that was to be attached to Rommel’s Afrika Korps. Einsatzgruppen E had only 24 German support personnel and would have relied upon the manpower reinforcements from al-Husseini’s volunteers to do the killing.



1941: Grand Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini visits Hitler in Germany

Einsatzgruppen E never became operational as it appears that Rommel wanted nothing to do with them (they remained in Greece) and due to the defeat of the Afrika Korps in the battles of El Alamein in 1942. Additionally, al-Husseini was instrumental in recruiting two Muslim SS Hanjar (Sword) divisions that would fight in Yugoslavia and also carried out security duties in Hungary. [Note: At the same time, the Catholic Church put a blind eye towards Catholic participation – including priests – in the massacres of Jews in Croatia. Pope Pius XII actually received Anton Pavelic at the Vatican during the war. Pavelic, the Croatian leader who with the help of local priests murdered and estimated 30,000 Jews and 200,000 Orthodox Serbs.]



Al-Husseini with SS Hanjar Divis.

“Arabs! Rise as one and fight for your sacred rights. Kill the Jews wherever you find them. This pleases God, history, and religion...” - al-Husseini, March 1, 1944

It is important, especially with the creation of national memory myths, that this self-declared “Palestinian national leader” not only worked with the Nazis, but attempted to destroy Jewish settlers and other moderate Arabs some of whom had gotten on fairly well before the 1930s. It must be noted also that al-Husseini represented a relatively small group of Arabs, but that their antisemitism and service to Nazi Germany was intense. It is important to understand that the efforts to destroy Jews in the Middle East predate the state of Israel and that Israel was not created because of the Holocaust, but in spite of it. (Many Jews were murdered in Palestine at that time.) It is also noteworthy to point out that the only mutiny to occur within the SS occurred in France in 1943 when Bosnian Muslims in the Waffen SS refused to carry out orders to murder Jews. They had been recruited under vague terms that utilized local grievances.

## The Role of Joseph Stalin and Soviet Propaganda in the Cold War

As head of a state traumatized by World War II and his own mass murders, Stalin was focused on maintaining a unified Soviet state and destroying any sense of national identity/nationalism either within the state or in occupied Europe. Although an original supporter of the fledgling state of Israel he quickly changed his position in 1948. With Jewish identity revitalized by the stunning survival of Israel in the 1948 war, Stalin faced the problematic example of Jews in the Soviet Union rallying around the new state of Israel. Zionism (Israel as the home of the Jewish people) posed a threat to Stalin's ability to subjugate the multi-ethnic police state and he therefore campaigned against Zionism with the goal of discouraging any national movements.



Stalin attacked the Jewish state by revitalizing the vulgar and Russian-invented *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (a cultural reference point into previous antisemitic beliefs and behaviors). It was Stalin who helped galvanize the perceptual shift of “Jewish conspiracy” into “Israeli conspiracy.” Soviet propagandists quoted and manipulated the *Protocols*: ‘Jews control the media. Zionism is a great invisible power whose octopus like tentacles expand into every sphere of politics, finance, religion, media...’

In the 1950s, anti-Zionism also proved an effective tool in rallying the communist east against the capitalist West in the deepening Cold War. The negative image of the “Jew” linked to “American imperialism” had its origins in France in the 1930s. Some French blamed the spread of “American imperialism” on “globalization by the Jewish cinema” and the propaganda of Hollywood and “black jazz.” Soviet propaganda built upon this and identified Zionism with both fascism and American imperialism. Soviet satellite states were often used as the “testing grounds” for anti-Zionist initiatives. Eastern European communist governments rediscovered that they could crush threats to their power or redirect criticism of their corruption by utilizing the traditional eastern European tactics of blaming “the Jews.” In Poland, for example, barely 30,000 Jews remain after the war (.1% of the population). And yet, Polish communist leaders often effectively blamed “the Jews” for post-war problems.

In December 1952 at the Czechoslovakia Party Congress, Zionists were accused of exploiting their suffering under Nazism to manipulate non-Jewish sympathy. In that same year, in Poland, Soviet speakers talked of Israeli campaigns to ‘exterminate Arab populations in Israel’ and conducting a “genocidal policy” that was identical to Hitler’s. In 1953, Stalin spoke of Israel as a “bridgehead for U.S. aggression against the Soviet Union and all peace-loving peoples” while also accusing Zionists of collaborating with the Nazis in the extermination of Jews. This coincided with Soviet allegations that the U.S. had delayed opening the second front in World War II – implying Zionist scheming. Finally in that year, Zionism was labeled as “racist” and “colonialist.”

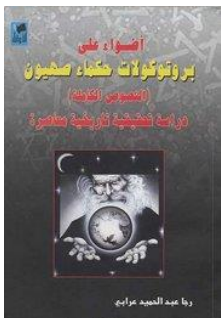
In the 1960s and 70s, with Stalin gone, anti-Zionism continued to be a crucial part of the Soviet Union’s Cold War strategy. In 1965 Polish communists proposed that Zionism be linked to colonialism, racism, and all other colonial evils. Soviet propaganda ratcheted up after 1967 Six Day War when Israel, backed by U.S. weaponry, destroyed larger Arab armies equipped with Soviet weaponry. On July 5, 1967, in response to this humiliation and the possible diplomatic fallout, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev connected Israel to Nazism (the big taboo) by claiming, “in their atrocities it seems they [the Israelis] want to copy the crimes of the Hitler invaders.” In 1975 the United Nations, under heavy pressure from the Soviets, declared “Zionism” to be synonymous with racism.



Soviet propaganda resonated in Arab world after 1948. It served Arab national interests to go along with their great ally in the Soviet Union who were finding hot spots to battle the West. Ironically, Arab nations accepted Soviet aid and the Cold War anti-Zionism rhetoric that went along with it due in part to having been disillusioned by the West after World War I that had promised Arab national freedom but instead had implemented the post-World War I mandate system. Mix elements of Muslim extremism (such as Hassan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Grand Mufti) with state corruption, a rejection of modern egalitarian ideas, and humiliation on the battlefield, the Arab world became a hotbed of antisemitism. In this context, anti-Zionism has been an outlet for venting Arab frustration and militancy. Israel is singled out as the root of *all* evil while other state and individual crimes are ignored and deflected towards a “pariah state.” Antisemitism and Holocaust denial are fueled by the Israeli/Palestinian/Arab war, but Israel is not the root cause or origin. It is important to reiterate that antisemitism based on the concept of a “Jewish [Israeli] world conspiracy” is not rooted in Islamic tradition, but in European mind-sets. Its lethal, corrupting, and destructive legacy is expressed in the Hamas Covenant of 1988:

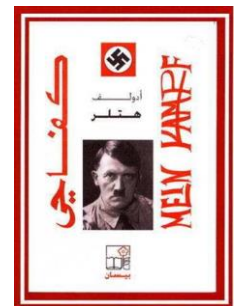
For Zionist scheming has no end, and after Palestine they will covet expansion from the Nile to the Euphrates. Only when they have completely digested the area on which they will have laid their hand, they will look forward to more expansion, etc. Their scheme has been laid out in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*... - Article 32

After the Holocaust, Christianity discovered that antisemitism had created an identity crisis that threatened both their self-understanding and their ethical role in the world. Islam is beginning to acknowledge the same threat. In England, “Muslims Against Antisemitism” has formed recognizing the polluting effect this hatred has on Muslim ethics. History is rife with examples of religion inciting violence in its followers. Religion has also served to mitigate violence by embracing the fundamental principle of hospitality to the other. Why are Jews constantly exempted from this ethic of hospitality by their religious neighbors? What is at stake for religious identity and behavior?



2005 Syrian edition of the *Protocols*.

The shaping of anti-Israel rhetoric by both Nazi and Communist propagandists are reflected in contemporary cartoons, accusations that shape the international debate, and the unavoidable fact that both the revised *Protocols* and *Mein Kampf* are top sellers in the Arabic world today. Finally, it was the European Left and Communists in particular who adopted Palestinian national liberation as a “cause celebre.” It was the combination of Soviet support, Arab nationalism and antisemitism that created the twisted logic and modern mantra of anti-Zionists, “Zionism=racism=Nazism.”



Arabic distribution by Al-Shurouq, a Ramallah based book distributor



In Place de la République (Paris) the crowd shouted “Death to the Jews! Death to Israel!” (10-6-2000)

Separate from this dynamic, we live in a world seemingly in turmoil. We fear terrorism, disease, dislocation, changing mores, and globalization. It is an era ripe for conspiracy theories and an easy embrace of antisemitism (in all of its manifestations) to explain away the confusion. We must use education to identify the origins of and costs of hatred. We have the power and choice to reject fear and embrace complexity. We must allow our identities to be informed by diversity not threatened by it. We cannot accept simple mantras and narrowly defined ideologies to imprison us. How can we move forward and find opportunities for peace, for the many peoples who deserve it, if antisemitism poisons the waters?



Ernie Michel, Auschwitz 704995