

JEWS AND CHRISTIANITY

During the turbulent times of the Middle Ages and leading to our own era, there have been a number of wars with particularly religious emphasis. From 1208 to 1228, for instance, the Catholic Church led crusades against the Albigensians (a Christian "heretic" movement in Western Europe), which totally destroyed them. The Inquisition burned thousands of Christians at the stake and eliminated religious dissent in Southern Europe. For over a century, from 1559, much of Europe echoed a series of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. One of the most famous atrocities of this period was the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, in which thousands of Huguenots were massacred in Paris, and thousands more in the countryside. In the seventeenth century, Protestant churches in Poland were destroyed by Catholics in anti-Protestant riots in towns like Poznan, Cracow, and Lublin. [HAGEN, p. 198] [Editor: this paragraph by Hagen *totally* mischaracterizes the Spanish Inquisition, and says nothing about Protestant anti-Catholic violence, which was vastly more severe, especially in England and in Ireland, with its orchestrated famine. As to the Inquisition, see <https://www.fisheaters.com/spanishinquisition2.html>]

Within this context of intra-religious warring, in conjunction with famines, pestilence, and other widespread catastrophes, "what is astonishing," writes Alan Edelstein, "given the situation of medieval European Jewry, and what bears examination, is not that many were attacked, expelled, or forcibly converted, but that more were not." [EDELSTEIN]

"Any judgment on the Christian treatment of Jews [across history]," agrees Nicholas de Lange, another Jewish scholar, "should also take account of the treatment of other religions, and indeed of dissident movements within Christianity. Against this background, the treatment of Jews can actually seem astonishingly humane and generous." [DE LANGE, p. 35] "Christianity mercilessly persecuted paganism and heresies," says Abram Leon, " [but] it tolerated the Jewish religion." [LEON, p. 73] "We shall have to admit," wrote famed Jewish historian Salo Baron, "that church censorship has rarely interfered with the autonomous development of Jewish culture." [BARON, Ancient, p. 266]

Yet modern Jewry's deep animosity towards Christianity stems from the accusation that institutional Christianity (as distinct from riotous mobs and individuals) was seminal to anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages, and even earlier, laying a religious foundation for the hostility towards Jews in the Western world to our own time. It can easily be argued, however, (as did Benjamin Disraeli, and others) that official Christian protection of Jewry is as much responsible for Judaism's survival as anything else. "It may be asserted," wrote Salo Baron, "that had it not been for the Catholic Church, the Jews would have not survived the Middle Ages in Christian Europe." [SCHORSCH, p. 38] Yet an important part of the Jewish victim tradition is the perceived monolithic oppression of Christianity, presumably emanating from the traditional Christian notion that "Jews killed Jesus," and epitomized in attacks by medieval mobs and thugs against Jews, especially during the fervor of the Crusades in 1068. "Anyone who reads the

Talmudic tractate Avodah Zara," says Michael Lerner, "cannot escape the impression that Jews have come to believe that all non-Jews are so dangerous that they should be avoided." [LERNER, Goyim, p. 434]

Cecil Roth, a prominent Jewish historian in the first half of this century, argues that the Jewish persecution by Christianity throughout the ages -- a staple of popular Jewish folklore -- has been greatly exaggerated:

"Jewish historiography towards Christianity, and especially Catholicism, is typical of the errors which a too slavish following of the German tradition has inspired ... The same lack of understanding and the same violence of contrast have been carried into other aspects of Jewish history. No attempt whatsoever has been made to understand the psychology of persecution. Any Jew-baiter is necessarily represented as a bloodthirsty desperado ... Any [Jewish] apostate as a mere self-seeking humbug. All persons who have favored the Jews inevitably figure as saints and heroes, while whoever opposes or oppressed them automatically become ruffians and hypocrites ... Almost every Jew is made to figure as a peaceful, unoffending saint, with no blemish whatsoever to mar his character or to explain his mistreatment ... [But] blood ran as quickly in the ghetto as outside ... [Jewish] violence was not unknown in the synagogue itself. [Jewish] sordidness was present in plenty to enhance by contrast the glories of martyrdom." [ROTH, p. 421-423]

Based upon the ancient Judaic mythos of eternal victimization, Jewish animosity -- and often hatred -- towards Christianity runs deep to this day. Yet, says Salo Baron, "It would be a mistake ... to believe that hatred was the constant keynote of Judeo-Christian relations, even in [medieval] Germany or Italy. It is the nature of historical records to transmit to posterity the memory of extraordinary events, rather than of the ordinary flow of life." [LIBERLES, p. 347]

Judaism had, of course, antipathy for Christianity from the latter's very inception. Christianity evolved out of Judaism; it was founded and propagated by Jews dissatisfied with the direction of the seminal faith as guided by its leaders. "Popular hatred of the Temple priest and the rich," says Lenni Brenner, "became the basis of Christianity, and the New Testament must be seen as the last major production of the Jewish religious genre." [BRENNER, p. 42] The new faith branched out of Judaism as a distinctly different -- and to Jewish minds heretical -- religious view. At this point in history, Judaism was the dominant religious force (vis a vis Christianity) in Jerusalem; Christianity was embryonic and Jews were the persecutors. Christians hoped that Jews would join their new, universalistic faith.

Edward Flannery writes that

"The synagogue resented Christianity's claims and in the emerging conflict struck the first blow. Hellenist Jewish converts to the Church were driven from Jerusalem. [Saint] Stephen was killed, as were the two Jameses, though James the Less was killed through the action of the high priest, not the majority of Jews. Peter was forced out of Palestine by the persecution of Herod Agrippa I, and Paul endured flagellations, imprisonment, and complaints by Jews to Roman authorities, and threats of death at Jewish hands. Barnabas' death (60 AD) at the hands of Jews in Cypress is unanimously reported by early hagiographers." [FLANNERY, p. 27]

By 80 AD Jewish ritual had incorporated a daily curse against Christians: "May the *minim* [heretics] perish in an instant; may they be effaced from the book of life and not be counted among the Just." [FLANNERY, p. 28] In 117 CE Jews were involved in the death of St. Simeon, the bishop of Jerusalem, and unrepenting Christians were massacred by Jews in the Bar Kocha revolt (132-135 AD) against the Romans.

Christians were severely persecuted under Roman rule, while Jews -- after initial revolts against Rome -- largely prospered. "Christians were subject to mounting and systematic persecution from the time of Emperor Trajan (98-117 CE) onwards," notes Robin Spiro, "The Jews, by and large, fared better than the Christians at the hands of the Romans, and retained the majority of their special privileges." [SPIRO, p. 17] As Christianity grew in later centuries, attacks, riots, pogroms, rebellions -- or whatever else one chooses to polemically label them -- were instigated by Jews against Christians in Palestine and other parts of the Old World. Simon Dubnov notes that "in 556, during bouts in the circus in Caesarea, the Samaritans, assisted by Jewish youths, attacked the Christians. The Christians were beaten soundly. Several churches were razed and Stephanus, the governor of Palestine, was killed ... In Antiocha ... in 608, the local Jews rebelled; since they predominated in numbers they killed many Christians, including the patriarch Anastasias, whose body they dragged through the city streets ... In other localities (Scytopolis, for instance) the Jews were hostile toward the Christians. During commercial transactions, they would not even accept money directly from the hands of a Christian; they had to throw their coins into water, where the Jews would then retrieve them." [DUBNOV, p. 24-25 v. 2]

When the Persians invaded Palestine in 614, Jews joined as "auxiliaries" in slaughtering Christian neighbors. "Jewish warriors," says Simon Dubnov, "along with Persians, now assaulted numerous Christian churches (a church legend exaggerates the number of dead to 90,000). Many churches, including the one of Christ's grave, were razed to the ground ... In hostile acts towards Christians the Jew did not lag behind the Persians. Bitter resentment ... found an outlet in atrocities." [DUBNOV, p. 216, v. 2] According to a Christian monk of the times, Strategius of Mar Saba, Jews bought "a large number" of Christian prisoners from the Persians, "who they then slaughtered just as one might buy cattle to slaughter." [SCHAFER, p. 192] "Even as the Persians were approaching Palestine," notes Peter Schafer, "the Jews appear to have risked an open revolt against the Christians and allied themselves with the Persians." [SCHAFER, p. 140] The Persians were soon driven out, however, by Heraclius of Christian

Byzantium. When a Jewish leader, Benjamin of Tiberias, was asked why he had previously justified the cruelties against Christians, the Jewish patriot is reported to have answered, "Because they were the enemies of my religion." [DUBNOV, p. 218, v.2]

For centuries a range of ridiculing and hostile defamatory material about Christ was popularly circulated in the Jewish communities, eventually written as Sefar Toledoth Yeshu. "It enjoyed wide circulation among the general Jewish population." [JACOB, W., 1974, p. 11] The earliest known copy found in modern times was discovered in a synagogue built in the seventh century. Christ, it was said, practiced witchcraft and was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier or, by other accounts, a "disreputable man of the tribe of Judah." [SHAHAK, p. 98, FLANNERY, p. 34, GOLDSTEIN, p. 148] The book, "in Hebrew and Yiddish was, but is not now, in common circulation," wrote Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner in 1926, "yet the book may still be found in (manuscript) and in print among many educated Jews. Our mothers knew its contents by hearsay -- of course with all manner of corruptions, charges, omissions, and imaginative additions -- and handed them on to their children." [KLAUSNER, p. 48] In the early years of Christianity Rabbi Tarphon of Jerusalem declared that "Christians were worse than heathens and one Rabbi Meir proclaimed that the New Testament was "a revelation of sin." [FLANNERY, p. 34]

The Talmud also accused Jesus of a variety of sexual indiscretions and that he had been condemned by God to boil for eternity in "boiling excrement." Jewish religious texts also enjoined pious Jews to burn whatever New Testament volumes they came across. (Israel Shahak notes that this was publicly performed in Israel in 1980 by a Jewish religious organization, Yad Le'alchim). [SHAHAK, p. 21]

A Chabad-sponsored Internet web site notes that

"The Talmud (Babylonian edition) records other sins of 'Jesus of Nazarene':

- 1) He and his disciples practiced sorcery and black magic, led Jews astray into idolatry, and were sponsored by foreign, gentile powers for the purpose of subverting Jewish worship (Sanhedrin 43a).
- 2) He was sexually immoral, worshipped statues of stone (a brick is mentioned), was cut off from the Jewish people for his wickedness, and refused to repent (Sanhedrin 107b, Sotah 47a).
- 3) He learned witchcraft in Egypt and, to perform miracles, used procedures that involved cutting his flesh -- which is also explicitly banned in the Bible (Shabbos 104b).

The false, rebellious message of Jesus has been thoroughly rejected by the vast majority of the Jewish people, as G-d commanded. Unfortunately, however, this same message has brought a terrible darkness upon the world; today, over 1.5 billion gentiles believe in Jesus. Those lost souls

mistakenly think they have found salvation in Jesus; tragically, they are in for a rude awakening." [NOAH'S COVENANT WEB SITE, 2001]

"The very name Jesus," says Shahak, "was for Jews a symbol of all that is abominable, and this popular tradition still exists. The Gospels are equally detested, and they are not allowed to be quoted (let alone taught) even in modern Israel schools. ... For theological reasons, mostly rooted in ignorance, Christianity as a religion is classed by rabbinical teaching as idolatry. All Christian emblems and pictorial representations are regarded as idols ... " [SHAHAK, p. 98]

Another Israeli, Israel Shamir, notes that the Toledoth is being rejuvenated today in Israel:

"Last year [2000], the biggest Israeli tabloid Yedioth Aharonoth reprinted in its library the Jewish anti-Gospel, Toledoth Yeshu, compiled in the Middle Ages. It is the third recent reprint, including one in a newspaper. If the Gospel is the book of love, Toledoth is the book of hate for Christ. The hero of the book is Judas. He captures Jesus by polluting his purity. According to Toledoth, the conception of Christ was in sin, the miracles of Christ were witchcraft, his resurrection but a trick." [SHAMIR, I., 2001]

In 1997, notes Yossi Halevi, "a group of pro-Israel Pentecostals from Oklahoma were gathered outside the room on Jerusalem's Mt. Zion traditionally associated with Jesus' Last Supper, when several Ultra-Orthodox men passing by ostentatiously covered their noses with their prayer shawls, to protect them from the 'stench;' one of them spat on the ground." [HALEVI, Y., p. 16] In Jewish tradition, notes Leon Poliakov, "Christians, significantly, were feared as wild animals much more than hated as men." [WOLFSON, p. 6]

This age-old Jewish contempt is integral to the reciprocal Christian religious animosity towards Jews in the Middle Ages, especially after such material was revealed by Jewish apostates to the surrounding Christian populace. But it is not likely that most "Christian" hostility towards Jews through the ages was based solely upon religious beliefs, although their contesting world view certainly could inflame non-Jewish hostility. As even Mark Twain noted, "With most people, of a necessity, bread and meat take first rank, religion second. I am convinced that the persecution of the Jews is not due in any large degree to religious prejudice." [TWIN]

At Hebrew classes," says Evelyn Kaye, who was raised in an Orthodox community, "we learned only about the role of the Jews in Greek and Roman times. The other aspects of the world were dismissed completely ... At Hebrew classes, we understood that no one ever mentioned the name of Jesus under any circumstances ... Any discussion of Jesus was taboo ... We learned nothing about the spread of Christianity, or its development. We heard nothing of Christian suffering in defense of faith ... I absorbed the idea that as soon as Jesus had arrived and started Christianity, Jews were persecuted ever after." [KAYE, p. 79]

Secular Jewish author Earl Shorris recalled in 1982 the first time he bought a Christmas tree, and the emotions he had when he decided to throw the tree out after both he and his son cut their hands on Christmas ornaments ("one of the cruciform balls"):

"I resolved to save the lives of the Shorris family by getting the Christmas tree out of my house. Like David approaching the giant of Gath in the valley of Elah, I advanced upon the Goliath of Christmas trees. For a moment I was afraid, but I knew that righteousness was on my side and I snatched the great tree from its moorings and bore it out to the trash bin. Disregarding the mystical signs that hung from its limbs, I broke it in half with my bare hands and cast it down into the dark barrel, the Sheol of Christmas trees. Then all the family -- the mother, the wounded men, and even the babe -- rejoiced."
[SHORRIS, E., 1982, p. 40]

"A number of years ago," notes Maurice Friedman about common Jewish perspective on Christianity,

"one of my oldest friends, now a minister, told me of his hope of establishing a community church which would attract many of the Jews in New York City who no longer have any religious commitment. 'Will you have a cross at the altar?' I asked.

'Of course,' he replied. 'It is a universal religious symbol.'

'That is where you are wrong,' I said. 'Even to the non-religious Jews the cross is a symbol of anti-Semitism from which the Jew has had to suffer.'
[FRIEDMAN, M., 1965, p. 211]

There are still excessive anti-Christian currents within much of Jewry today -- even including among its educated leaders. Michael Wyschogrod, a Jewish philosophy professor, wrote in 1989:

"For many Jews, the cross is a source of contamination. From time to time, I have helped organize Jewish-Christian meetings at Catholic locations. There will almost always be some invited Jewish participants who inquire whether there are any crucifixes in the meeting rooms or in the room in which the participants sleep. If so, some participants will refuse to attend or inquire whether the crucifixes can be covered over or removed. What is going on here?" [WYSCHOGROD, p. 146]

Rabbi Daniel Lapin wrote an entire book in 1999 about Jewry's defamation of Christianity. As he notes,

"A scenario I have seen several times took place during a Rotary

luncheon I once attended. The invocation was given as it always is, but on this occasion, unbeknownst to me, the presenter violated an unwritten rule by invoking the name of Jesus. One of the prominent members who is also a leader of the local Jewish community exploded in a paroxysm of rage ... Why do Jews think it acceptable to decree how Christians may pray? Why do so many Jews feel that they must take offense and react angrily at the invoking of the name of Jesus?" [LAPIN, D., 1999, p. 300]