HISTORY, RELIGION, AND ANTISEMITISM
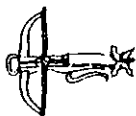
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From Anti-Judaism to Antisemitism

Antisemitism, I shall argue, both in its origins and in its recent most horrible manifestation, is the hostility aroused by irrational thinking about "Jews." But Jews have also been the object of all the more usual kinds of hostility that have been directed at other major groups, especially enduring ethnic groups that competed for scarce resources. If we look first at the kind of hostility that preceded and prepared the way for antisemitism, the contrast will become obvious.

Since I am primarily concerned with the European antisemitism that led directly to the "Final Solution," I shall not discuss pagan attitudes to Jews in antiquity. Certainly, many pagans in the Roman Empire were strongly, even violently, anti-Judaic; indeed, a few individuals may have been antisemitic in my sense. But for various reasons, some of which were sketched in chapter 2, I do not think their attitudes significantly influenced the formation of antisemitism in western Europe, whereas a connection between Christianity and antisemitism is undeniable. We must, therefore, examine the hostility of Christians that preceded the appearance of Christian antisemitism, the hostility usually referred to as anti-Judaism.

As I observed at the outset, the term "anti-Judaism" was used at the end of the nineteenth century by Bernard Lazare to distinguish the centuries-long religious opposition of Christians to Judaism and Jews from nineteenth-century antisemitism. But both

Jewish and Christian scholars soon came to describe instances of hostility against Jews at any time from antiquity to the present as antisemitism. And so long as they accepted that usage, Christian scholars could no longer rely on a chronological argument to disculpate Christianity from responsibility for the Holocaust. If they wished to absolve early Christianity, they had to find a way to distinguish between anti-Judaism and antisemitism in antiquity as well as in the modern period.

Several Christian scholars, therefore, sought to distinguish between the hostility in antiquity of which they did not approve and the Christian rejection of Judaism on theological grounds of which they did approve. Yet if they were able to do so by arguments based on Christian premises, they were unable to demonstrate an empirical distinction between the two kinds of hostility. Their historical investigations only demonstrated ever more clearly an undeniable connection between Christian hostility in the first century and the horrors of twentieth-century antisemitism.

Empirical distinctions can be drawn, however, if religious phenomena are conceptualized in the way I have presented. It can be argued that anti-Judaism is a nonrational reaction to overcome nonrational doubts, while antisemitism is an irrational reaction to repressed rational doubts. And when this distinction is applied, the historical picture that emerges is very different from either the chronological distinction between a period of religious and a period of racist hostility favored by Hannah Arendt, or the theological distinction between two forms of hostility in the ancient world favored by many Christian scholars.

Jesus of Nazareth was neither anti-Jewish nor anti-Judaic—to say nothing of antisemitic. The historical Jesus was a Jew whose religiosity was deeply Judaic and whose only religion was Judaic. He was born in Bethlehem into a society in which the dominant religion was a Judaic religion closely supportive of a people, and in which the religiosity of almost all members was deeply influenced by nonrational Judaic beliefs so that they symbolized themselves as Jews. The Jews, however, were divided among several competing Judaic religions or sects.[1] If all Jews accepted Hebrew

1. See Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Jonathan Z. Smith, eds., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York, 1987).

Scripture as divine revelation, as individuals they differed somewhat in religiosity, and as members of society they looked to different human authorities to determine the meaning of Scripture and prescribe their conduct.

Jesus certainly symbolized himself as a Jew in his own language, whatever other symbols were salient in his sense of identity, although he had little need to do so explicitly when almost all he spoke to were Jews. But as he developed, he associated that symbol and those usually associated with it with symbols that were salient in his own religiosity in a way that made his religiosity differ markedly from that of many other Jews—although it apparently had much in common with the religiosity of those who accepted John the Baptist as a privileged contact with the god of Judaism. In any case, Jesus' religiosity found expression in beliefs—for example, in the proximate end of the world and how individuals should prepare for it—that set him apart from most other Jews and seem to have caused him to have nonrational doubts about some prescriptions of the dominant Judaic religion and to seek to modify them.

The initial conflict between the followers of Jesus and Paul and the majority of Jews who did not join the Nazarene movement was a conflict over nonrational beliefs, and above all over one belief. The limited evidence from a later period permits only speculation about the precise characteristics of Jesus' personality, religiosity, and expressed beliefs. Yet we can be sure that he asserted, like Moses or the prophets but in his own way, that he had a direct contact with the god of Judaism denied to other contemporaries; and he persuaded others to believe him. We might speculate about what it was that made his beliefs appealing to their religiosity.[2] But whatever sociological and psychological explanations be given, his followers associated Jesus nonrationally with the Judaic symbols they associated with their god, symbols

2. There must always be an affinity between the message of a charismatic and the needs of his or her audience. The deprivation theory would suggest that the affinity in this case was a shared reaction of the socially disfavored against the upper classes. A variant of it, based on a possible reading of the uncertain evidence of the Gospels, would be that what appealed, perhaps particularly to Paul, was Jesus' emphasis on the value or salvation of the individual rather than that of the religious society.

such as Moses, Messiah, Christ, and Israel, and with other symbols connected with their daily life that were central in their sense of identity, such as neighbor. And as Jesus became a salient symbol in their religiosity, their sense of identity and of the meaning of Judaism changed.

A new religious movement developed around Jesus composed of Jews who accepted him as a direct contact with their god, the god of Moses. Yet, though they used most of the same Judaic symbols as other Jews to express their own faith, some of their nonrational beliefs conflicted with those of many Jews. Jesus and his followers apparently questioned some of the prescriptions of the dominant Judaic religion—or at least the conduct of those in authority—in a way that encouraged doubts about the legitimacy of the religious authorities and led to Jesus' condemnation. Assuredly such questioning was the case for those who continued to believe in Jesus and risk persecution after his condemnation by those authorities had led to his condemnation and execution by the Romans. They had to reject that prescription at least.

Yet to describe Jesus and his early followers as anti-Jewish or categorize their attitude as anti-Judaism makes sense only if we neglect the religiosity of Jews and think of Judaism as a single religion. To describe them as anti-Judaic contradicts the way we use "Christianity." We denote as Christians any people at any time who have symbolized themselves as Christian because they believed that Jesus was in some fundamental sense supernatural, and we use the term Christianity to refer to the thoughts, actions, and religions connected with that belief by people who have symbolized themselves as Christians. Similarly, we should not identify Judaism with any particular Judaic religion. Rather, we should denote as Jews those who have symbolized themselves as Jews because they believed that the fundamental revelation about ultra-empirical reality came through Moses, and we should use the term Judaism to refer to all the thoughts, actions, and religions connected with that belief by people who symbolize themselves as Jews.[3]

3. One value of distinguishing between religion and religiosity is that it permits a distinction between those who are Jews in the sense of being adherents of a Judaic religion and those who are Jews in the sense that their religiosity uses many Judaic symbols even though they do not adhere to any Judaic religion.

We cannot then describe Jesus and his immediate followers as anti-Jewish or their attitude to Judaic religions as anti-Judaism. Although their religiosity may have conflicted to some extent with that of many other Jews, they symbolized themselves not as Christians but as Jews, and they relied heavily on long-established Judaic symbols and beliefs to establish their own sense of identity. The criticisms of the scribes and Pharisees attributed to Jesus in the Gospels accuse them of being hypocrites; they are not criticisms of the religion over which they presided. Some of Jesus' first followers may have disliked some other Jews, but since they symbolized themselves as Jews, they could not hate others simply for being Jews. Moreover, although they rejected some beliefs prescribed by existing Judaic religions, and although they formed their own religious subsociety or subsocieties that recognized Jesus as a superior religious authority (including the subsociety that met in the portico of the Temple and followed the Law), they were only creating a new Judaic sect or potential Judaic religion that they hoped would become the religion of all Jews.

In its origins, Christianity, like Pharisaism, was neither anti-Jewish nor anti-Judaic. Whatever the conflicts with other Jews or Judaic religions, the followers of Jesus could become anti-Jewish or anti-Judaic only if they accepted Christ rather than Moses as their most fundamental contact with their god and the primary symbol of their identity and refused to accept the authority of any Judaic religion, even though they might still symbolize themselves as Jews.[4]

Many who followed Jesus never took that decisive step. They were the Judeo-Christians who stayed in the middle, endured for about a century, were increasingly rejected by other Jews and Christians, and had largely disappeared by 135. The decisive change came with Paul and his decision to devote his efforts to converting non-Jews to his understanding of Jesus' message. Just as Jews had sought to convert gentiles to their Judaic religion, so Paul and others such as Philip, Barnabas, and Mark sought to persuade them to believe in Jesus. And as Paul's proselytizing succeeded, his attitudes changed.

I cannot enter here into the present lively debate about Paul's

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4. Hence, I would consider the "Jews for Jesus" movement as anti-Judaic.

thought and his attitude toward non-Christian Jews and the dominant Judaic religions. Despite arguments to the contrary, it still seems plausible that he maintained that Jews who did not believe that Jesus was a direct contact with their god would not be saved. But even if Paul was against Judaic religions to that considerable, if considerably ambivalent, extent, I do not think he hated non-Christian Jews, for he still identified himself as a Jew.

Paul's religiosity seems initially to have been universal in outlook, individuals and their religiosity being more salient in his consciousness than any particular society or religion. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[5] Jews and non-Jews would be saved, he insisted, if they as individuals accepted Jesus as their fundamental contact with "God"— indeed, as their god. Hence, he did not demand that his non-Jewish converts identify themselves as Jews. Just the reverse. He told them that they should not obey many prescriptions that were common to every Judaic religious society. If his religiosity, like that of Jesus, was distinctively Jewish, he did not think salvation depended on adherence to a religion, possibly because he believed the end of the world at hand. Unlike those who first followed Jesus, the religiosity of Paul and his followers had at first no institutional base. Initially the Pauline movement was neither a sect within Judaism nor a religion outside of it; it was a sharing of religiosity with any who would accept it.

Although Paul used synagogues as a springboard and his messages were permeated with Judaic symbolization, his preaching neither supported nor rejected the members of any Judaic religious society, nor indeed any other existing society. A Jew or a non-Jew could be a Christian. And just as Paul did not expect Jews who followed him to give up all their prior symbolic associations and conduct, neither did he require his non-Jewish adherents to reject all the symbolic associations and practices that had hitherto given them their sense of identity. They could recognize the appeal of his beliefs without having to symbolize themselves as Jews or abandon all their Greek and Roman associations.

His appeal was remarkably successful, and precisely because it

5. Galatians 3:28.

was—and because Paul was not operating within an established religious society—he soon confronted the problem that faces anyone whose social expression of religiosity attracts many individuals, the problem of social organization, of the routinization of charisma. Unlike Francis of Assisi, Paul accepted the burden wholeheartedly. He tried to organize his followers into religious societies that accepted his prescriptions. In his epistles, our earliest direct evidence for the consequences of Jesus' teaching, we can see him striving to exert authority over his followers to ensure that they would believe and conduct themselves as he did. The result was the little societies of households headed by Christians in various cities: the beginning of new Christian religions supportive of the authority of Paul. And with the birth of Christian religions, there could now be tension between Christian religions and Judaic religions—and between the religiosity of Christians and their Christian religion.

The emergence of the new Christian religious societies generated new intergroup attitudes and intergroup politics. The new Christian societies reacted to each other, to Jewish society, and to the greater surrounding society of the empire; and the Roman and Jewish authorities reacted to the new Christian societies. The Roman persecutions and the gradual conversion of Greco-Romans to Christianity are too well known to need discussion and are irrelevant here, but the reaction of Jews is important.

The Jewish authorities reacted strongly against Christians initially, but paid less and less attention to Christians thereafter. Since the overwhelming majority of Jews had not been attracted by the new Christian religiosity, the Jewish authorities did not feel particularly threatened by the relatively small schismatic movement. They had even less cause to worry when Paul made it possible to be a Christian without being a Jew, for most Jews did not wish to abandon their self-identification as Jews and were not attracted to the Pauline Christian movement. Moreover, since most of the adherents of the Pauline movement were not Jews, the rapid expansion of the movement was not a serious threat to the authorities of the Judaic religions. As for the Christians who still adhered to their Judaic religion, the Judeo-Christians, they were a problem, as is any sectarian movement within a religion. But they were only a minor problem, which was solved by oc-

casional persecution and their exclusion from the synagogues about the year 80. Of far more concern for the Judaic authorities than these conflicts with Christian movements was the conflict with the Roman authorities that led to the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion from Jerusalem.

Although the Jewish authorities did circulate scurrilous stories about Jesus and his followers, which were known in their medieval form as the *Toledot Jesu*, they were very brief and were the kind of slander that religious authorities frequently tell about those they consider heretics. What is striking is that the authorities of the new Talmudic Judaic religion ignored Christianity almost completely, save for those stories. Those who explain the development of Talmudic Judaism as a retreat from Greco-Roman thought in reaction to the success of Christianity are almost certainly wrong. The efforts of Jews to maintain their identity in the face of the riots against Jews in Greek cities, the wars with Rome that resulted in the destruction of the Temple, and the dispersion of many Jews from Jerusalem and Palestine provide a more obvious explanation.

For Christians, however, Jews and Judaism remained crucially important. Although Jews posed no serious or enduring physical threat to the survival of Pauline Christianity, the very existence of Jewish religiosity and Judaic religions posed a fundamental problem for Christians and the new Christian religions, for it was an internal problem, a birth trauma. Christians could never escape their awareness of competing with Judaism. Even before there was a distinctive Christian religion, the early followers of Jesus and Paul had challenged the legitimacy of the authorities of the dominant Judaic religion and tried to attract others to their beliefs about Jesus. And when new Christian religions with non-Jewish adherents were formed on the basis of those beliefs and sought to legitimate their independence, they had to make their rejection of the Judaic authorities an explicit and integral part of Christian belief.

From motives common to most sects, the adherents of the new Christian religions were necessarily anti-Judaic in the sense that they had to demonstrate the superiority of their Christian religions to any Judaic religions. But their arguments were ambivalent precisely because their claim to legitimacy rested on their

Judaic inheritance. People in antiquity expected religions to be old, with the result that Christians sought to claim antiquity by insisting that their religion was a continuation of Judaic religion.[6] They were partly right and partly wrong. On the one hand, Christian religiosity had started as a form of Judaic religiosity, and the emerging Christian religions maintained many elements of religiosity prescribed by Judaic religions; on the other, the emerging Christian societies were not a continuation of any Judaic religion, for they had rejected the authorities of all Judaic religions and were developing their own.

Their struggles to establish their own identity were fraught with tensions, including the tension with Judaism. Although Paul stressed faith, hope, and love, the Christian religions emerged out of conflicts and doubts. As his epistles make clear, Paul and his followers were troubled not only by the disbelief of non-Christian Jews and Greco-Romans but also by their own nonrational doubts and diversity of belief. That diversity should not surprise us. Belief in Jesus and baptism was no more open to rational proof or disproof than belief in the authority of the High Priest or the Pharisees or circumcision. And since faith in Jesus was still primarily an individual phenomenon and there was no social authority that could impose its prescriptions on all Christians, diversity of religiosity produced manifest diversity in the beliefs about Jesus.

People became Christian because they had had nonrational and rational doubts about the beliefs with which they had grown up and were powerfully attracted by the new beliefs they encountered. But their new religiosity was unsettled. Not only had most of Paul's converts not grown up in a society permeated with Jewish symbols, they had not grown up in a society in which Christian symbols, nonrational associations, prescriptions of carefully formulated beliefs and rituals, and their institutional organization were taken for granted. In fact, the most distinctive Christian beliefs—for example, about the Trinity—had not yet been stably formulated. And because both their religiosity and the formulation of Christian beliefs were in a state of flux, the religiosity of individuals had an impact on the development of the beliefs and

6. See Simon, *Verus Israël*, pp. 87-124.

organization of Christian religions that would be impossible later. Inevitably, there were sharp disagreements as individuals sought to organize religious societies and to formulate and prescribe their beliefs.

The first centuries of Christianity were a period of massive syncretic borrowing and organizational development, accompanied by political struggles, great theological debates, the gradual definition of the canon of the New Testament, and schisms. And one inescapable issue among many others was the relation between Christianity and Judaism. The symbols and many of the symbolic associations of Jewish religiosity would have been salient in Christian religiosity even if, like Marcion (died about 160),[7] Christians had been willing to accept that theirs was a brand-new religion, deny the authority of Hebrew Scripture, and reject much of what would become part of the canonical New Testament. But all the main Christian religions did accept translated versions of Hebrew Scripture as divine revelation. The conflict between Christian and Judaic religions was thus enshrined within Christianity in the division of the Christian Bible between the Old and New Testaments, the belief in the old and new Covenants, and the New Testament's testimony to Jewish disbelief.

Jews and Judaic religions posed a problem for Christian religiosity and Christian religions that Christians could not avoid, for it was the result of tensions within the religiosity of Christians and between Christians. They could not help asking and trying to explain why the vast majority of Jews had been unwilling to accept the Christians' beliefs about Jesus. Jesus was a Jew who lived and died in the Jewish society of Palestine; he and his disciples relied on Jewish Scripture; and many Jews in Palestine had seen him. Why, then, had most not believed him? Jews were thus the very incarnation of disbelief in Jesus. And because they were, not only could they inspire doubts but Christians who were seriously bothered by their own doubts could hardly avoid thinking of Jews.

If Paul and other Christians had been thinking rationally and

7. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 71-81.

empirically about the problem, they—like any modern historian—could have found obvious explanations for Jewish disbelief by examining the divisions of Judaism at the time and the alternative explanations then available for Jesus' actions and death. But to accept those answers would have emphasized that Jesus' divinity was anything but self-evident and that the reaction of non-Christian Jews to Jesus was easily comprehensible. In fact, several passages in the Gospels indicated that he had not made his identity obvious, but to insist on that obscurity would only have strengthened doubts about his divinity. Instead, Christians increasingly insisted on the failure of Jews to recognize what Christians asserted to have been manifest to men of good will.

Among the variety of Christian reactions to enduring Jewish disbelief, three main nonrational reactions stand out: belief in the deficiency of Jewish understanding; the deicide accusation; and the belief that historical events demonstrated that God was punishing the Jews for their deicide. The reactions are clearly related; together, they constitute the core of Christian anti-Judaism. Yet if we, looking back, can see the relation between them, they only emerged gradually, one after another. And although they fused, they remained conceptually distinct. I shall therefore deal with each separately.

The first reaction to Jewish disbelief was the effort to explain why Jews did not believe as Christians did. Paul was very aware of the need for such an explanation. Whatever he now believed, he knew that he had not initially believed in Jesus, and he knew that most Jews who knew what he knew neither believed in Jesus nor interpreted Scripture as he now did. Paul could not avoid the problem of explaining the conflict in nonrational beliefs. He resolved it in a self-righteous way whose consequences he could not have foreseen.

Precisely because his religiosity was Judaic and monotheist, Paul could not acknowledge that he was proclaiming a new god and active in establishing a new religion. There could only be one god, the god who had revealed himself to Jews and whose revelations were preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures. Why then did most other Jews who revered the same Scriptures refuse to see life as he did? In his frustration, Paul asserted that the god of the

Jews had blinded most Jews to the meaning of their own Scriptures and even to their god's presence among them so that they
were now inferior in righteousness.

In effect, in the terms I have been using, his paradoxical assertion was equivalent to the proposition that the capacity of most
Jews to think nonrationally had been weakened, an idea so implausible that Paul considered the phenomenon mysterious and
could only explain it by divine action. A modern parallel would
be the Nazi assertion that Jews were unable to appreciate fundamental values because of the mysterious action of biological
forces. Instead of assuming, like polytheists, that people and individuals have had different gods because they were different people, monotheists have been monopolists; they have insisted imperialistically that there was only one valid faith or genuine sense
of human identity, and that all sane people should believe in their
concept of a supreme being.

Paul's belief in Jewish blindness was a nonrational and nonempirical intepretation of the conflict of nonrational beliefs. But it
had implications for the interpretation of empirical events since
it purported to explain something empirically observable, the difference in beliefs. It therefore suggested that other events could
be explained in the same way. Not surprisingly, the Christians
who followed Paul came to expect that events of history would
confirm their belief in Jesus. If they had to defer and reinterpret
the expectation of the end of the world which had been so important for the beginning of Christianity, they could, in the meantime, interpret other occurrences in present times as empirical
confirmations of their faith. When the Romans were victorious in
the Jewish wars, destroyed the Temple, and dispersed Jews from
Palestine, Christians thought those hard-won successes of the Roman army demonstrated that their god was punishing contemporary Jews for their condemnation of Jesus and continuing disbelief in him.

But if events during Jesus' life and after confirmed their beliefs,
then those before Jesus must do so also. By the time of Eusebius
(died ca. 340), Christians had revised history before Christ to correspond to their interpretation of the conflict between Jews and
Christians after Christ; they polarized the actors of the Old Testament into bad Jews and good Hebrews and thought of them-

selves as the descendants of the Hebrews and the true Israel.[8] By the beginning of the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo would see all history as a confirmation of his faith, and his writings would influence Christians for centuries to come to see it the same way. Jews were not only blind to the divinity of Jesus; they were unable to understand their own history.

As James Parkes emphasized, Christians gradually reinterpreted Hebrew Scriptures and the past of Jews in accordance with their own nonrational beliefs in a way that anyone who does not share Christian beliefs—and even someone like James Parkes who did—must consider a distortion. Even though some literary scholars assert that a text has no fixed meaning or that we cannot know what it meant to those who composed it, we can be sure that whatever the Hebrew Scriptures meant to those who composed them, they did not mean what Christians, who lived much later and whose religiosity had developed under very different conditions, said they had meant. Nor had Jews done what Christians said they had done.

The Christian understanding of Jewish history is a perfect example of the failure to distinguish between nonrational and rational empirical thinking. But it was not irrational. We, looking back with our techniques of rational empiricism and historical analysis, can recognize what they were doing. And we would be irrational if we ourselves failed to distinguish between the two modes of thinking about the past. But since neither Jews nor Christians had developed those techniques, they were not suppressing their capacity for rational empirical thought. They were not being irrational as they molded their beliefs about the past to confirm their distinctive identity. They were writing religious history, myths of origin, not the empirical history of religions, something most Christian historians of Christianity would continue to do until the nineteenth century—and many still do in the twentieth.

If the first main nonrational reaction to the challenge of Jewish disbelief was to make historical events a demonstration of Jewish blindness, the second and most famous was the accusation that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. As ob-

8. See Simon, *Verus Israël*, pp. 86-124.

served earlier, the affirmation of the physical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, symbolized as Christ, was identical in form with an empirical proposition. As such, it aroused doubts at the time and has ever since. But from an early date, many Christians hated Jews who were not born when Jesus died because, they said, the Jews had literally killed their god.

Paul, who was thoroughly aware of the doubts about Jesus' resurrection, accused Jews of blindness but not of killing his god. That accusation did not appear clearly until the Gospel attributed to John, which is usually dated about the end of the first century, when it had become obvious that most Jews were not going to believe in Jesus. Nonetheless, the accusation owed much to Paul, for it relied on his assertion of the supernatural blindness of the Jews. As Jesus' life and death became more remote in time and space, and as more and more gentiles converted to Christianity, it became easier to think of "Christ" as "God" than of Jesus as human. But if Jesus had died on the cross because of Jewish disbelief, either Jesus was only a dead human or the Jews had killed the Christ. Since Christians proclaimed that their god had appeared empirically, many were therefore impelled to protect themselves from doubt by insisting that "Jews" were so deficient in understanding that they had not only misinterpreted their own Scriptures but had, in some concrete sense, killed "God."

The deicide accusation camouflaged Christian awareness that the continued existence of Jewish disbelief challenged Christian belief. The accusation enabled Christians to repress doubts about Jesus' resurrection by imagining that no one who was not blind could have encountered Jesus without perceiving he was God. Indeed, not to recognize their God seemed so implausible that some Christians found it easier to attribute it to ill will than to ignorance. Some apocryphal gospels alleged that the Jewish authorities really had believed; they had known that Jesus was God but killed him nonetheless. As Thomas Aquinas would put it much later, the ignorance of the Jewish elders was affected ignorance, "for they saw manifest signs of his Godhead; yet they perverted them out of hatred and envy of Christ."[9] Jews were not simply blind, they were malevolent.

9. *Summa theologica*, III.47.5. For an overview of this development, see

Many, probably most, Christians in the Roman Empire did not in fact hate Jews, but some did, especially some in authority who were later considered as peculiarly authoritative and given the title of Church Fathers. But at the time, they felt their authority challenged. The most famous example is John Chrysostom,[10] but Ambrose was not far behind. Had the Roman Empire in the west continued, hostility against Jews might have increased greatly and become irrational, but it did not.

With the fall of the western Roman Empire, the deicide accusation lost significance. When the Germanic conquerors converted to Christianity, they understood it according to their own religiosity, and they converted the religion of Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine, and the other authorities into a Christian religion supportive of particular peoples. They took for granted that each people, including Jews, would have its own religion; they conceived of Christ as the mighty god, bringer of victories, depicted in the Old Testament. They paid little attention to the account of the humanity of Jesus in the New Testament and were little concerned with his suffering and death. Although they believed their god had appeared on earth, they apparently could not imagine that anyone could really have killed him. Consequently, they thought of Jews as they were depicted in the Old Testament and saw them as a model rather than as Christ-killers.[11]

By the end of the eleventh century, however, conditions had changed radically. Jews in northern Europe were a small and largely defenseless group who lived surrounded by Christians whose religiosity and religion were changing significantly. During the eleventh century, many Christians had recently come to think of Jesus as he had been in empirical reality, to think of him, not simply symbolically as a distant all-powerful divinity, but also historically as a poor suffering human on the cross. One symptom of the change was that, whereas European Christians had been using "Jerusalem" primarily as a symbol for heaven, now the symbol evoked emotional responses to the earthly city, the symbol of

Jeremy Cohen, "The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, from Augustine to the Friars," *Traditio* 39 (1983): 1-27.

10. See Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews.*

11. See "The Transformation of Anti-Judaism," in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism,* chap. 4.

Jesus' empirical death and resurrection.[12] The renewed interest in the observable city manifested itself throughout the century by the increase in pilgrimages to it. Another symptom of the change in mentality was the Investiture Contest, the great struggle in the middle of the century to establish a European Christian religion that looked only to the authority of the pope. And when, in 1095, the pope of the new religion called on his adherents to liberate Jerusalem where Jesus had died from Moslem unbelievers, he and others were surprised at the wide response.

One response was the official crusading armies; the other was what is known as the People's or Peasant Crusade. The popular crusaders came from an area in northern Europe that had suffered from severe social dislocation. Those who joined the movement came primarily from the lower segments of society. They left the society where they counted for little and took off to fight the unbelievers. They set off on their own before the official crusade in groups with little organization. But before they left, and in defiance of the religious authorities, some of these groups slaughtered any Jews they could lay their hands on who refused to convert.[13] They did so, they said, because Jews had killed their Christ and were Christ's worst enemies.

In fact, the Jews of 1096 had had nothing to do with the death of Jesus (except that they approved of it); and had Jesus really been immortal, even Jews at the time could not have really killed him. But what non-Christian Jews could and did do in Jesus' lifetime—and have done ever since through the account of them in the New Testament and their presence in the midst of Christians—was to challenge Christian ideas about Jesus. Their existence and disbelief reinforced any doubts that were lurking consciously or subconsciously in the minds of Christians. And here it is well to remember that some small Christian movements or

12. Joshua Prawer, "Jerusalem in the Christian and Jewish Perspectives of the Early Middle Ages," in *Gli ebrei nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, vol. 26 (Spoleto, 1980), 2:739-812.

13. Jonathan Riley-Smith, "The First Crusade and the Persecution of the Jews," *Studies in Church History* 21 (1984): 51-55, argues that the bands that committed the major massacres were ably led by experienced nobles, but I remain unconvinced about the number of knights in these bands and how disciplined they were.

"heretics" had already been expressing doubts about Jesus' divinity or his humanity in the first half of the eleventh century.

Jews were therefore a real threat to any Christians who were sensitive to threats to their identity. Some Christians sensitive to doubts, like Anselm[14] and Peter the Venerable, sought by rational arguments or rationalizations to overcome their doubts and preserve their assurance of the value of their identity; some, like William of Auvergne's theologian, would learn to live with them; some would suppress doubts by killing heretics. But several bands of the popular crusaders of 1096 tried to extirpate Jews. These groups seem to have been made up of people whose sense of identity had been seriously undermined by rapidly changing social conditions that they could not control or understand and to which they could not adapt successfully. Their present life gave little assurance of the earthly value of their identity, and in their dissatisfaction they sought a new one. As their refusal to obey ecclesiastical or governmental authority and their generally disorderly conduct indicate, they had little faith in those authorities. Yet if their unsettled religiosity conflicted with their religion and made them doubt its authorities and their prescriptions, they had been brought up in that religion—however unsophisticated their understanding of it—and the symbol of Christ was salient in their sense of identity. Whatever else they were, their religiosity was Christian.

When the distant pope summoned Christians to fight to liberate Christ's tomb from Moslem unbelievers, the message mobilized them to escape from their uncertainties. It associated "Christ" with "fighting," "revenge," and "feud," symbols prominent in their culture, and probably peculiarly salient in their own frustrated lives. Holy war thus gave a new integration to their

14. In or about 1097, Anselm, the greatest medieval theologian before Thomas Aquinas, doubted the standard explanation of why his god had suffered death and wrote *Cur Deus homo*, the famous treatise that gave his own explanation of why God had had to become man and die in order to save human beings; he was directly influenced by his awareness of Jewish disbelief: see Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer* (Cambridge, Eng., 1966), pp. 88-91. The increased sensitivity to challenges to Christian beliefs is indicated by the great increase in polemics against Jews in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: see the articles by David Berger and Jeremy Cohen and my comment in "AHR Forum," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 576-624.

lives that emboldened them to defy the local authorities of their religion. But when they thought of fighting, revenge, and Christ's death, the symbol "Jews" immediately came to mind, for they had been taught that "Jews" were responsible for his death. What better expression of their newly reinforced religiosity than to avenge the death of their Christ by attacking those responsible for his death?

It is highly significant, however, that these violent groups first summoned Jews to convert and killed them only if they refused. To the killers, the threat of Jewish disbelief to their sense of identity was even more important than their desire for vengeance. There could hardly be a better confirmation of their faith or better reassurance of the security of their identity as Christians than— as in show trials—the willingness of Jews to recognize the error of their ways and become Christians. But most of the besieged Jews refused, preferring to die rather than abandon their own identity. They rejected baptism, fought to defend themselves, and expressed contempt for "the hanged one." When they could no longer defend themselves, many expressed their disbelief in the most extreme form by preferring suicide.[15] And since the unofficial crusaders were unable to make living Jews serve to reinforce their belief in Christ and the value of their own identity, they tried to eradicate the threat of disbelief by killing Jews. Their religiosity was so threatened that, though the Jews' challenge to their identity was only mental, they could respond only by defying the authorities of their own religion and killing the overt disbelievers.

The suicides and massacres of 1096 were horrible, yet it is difficult to characterize the killers as irrational (though some may have been). If they hated Jews because of doubts about the value of their own identity and killed Jews to stifle those doubts, they were nonetheless correct in thinking that Jews did not believe in Christ and mocked those who believed in "the hanged one." Moreover, the killers did not project on Jews any characteristics

15. See Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1987).

Jews did not have, such as horns.[16] They killed Jews because they were Jews, because Jews were people in the midst of Christendom who stubbornly rejected the nonrational beliefs of Christianity and persisted in adhering to their Judaic religion to the point of martyrdom. The killers were no more irrational than the Catholics and Protestants who killed each other in the Thirty Years War. Yet if they were not irrational, their reaction to their awareness of conflicting nonrational beliefs had brought them to the verge of irrationality. And from then on, the crusades would embed the stereotype of Christ-killer in all ranks of society.

The third main reaction to Jewish disbelief was the efforts of Christians, as they gained political power in the Roman Empire, to use Jews for their own ends. By the fourth century, Christian religions supportive of the supreme social authority of the priesthood had existed for some two centuries within the complex differentiated society of the Roman Empire. By 313, the Catholic religion had acquired sufficient support so that its authorities could compete with the authority of the government and persuade the emperor to recognize and protect it. And once they had gained that measure of political power, they were able to influence the Roman government to deny Jews access to influential occupations, prohibit them from building new synagogues, and restrict their intercourse with Christians.

It was a fateful precedent. Even though Christians may not have been conscious of it, the results of their legal efforts to restrict and degrade Jews reinforced their belief that empirical historical events would confirm their faith in Jesus Christ. They had long believed that their god was punishing Jews for their disbelief and deicide by depriving them of political power and dispersing them. Now they could use their power to make sure that the condition of Jews would continually demonstrate divine punishment. Jewish social degradation could be used to confirm their Christian beliefs.

The germ of the idea that Jews existed to serve Christians can be found in Paul's explanation that the disbelief of Jews was part

16. See Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1970), pp. 121-137.

of the divine plan to bring salvation to the gentiles. That explanation rapidly became a commonplace and was given its most influential reformulation by Augustine of Hippo at the end of the fourth century.[17] Augustine extended Paul's concept of Jewish blindness dramatically so as to make the existence of Jews useful to Christians. Jews were dispersed everywhere so that they could serve Christians. Because they disbelieved yet preserved the Scriptures they could not understand, they were testimony that the Christians had not invented Christ. The presence of Jews dispelled doubts about Christianity. And Augustine made the fundamental implication of this manner of thinking strikingly explicit: "The Jew is the slave of the Christian."[18]

Empirically, of course, Jews were not the slaves of anyone when Augustine wrote, but Jews were being enslaved in another sense. Within the minds of Christians in order to silence their doubts, the symbol "Jews" was being made the slave of Christian nonrational beliefs, with potentially dire consequences for the realities the symbol denoted. Ironically, while Christians were accusing Jews of stubborn blindness to the salvation offered them, they themselves were becoming increasingly blind to the empirical reality of Jews. As they would do with the bread and wine of the Eucharist, many Christians, when they perceived real Jews, began to think about Jews as if they existed physically only as a symbol that expressed Christian faith. There are few clearer examples of that thinking than Pope Innocent III's assertion in 1208.

Thus the Jews, against whom the blood of Jesus Christ calls out, although they ought not to be killed, lest the people forget the Divine Law, yet as wanderers ought they to remain upon the earth, until their countenance be filled with shame and they seek the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord. That is why blasphemers of the Christian name ought not to be aided by Christian princes to oppress the servants of the Lord, but ought rather to be forced into the servitude of which they made themselves deserving when they raised their sacrilegious hands against

17. *The City of God*, ed. and trans. Marcus Dodds (New York, 1948), 2.277-279; 18.46.
18. Ibid. The idea that Jews should serve Christians had already been advanced by Tertullian (died ca. 220): Simon, *Verus Israël*, p. 102.

Him Who had come to confer true liberty upon them, thus calling down
His blood upon themselves and upon their children.[19]

By the thirteenth century, as a result of the efforts of eccle-
siastics, kings, and barons to exploit Jews, each for their own
ends, Jews had been given a degraded legal status that set them
apart from all others in European society and denied them even
the protection usually accorded serfs.[20] Their shame and punish-
ment thus seemed obvious. Yet if Jews were increasingly denied
this-worldly opportunities, their right to live and practice their
own religion was still protected, above all by the pope.

By 1250, the Catholic religion and almost all Catholic Chris-
tians, although deeply impregnated with elements of Judaic re-
ligiosity, were violently anti-Judaic. The authorities of the Cath-
olic religion taught that the old Judaic religion had been
superseded and assumed that those who practiced it would go to
hell. Most Catholics knew little about Jews but disliked them in
varying degrees. Yet, although some Christians during the various
crusades had tried to extirpate Judaism and Jews by force, they
had done so in defiance of the authorities of their religion. For
although the authorities prohibited most intercourse between
Christians and Jews, they nonetheless defended the presence of
Jews and their religion in their midst, as they could use the de-
graded state of Jews as empirical evidence in support of Christian
beliefs.

The only time the authorities tried to deny Jews their religion
was when they feared it could no longer serve to confirm Christian
belief. Christians had long taken for granted that the religion of
Jews was what Christians, relying on their own interpretation of
the Old Testament, thought it was. But they were wrong. Tal-
mudic Judaism had developed after Christ, and the Babylonian
Talmud, completed by 600, was accepted by European Jews in
the eleventh century.[21] Christians, however, were largely un-
aware of the change. The few Christian scholars who were aware

19. Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*,
2d ed. (New York, 1966), p. 127.

20. See "*Tanquam servi*: The Change in Jewish Status in French Law about
1200," in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, chap. 7.

21. See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford, 1961).

of the existence of the Talmud had little understanding of it and paid little attention to it. In the middle of the thirteenth century, however, the ecclesiastical authorities became very aware of Talmudic Judaism after Nicholas Donin, a Jew who had converted to the Catholic religion, denounced the Talmud to the pope, who then ordered that it be carefully examined.

Only then did the Catholic authorities realize that the religion of contemporary Jews was not the superseded and fossilized Judaic religion they had imagined and blamed Jews for practicing. They discovered the existence of the Talmudic Judaic religion and were shocked. As the pope put it, Jews were now using a huge book, the Talmud, not the Bible, as their fundamental divine revelation. Of course, Christians had been interpreting their own Bible for centuries; Christian theologians had written many and massive commentaries; and for centuries, the authorities of the Catholic church had been prescribing how Catholics were to understand the Bible. Yet, somehow oblivious to all that, the pope blamed Jews for putting their own intepretation on their Bible, and he commanded that all copies of the Talmud and the commentaries on it be burned.

The commission that investigated the Talmud provided several rationalizations for the condemnation, but central was the objection that Jews were teaching their children to understand their Bible according to the Talmudic interpretation, not according to the Christian interpretation, and that that interpretation would make it harder to persuade Jews to acknowledge the superiority of Christian beliefs. Although the authorities already considered the Jews damned for their Judaism, when they discovered that contemporary Jews were practicing a religion that did not harmonize with Christian beliefs about Judaism, they considered Jews doubly damned and sought to eradicate Talmudic Judaism. Jews had to conform to the image Christians had made of them and practice what Christians told them was their religion.

The results of the condemnation were tragic for Jews, but the papal campaign was only partially successful precisely because, as even the pope was forced to recognize, the Talmudic religion really was the religion of contemporary Jews. And thanks largely to Paul, Christian theologians had long believed that Jews must be preserved because they still had a central role to play in prov-

idential history: their remnant would be saved at the end of time. Consequently, while still trying to censor passages of the Talmud, the authorities allowed Jews to continue to practice their Talmudic religion. Christians may have wanted to ensure that the existence of Jews and their beliefs did not contradict Christian beliefs, but the Catholic authorities were sufficiently realistic to recognize that Jews were an independent reality and that toleration of Jews meant qualified toleration of Talmudic Judaism. They could, however, and did try to deal with it as they had dealt with Hebrew Scriptures: they could try to interpret the Talmud so as to confirm their Christian beliefs.[22] A new stereotype was born, that of the mysterious Talmudic Jew.

Thus, to defend their nonrational beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth, Christians came to believe that Jews were mysteriously blinded, had killed god, and were therefore being divinely punished. By 1096, because of changes in Christian mentality, "Jew" had become much more salient as a symbol of the killing of Christ in the religiosity of many Christians, and hostility toward Jews had increased greatly, particularly in northern Europe. By 1250, many Christians, including popes, had expressed those anti-Judaic beliefs in extreme ways. Nonetheless, the degradation of Jewish legal status, the crusading massacres, and the condemnation of the Talmud were nonrational, not irrational, reactions to the conflict between Christians and Jews. Though xenophobic and violent, they were a response to real characteristics of Judaism and Jews. But something more had now appeared. No longer was anti-Judaism the only kind of hostility directed against Jews; a century earlier, a new irrational hostility had surfaced in northern Europe.

If antisemitism is defined as chimerical beliefs or fantasies about "Jews," as irrational beliefs that attribute to all those symbolized as "Jews" menacing characteristics or conduct that no Jews have been observed to possess or engage in,[23] then antisemitism first appeared in medieval Europe in the twelfth century. By then, the symbol "Jew" was evoking violent hostility, even

22. See Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), pp. 60-195; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1989).

23. See "Toward a Definition of Antisemitism," in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, chap. 14.

though, or partly because, most Christians knew little about them. Most Christians in western Europe, particularly in north-western Europe, had had little opportunity to observe Jews at all closely, and most had little interest in knowing more about the people they had been taught to regard as inferior. They knew Jews were human beings like themselves, they knew that Jews had different religious beliefs and practices, but they had little knowledge of what Jews actually believed and what their religious practices were—save that they had been told they were old, use-less, and bad. At worst, Jews were killers of Christ, but nothing more. The capacity of most Christians to determine whether ap-parently empirical assertions about contemporary Jews were true was therefore severely diminished. That ignorance, when com-bined with the rapidly rising hostility against Jews as killers of Christ, made Jews an inviting target for irrational projections.

Shortly after 1096, some individuals began to attribute to Jews characteristics that neither they nor any others had observed. Whatever other motives were at work, the characteristics they projected on Jews were clearly inspired by their own doubts about the body of their Christ and their need to overcome them. Just as some Christians reacted to bread and wine as if they could see the body and blood of Jesus of Nazareth and were thereby re-assured of his real presence, so some began to react to contem-porary Jews as if they were still trying to kill Christ, thereby demonstrating the truth of beliefs about Jesus and the Jews.

We can pin the origin of the first such fantasy down to a single individual. In 1144, the body of a child was found near Norwich, England. Nothing about the boy was religiously significant save that someone had killed him at Eastertide. But about 1150, Thomas of Monmouth, a monk who had come to the cathedral priory some four years after the event, created the fantasy—with considerable help from the boy's family and a Jewish convert to the Catholic religion—that Jews had crucified the boy and that they conspired annually throughout Europe to crucify a Christian child in order to express their hatred of Christ, whom they could no longer attack directly.[24]

24. See "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder," in *Toward a*

The falsity of the fantasy should be apparent, although many have believed it right down to the twentieth century.[25] Indeed, it was immediately recognized as a fantasy by many of Thomas's fellow monks who were there at the time of the crime and stated that there was no evidence that Jews had even murdered the child, let alone crucified him. But by depicting Jews as still concerned to kill Christ and describing the miracles surrounding the alleged victim, the fantasy confirmed beliefs about the death and resurrection of Jesus. And since it gave added credence to threatened religious beliefs, it found a receptive audience. Thomas disseminated his fantasy by word of mouth and by the account he wrote of it. Others picked up the story and spread it further. The belief was then translated into action. Jews in various localities were accused and killed for the alleged crime; shrines to the alleged victims were constructed in churches and cathedrals across Europe with the explicit approval of bishops and priests and with the tacit approval of popes who failed or refused to condemn the accusations or the shrines.

A century later, a different fantasy about ritual murder appeared in Germany, the fantasy of ritual cannibalism. It can be seen as a halfway stage between the original fantasy of ritual murder by crucifixion and the fantasy about Jews and the Eucharist that appeared later. The central European ritual, performed innumerable times daily across Europe, was the Eucharist, the symbolic eating of Christ. Ever since the eleventh century, however, many who could not help thinking that the consecrated bread and wine were only bread and wine had had serious doubts about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But if it could be shown that even disbelievers in Christ believed in the efficacy of a similar but evil ritual, doubts about the efficacy of the Christian ritual might be overcome. Any "evidence" to that effect was therefore most welcome to some.

Between 1231 and 1234, Conrad of Marburg was exciting Germans—and the pope—with accusations that "heretics" in Germany rejected the Eucharist and engaged in their own horrible

Definition of Antisemitism, chap. 9. It should be noted that belief in a Jewish conspiracy was present from the very beginning of irrational beliefs about them.

25. "Historiographic Crucifixion," in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, chap. 12.

secret orgies. Almost immediately after, on Christmas day of 1235, while those ideas were still fresh in everybody's mind, five boys were found dead after their parents' mill at Fulda had burned down. The few Jews at Fulda were immediately accused of killing the boys to obtain the blood they needed for their rituals, and all were slaughtered. The accusation was brought to the attention of the German emperor; and early in 1236, after an unusually careful investigation, he pronounced the charge false and forbade anyone to accuse Jews of ritual cannibalism. Eleven years later, even the pope pronounced against it. But the rumor continued to spread and brought more shrines and death to many Jews then and thereafter.[26]

Yet another fantasy appeared at the end of the thirteenth century. Like the fantasy of ritual murder by crucifixion, it corroborated the belief that contemporary Jews were still trying to harm Christ by attacking his body. And even more directly than the ritual cannibalism fantasy, this accusation was connected with the doubts many Christians had about the Eucharist. The new fantasy accused Jews of attacking Christ through the consecrated host or wafer of the Mass. What is remarkable about the fantasy is that although some Christians had reported seeing signs of Christ in the Eucharist for centuries, the fantasy about Jews did not appear until the late thirteenth century, just when it had become very dangerous for Christians to admit to any doubts about the dogma of transubstantiation, and shortly after the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi to honor Christ's eucharistic presence.[27] The fantasy obviously functioned directly to confirm the dogma when many people badly wanted confirmation. It assumed that even

26. See "Ritual Cannibalism," in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, chap. 11.

27. Poliakov, *Du Christ aux Juifs de cour*, p. 75, and R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford, 1987), p. 38, state that there were accusations of host profanation at Cologne in 1150 and at Belitz in 1263. Their evidence, however, comes from chroniclers who wrote much later and anachronistically introduced into their account the later accusation that Jews attacked the host to injure Christ. The first clear evidence for such accusations comes from about 1290, whereafter they proliferated rapidly: Friedrich Lotter, "Hostienfrevelvorwurf und Blutwunderfälschung bei den Judenverfolgungen von 1298 ('Rintfleisch') und 1336-1338 ('Armleder')," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Shriften, vol. 33, part 5 (Hannover, 1988): 533-583.

Jews really believed in transubstantiation although they would not admit it—except under torture.

The greatest slaughter of Jews at any one time in the Middle Ages was caused, however, by a totally different fantasy. It was occasioned by the death not of a few children but of millions of Christians. When the Black Death was devastating the population of Europe between 1347 and 1350, there were three main explanations of the horror. One was an effort, however erroneous, to explain it scientifically. But for those who could neither accept the uncertainty of their knowledge nor be as lighthearted about their salvation as the protagonists of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, there were two religious explanations. One was the kind of explanation often used to explain great disasters. Since it was unthinkable that God would do evil or permit such evil without a good purpose, God must be punishing people for their sins or testing their faith.[28] The other explanation was that cosmic forces of evil were at work: the Jews, in league with the devil, were destroying Christians.[29]

The explanation that God was punishing sins or testing faith was not very reassuring. If people's sins were so grievous that God was even killing many devoted priests and monks, as well as innocent children by the thousands, that implied profoundly disturbing questions about anyone's salvation. And if God was testing faith, it raised disturbing questions about God's goodness. Yet once the plague was thought of as a result of human actions, there was a way out of that hellish dilemma. It became possible, and was much more reassuring for personal salvation, to blame someone else. Although the pope had emphasized something widely known, that Jews were dying like Christians, Jews were nonetheless accused of conspiring to poison the wells in order to destroy Christendom, and thousands were killed.

It would be hard to find a clearer example of irrational scapegoating; and the fact that the people known as flagellants were particularly active in inciting attacks on Jews reveals something

28. The explanation also used by Jews to account for the massacres of 1096; see Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, pp. 161-168.

29. Séraphine Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death in the Contemporary Treatises on the Plague," in *Change in Medieval Society*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York, 1964), pp. 208-224.

about the mental processes at work.[30] These self-selected volunteers of both sexes and various social ranks went around in groups from town to town, thereby helping to spread the plague. In each town they stopped to whip themselves in a violent public ritual in order to purge themselves of their sins, set an example of atonement, and stop the plague. Their conduct thus conformed to the explanation that God was punishing people for their sins. The flagellants seem to have been people particularly beset by internal conflicts that fear of the plague had made even more acute.

The plague apparently heightened their consciousness that they had not been thinking and acting in accordance with the prescriptions of their religion. But it apparently also made many angry at the failure of their religion to satisfy their needs and inspired them to defy religious authority. Although the flagellants started with masochistic self-abasement, many soon began to attack local priests, the closest symbols of religious authority, and to claim supernatural authority for themselves. They also disregarded papal commands and attacked Jews, even though their travels should have made them more aware than most that Jews were dying of the plague like Christians. They seem to have had confidence neither in themselves nor in their religion and to have acted desperately to restore their self-confidence by extirpating Jews, the incarnate symbol of disbelief.

Thus, by the late Middle Ages, in order to dispel doubts about their religion and themselves, many Christians were suppressing their capacity for rational empirical thought and irrationally attributing to the realities they denoted as "Jews" unobservable characteristics. These four fantasies—that Jews ritually crucified Christian children, used human blood and flesh in their rituals, tortured the wafers of the Eucharist, and sought to destroy Christendom by sowing the Black Death—are the clearest examples of irrational efforts by Christians to use Jews to repress doubts about their beliefs and strengthen their faith in their Christian identity. But there were other irrational projections, including the attri-

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30. Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York, 1971), pp. 84-109; Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death* (New York, 1983), pp. 69-74.

bution of physical characteristics that existed only in the imagination of Christians.[31]

"The Jews" had become the great symbol of hidden menaces of all kinds within Christendom. In a rapidly changing Europe suffering from economic depression, social discontent, ecclesiastical divisions, bubonic plague, and endemic and devastating wars, many Europeans were prey to lurking doubts that sapped their self-confidence. They struggled to repress them but remained anxious, and many gave expression to their unease by attributing to Jews evil characteristics that made the goodness of Christians obvious by contrast and attributed their problems to an external source. Many believed that individual Christians and Christendom as a whole were threatened by a secret conspiracy of Jews who stole their children (like gypsies), crucified them, and ate them; who poisoned Christians old and young; who were still trying to torture their Christ; and who were working to overthrow their values and society. The conspiracy was imaginary, but the fear and hatred the image engendered were all too real. Indeed, the hatred was peculiarly intense because what these Christians feared was buried deep within themselves. They feared and hated their own doubts about beliefs basic to their sense of their identity, doubts they could neither acknowledge consciously nor eradicate subconsciously.

They hated Jews, it should be emphasized, because they were Christians. They created and believed chimerical fantasies about Jews because Christian symbols, including "Jew," were very salient in their religiosity and they wanted to preserve their faith in Christ. Their fantasies were the expression of one kind of Christian religiosity, initially only the religiosity of a few Christians but soon shared by many. So far as the evidence permits, the fantasies can be traced back to particular localities and to the irrational religiosity of individuals. Yet if some irrational individuals created these chimerical beliefs and others rapidly found them appealing, despite the disbelief of many at the time, many more Christians soon came to believe them, not because they were irrational but because they trusted what their society communicated, for, although the authorities of the Catholic religion condemned some

31. See Poliakov, *Du Christ aux Juifs de cour*, pp. 140-161.

of the fantasies, they gave explicit or tacit approval to others, and governments did the same. The fantasies were given widespread social expression and incorporated in European historiography, literature, and art. They became deeply embedded in the mentality of millions of normally rational Christians. Thus, by the later Middle Ages, it had become very difficult for many not to believe the fantasies, particularly the less educated. Consequently, many Christians were willing to participate in the killing of thousands of Jews for actions that no Jew had ever been observed to commit.

These irrational massacres were very different from the first great massacre in Europe. Those who died in the massacre of 1096 were killed because of what they really were, Jews who adhered to Judaism, rejected and despised Christian beliefs, and approved of the death of Jesus. Similar massacres occurred in northern Europe at the time of later crusades. And even though the new hostility against Jews as usurers contributed to the later massacres, the hostility was still, for the most part, only xenophobic, for Jews were in fact disproportionately engaged in moneylending in northern Europe by the late twelfth century. Moreover, despite that additional cause of hostility, the numbers of Jews killed at the time of successive crusades declined sharply because governments, which were profiting from their exploitation of Jewish moneylending, had grown stronger and were able to prevent or limit the massacres.

Governmental protection and use of Jews in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, only increased hostility against them, and to that hostility was now added the new irrational hostility expressed by the chimerical fantasies. In the course of the thirteenth century, rulers found it increasingly unwise politically, and unrewarding economically, to protect Jews and began to dissociate themselves from the Jews. More than that, they put into effect the policy advocated by the antisemitic movements of the late nineteenth century: they began to expel Jews. By the end of the fifteenth century, Jews had been expelled from most of western Europe; where they were not, they were isolated in ghettos to protect Christians from them.

Those expulsions were accompanied by the new wave of massacres that began at the end of the thirteenth century. Though all the old anti-Judaic and economic motives doubtless played

their part, these massacres were triggered, not by a summons to crusade and the attendant accusation of deicide, but by the new irrational accusations of conspiratorial ritual crucifixion, ritual cannibalism, host desecration, and well-poisoning. Someone would accuse the Jews of one of these crimes, and the accusation would inspire mobs to roam from town to town killing Jews for a crime no one had ever seen them commit. These massacres claimed far more victims than the earlier ones connected with the crusades, and the Jews who were killed did not die as martyrs in defense of their Judaic faith; they were the defenseless victims of their killers' delusions. In these attacks we can see, for the first time in European history, a clear parallel to Hitler's delusions and the victims of the camps. Socially significant antisemitism first emerged in medieval Christendom,[32] and it became ever more deeply rooted as the Middle Ages drew to an end.

32. As Poliakov clearly recognized in 1955. He asserted that what should properly be called antisemitism, antisemitism in its classic form, only became widespread in the fourteenth century and was then a specifically Christian phenomenon: *Du Christ aux Juifs de cour*, pp. 116, 126, 140.