



“...AND THE CHILDREN
STRUGGLED”



*The Church
and the Jews
through History*

Ray Pritz

“... And the Children Struggled”

The Church and the Jews through History

BY RAY PRITZ

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Preface

Judaism and Christianity have often been described in family terms, perhaps mother and daughter religions or sister religions. Unfortunately it has not usually been a very happy family. The story of the relations between Jews and Christians is mostly a sad story. It is the purpose of this short book to describe those relations, focusing on the high points—mostly low points, actually—over the past two thousand years. This will not be a history of Judaism or of the church. And it will not be simply a history of anti-Semitism, even though much of the time we will indeed be talking about anti-Semitism in the church.

This is about relations between a religion, Christianity, and a people/religion, Judaism. It will not be limited only to the bad things Christians did to Jews. We will try not to overlook positive relations, and here and there we will also see negative actions carried out by Jews against Christians.

I have compiled the material in this book primarily with two groups in mind. First of all, it is for Jewish believers in Jesus, that they might have a fuller understanding of the historical relationship between those two worlds to which they belong. Secondly, it is for any who are engaged, directly or indirectly, in Jewish evangelism. By common consent, one of the biggest hurdles to sharing the gospel with Jews is the way “Christians” have treated their people over the centuries. If we are more sensitive to the mistakes of the past, perhaps we can more effectively “speak the truth in love.”

At the end of the book I have included a bibliography comprised of works cited directly or indirectly, and some works that will provide good supplementary reading. Citations generally appear in the text, sometimes in a footnote if they are accompanied by additional information. Otherwise, footnotes have been used sparingly.

1. How the Ancient World Viewed the Jews

Introduction

The history of anti-Semitism is older than the church and also wider. Even so, the church has been the most important and the most consistent player in the drama of anti-Semitic actions and pronouncements against the Jews. Of course, there is a real irony here, because the church did indeed have its origins in Judaism. Jesus was a Jew. All of his first followers were Jews. All of the events of the gospels take place in a Jewish environment. And three quarters of the book that Christians call the Bible is the Tanach of Judaism.

What is Anti-Semitism?

It is sometimes said that anti-Semitism originated in the New Testament. There are at least two reasons why this claim is a very weak one. First of all, anti-Semitism is normally defined as something done or an attitude held by non-Jews. All of the writers of the New Testament, with the possible exception of Luke, were Jews. This means that by definition the New Testament writings cannot be anti-Semitic. Secondly, actions and writings that would normally be considered anti-Semitic were to be found in the pagan world long before the time of the New Testament. In this chapter we will take a close look at the earliest instances of anti-Semitism in Jewish experience.

First of all, however, what do we mean by “anti-Semitism”? The term itself is not even two hundred years old, so we will not find it in the ancient world. Many definitions have been suggested. Here is a small sample.

1. Opposition to, or hatred of, Semites, especially Jews.
2. Hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group.
3. Attitudes and actions against Jews based on the belief that Jews are uniquely inferior, evil, or deserving of condemnation by their very nature or by historical or supernatural dictates.¹

1 P. E. Grosser and E. G. Halperin, *The Causes and Effects of Antisemitism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1978). The other definitions are from various dictionaries.

4. Discrimination against, or prejudice or hostility toward Jews.
5. Hate or strong dislike of Jews, or actions that express hate or dislike of Jews.

The first definition is weak for two reasons: it omits the possibility of physical actions being anti-Semitic, and it speaks of Semites generally, which is historically inaccurate. The term anti-Semitism has always been applied only to Jews, never to other Semitic peoples.

Definition 2 would not be accepted by everyone, because it includes under anti-Semitism "discrimination against Jews as a religious ... group." Not all would agree that opposition to Judaism as a religion is properly viewed as anti-Semitism. These would prefer to differentiate between anti-Judaism (opposition to the doctrinal or theological stand of the Jewish religion) and anti-Semitism (opposition to Jews as a "race").

We will not try to make our own definition, but we should make one important observation. An action or attitude should be considered anti-Semitic only if it is directed at Jews because they are Jews and could not have equally been directed against another people group in similar circumstances.

Let us take as an example the exodus story. The reasons for the actions of the king of Egypt are given in Exodus 1:9–10: "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Pharaoh set taskmasters over them in an attempt to reduce their numbers, but they continued to grow. At that point he ordered that the male babies be killed.

It seems clear that the king would have acted in a similar manner against any other large group of resident aliens, and so this should not be seen as an act of anti-Semitism. As we will see below, the exodus story later became a major cause of anti-Semitism, but it is doubtful that the actions of Pharaoh can properly be termed anti-Semitic.

Haman and Mordechai

We may safely pass over the actions of the various conquerors of the Israelite people. Harsh steps taken by Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others were not limited to the people of Israel and Judah. Such actions were normal in war and conquest. It is probably not until the fifth century bc that we find an event that may possibly be called anti-Semitic.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed." (Esther 3:8–9)

At first glance this might seem to fall into the same category as the exodus story. Perhaps the king of Persia would have taken the same steps against any alien group that did not honor the laws of the land. Viewed at this level, the policy of Ahasuerus toward the Jews may indeed not be anti-Semitic. However, what about Haman? Why is he counseling the king to take these steps? The verses just preceding those quoted give us a different picture: The king had decreed that everyone should bow down to Haman, but Mordechai refused. The reason for his refusal was directly related to his being a Jew, and Haman knew that. Other people groups would not have refused; it was not against their religion to bow down to a man. But it was against the Jewish religion. Haman's counsel to the king was based solely on something that was peculiar to the Jewish people, and so it can be seen as anti-Semitic.

The nation of Israel was not very well known in the ancient world. This should not surprise us. They never conquered an empire of any size to compare with nations like Sumer or Egypt or Assyria. In fact, neither the Jewish people nor their land is mentioned by any pagan author before the fourth century BC.

The Jewish historian Joseph ben Matiyahu, also known as Flavius Josephus, wrote a book against an Egyptian author named Apion. In his *Against Apion*, Josephus quotes from many earlier Greek authors who had mentioned the Jews. The earliest extensive treatment of the people of Israel was by Hecataeus of Abdera, who wrote around the year 300 BC.² He wrote about Jewish origins, although his information diverges in many points from the biblical account. He says, for example, that there was a plague in Egypt and that some people who worshipped non-Egyptian gods were expelled from the country. They were led by Moses, who divided them into twelve tribes and ordered that they should be ruled by priests. In fact, Hecataeus says that the Jews never had a king. Hecataeus was quite positive toward the Jews, and his writings contain no hint of anti-Semitism.

Not long after the time of Hecataeus an event took place which would cause a flurry of negative writing about the Jews. The newly founded Egyptian city of Alexandria had one of the few libraries in the ancient world. According to an ancient legend, the king wanted to include in the library the sacred Scriptures of many peoples, so he ordered a Greek translation of the Torah of the Jews. This translation is known as the Septuagint.

It is not necessary for us to discuss here the legends surrounding the making of the Septuagint translation. What is important is the fact that, from sometime in the first half of the third century BC, it became possible for Egyptians to read the story of the exodus as it was told in the Jewish Bible. Ancient Egyptian literature does not tell of a defeat such as we read about in Exodus. Indeed, Egyptian sources from the times of the

2 The Hecataeus texts, as well as others quoted in this chapter, are collected and accompanied by an English translation in M. Stern, *Authors*.

pharaohs almost never tell of defeats of Egyptian armies and their divine king, the pharaoh. The exodus story certainly would have been a blow to Egyptian pride.

Pagan Accounts of the Exodus

Soon after the publication of the Septuagint, there appeared an Egyptian account of how the people of Israel "really" left Egypt. It was written by a man named Manetho, who was a priest in the city of Heliopolis. Manetho was associated with the royal family of the Ptolemies and would have had easy access to the new Greek translation of the Jewish holy book. It is possible that many of the ideas that would later appear frequently in writings against the Jews were first created by Manetho.

Manetho in fact gives two accounts of the origins of the Jews. The first account actually describes the rise of a group of people called the Hyksos. Manetho tells how they left Egypt and built the city of Jerusalem in Judea. In the second account, he gives a long story of how the Egyptian king rounded up all the lepers and expelled them. He did this in order to make the land ritually pure so he could hear from his gods better. It is clear that this bears some similarities to what Hecataeus had said, and it is possible that Manetho is just expanding on that tradition.

Manetho adds other claims that will become popular in pre-Christian anti-Semitic writings. The leader of these polluted exiles, a man named Osarseph (meaning Moses, but a corruption of the name Yoseph), "made it a law that they should neither worship the gods nor refrain from any of the animals prescribed as especially sacred in Egypt, but should sacrifice and consume all alike, and that they should have dealings only with people from their own group."

The Jews, says Manetho, are atheists. This may sound very strange to us, but it did not mean for him what it means for us today. If a person did not acknowledge the gods that everyone else recognized, he was an atheist. The Jews, with their own special God who is intolerant of all other gods, were just such a people. In fact other writers from the same period even claimed that Moses commanded the Israelites to destroy pagan temples (cf. Deut 7:5).

In addition, the Jews were considered in the ancient world to be a closed and antisocial people. Hecataeus wrote, "The sacrifices that [Moses] established differ from other nations, as does their way of living, for as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt he introduced an unsocial and intolerant way of life."

Actually, it is not difficult to understand this. Imagine a village with a Jewish family and a pagan family living near each other. One day the head of the pagan family visits the Jew and invites the Jewish family to come to a special family celebration. When the Jew politely refuses, the pagan jokingly asks, "What's the matter? Is my food not good enough for you?" How shocked he will be when the Jew replies, "No, it isn't." Neither will he permit his children to marry the children of his pagan neighbor.

Many theories have been proposed to explain the origins of anti-Semitism. There seems little doubt, however, that a major factor contributing to anti-Semitism was the special relationship the people of Israel had with their God. He had commanded them to remove themselves from contact with and influence by the idol-worshipping nations around them. It was not to be expected that those nations would understand such an anti-social approach, and they reacted by rejecting those who rejected them.

Donkey Worship

Near the beginning of the third century BC a writer named Mnaseas, from the city of Patara in the country of Lycia in Asia Minor, added a new idea about the Jews and their God. Mnaseas claimed that a certain trickster named Zabidus managed to sneak into the Jewish temple and steal the golden head of a pack-ass. He adds no more information about this surprising statue, but other writers would develop the idea.

Not long after the time of Mnaseas, the Seleucid king Antiochus IV entered Jerusalem and committed a number of acts against the Jews (see 1 Macc 1). This story is told by the writer Diodorus from the island of Sicily, who lived about a hundred years later. Diodorus reports that when Antiochus entered into the sanctuary, he found a marble statue of a man riding on a donkey.

For those familiar with the Bible account of Israel's history and beliefs, this identification of a donkey with Israel seems strange and out of place. Where did this idea come from? First of all, the donkey suffered from the same negative image in much of the ancient Mediterranean world as it does today. The donkey was considered stupid and unworthy of honor. Several ancient writers connected the donkey to Israel's escape from Egypt. It was said that the escaping lepers found themselves in the desert with nothing to drink. Following a herd of wild donkeys, they were led to water. Because the donkeys had saved them from dying—so said the legend—the Israelites give a special place of honor to this animal.

Interestingly enough, the pagans also identified the donkey with the early church. In the year 1856, in excavations in the city of Rome, archaeologists found a piece of graffiti scratched on a wall. It showed a figure on a cross. The figure had the body of a man and the head of a donkey. Underneath the roughly scratched drawing were the words "Alexamenos worships his God."

Around the year 200 AD, the Christian writer Minucius Felix places these words in the mouth of a pagan opponent: "I hear that they adore the head of a donkey, that basest of creatures, consecrated by I know not what silly persuasion—a worthy and appropriate religion for such manners." Another church writer, Tertullian (*ad Nationes* 14), even blames the Jews for the same accusation against the Christians. He tells of a Jew who carried around a book and a figure of a man with donkey's ears and one hoof, and he was saying, "The god of the Christians, begotten by a donkey."

Ritual Murder

One of the most serious accusations made by non-Christian writers against the Jews appears for the first time in the writings of an Egyptian named Apion in the early first century AD. Apion was a scholar and writer and even served on one occasion as a diplomat. This came on the background of a conflict in Alexandria in the year 38 AD between the Jewish and the Greek citizens of the city. Each side sent a delegation to Rome to appeal to the Roman Emperor Gaius Caligula. Apion was one of the Greek delegates.

We know Apion's writings from Josephus, who wrote against him. The following story is the way Josephus quotes Apion.

Antiochus found in our temple a bed with a man lying on it. In front of him was a small table full of good things to eat, both fish and fowl. The man was amazed at these delicious things set before him. When the king entered, the man met him with adoration, hoping that he would help him. He fell on his knees, stretched his right hand out to him, and begged to be released.

The king had him sit down and tell him who he was, why he was there, and what was the meaning of the great variety of food that was set before him. The man spoke in a pitiful voice, and with sighs and with tears in his eyes, he explained to Antiochus why he was in distress. He said that he was a Greek and that as he traveled around this province in pursuit of his livelihood, he was suddenly seized by foreigners, brought to this temple, and locked up in it. From that time he had been seen by no one.

He was growing fat from this abundance of food, and at first he was overjoyed at his unexpected good fortune. After a while, however, he began to be suspicious and then he started to worry. At last he asked the servants who waited on him. They told him that he was being fed in this manner in order to fulfill an unspeakable law of the Jews. Every year at a certain time it was their custom to catch a Greek foreigner, fatten him up like this for a year, and then lead him to a certain wood. There they killed him, sacrificing him with their customary ritual, eating his flesh, and, as they sacrificed the Greek, taking an oath that they would always be hostile to Greeks. They then threw the remains of their victim into a pit. ...

The man said there were only a few days left until he was to be killed, and he begged Antiochus that, out of respect for the Greek gods, he defeat this plot of the Jews against his life, and deliver him from his evil predicament.

It may be that this story was invented in the Seleucid court of Antiochus as part of the propaganda that tried to justify the actions of the king against the Temple in Jerusalem. It is also possible, however, that the story actually originated later in Alexandria as part of an anti-Semitic campaign against its Jewish citizens.

Such a claim that Jews kill non-Jews as part of their religious custom is called a “ritual murder accusation.” As we shall see much later, it became a common charge in Christian Europe of the Middle Ages.

Other Claims against the Jews

Several other claims against the Jews are found in the ancient writers. Some of them are the standard kind of accusation against those you consider to be your enemies or who are just strange and different. For example, it is said by one writer that the Jews are cursed to be poor. This is a significant statement for our overall study, because it is quite the opposite of what will be said against the Jews in the Middle Ages. In the ancient world the Jewish people were never known as exceptional businessmen or bankers or as having a particular gift for making money. They were, in fact, generally poor and not influential.

A similar claim was that the Jews were condemned to be slaves eternally. It will be seen that there is an underlying metaphysical or theological assumption to these statements: there is a god who is controlling things, and as a result of their behavior he has caused certain things to happen to the Jewish people.

Two anti-Jewish statements stem directly or indirectly from Jewish practices. The direct practice was the unusual habit of the Jews to refrain from working one day out of seven and allowing the land to lie fallow one year out of seven. Neither practice had a counterpart in the ancient world. People normally worked seven days a week. Certain days were considered holy, when no work or business was to be done. These days were fairly frequent, but they were not regular, and the idea of sitting idle every seventh day was frequently criticized by non-Jewish writers. The year of *shmittah* was less known, but it was also seen as clear proof that the Jews were a lazy people.

A very strange—almost amusing—claim about the Jews was that they worshipped the pig. Several ancient writers mention this. The most extensive discussion was by the Roman writer Plutarch, writing early in the second century AD. The occasion is a discussion by a group of learned men of the strange customs of foreign peoples. It is noted that the Jews do not eat pork, and possible reasons are put forward by two of the participants. One suggests that the Jews treat the pig with great respect (much as they do the donkey) because of the important role that animal played in the development of agriculture (it showed people how to plow the ground). For this reason, they do not eat the pig. If they hated the pig, the wise Greek suggested, they would kill it.

Another member of the discussion disagrees. He points out that the pig is a dirty animal and that its skin looks like the skin of the leper. Some believed that leprosy was contracted by eating pork or even by coming into contact with pigs. For this reason, he says, Jews do not eat pork. The discussion leaves the question unresolved.

At least one ancient writer claimed that the destruction of Jerusalem

was a judgment of the Jews' God on them. Philostratus (early third century AD) wrote: "After Titus had taken Jerusalem, and when the country all round was filled with corpses, the neighboring races offered him a crown; but he refused any such honor for himself, saying that it was not himself that had accomplished this exploit, but that he had merely lent his arms to God, who had so manifested his wrath" (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.33).

2. The Early Church in the Roman Empire

State Religion and Mystery Religion

The Roman Empire had hundreds of different religions. These can roughly be divided into state religions and mystery religions. A state religion was identified with a particular city or state. Every citizen automatically belonged. The main gods of the state religions tended to be similar. There were gods of the sky, the earth, the sea, etc. While they had different names in different places, a visitor to Rome from, say, Athens would recognize in the Roman god Jupiter the same god he called Zeus. There were, of course, many differences, but in the broader areas state religions were not far from each other.

State religion could be roughly divided into two areas: public worship and private worship. Public worship included religious ceremonies performed for the good of the city-state by a recognized priesthood or by people who held certain civil offices. The priesthood was usually not hereditary, but individuals were chosen by the people or the governing body. There were some personal aspects to the state religions, but they were secondary and pretty much limited to what the person did at home.

Mystery religions were far more personal and were not connected to any particular location. A mystery religion was so called because it was based on a legend that was only known to those who had been “initiated into the religion” (the meaning of the word *mystērion*). A mystery religion usually had one central god figure, although it did recognize the existence of other gods. The legend frequently had something to do with the death and resurrection of this god figure. These events were retold and even acted out by the adherents to the religion, and it was all frequently accompanied by a sacred meal. Those who participated in the mysteries believed they would obtain *sōtēria*, salvation.

Because the mystery religions recognized the validity of other religions, it was possible for a person to participate in a mystery religion while still practicing his state religion. Some of the mystery religions, which all came from the eastern part of the Mediterranean, were only slowly recognized by Rome, but they eventually had their own temples in the capital of the empire.

When the Romans conquered an area, they were generally tolerant of

the local religion, as long as the conquered people did nothing to dishonor the religion of the conquerors or to endanger the security of the state.

The Status of the Jews in the Roman Empire

The Jews enjoyed remarkable privileges in the time of the Republic and also after the start of the Empire. Judaism as a cult was not considered dangerous by the Romans, and it achieved a tolerated status. However, as we have seen, anti-Judaism already existed in the areas that the Romans added to their territory. Conflict between ethnic groups under their control was a potential source of political instability, and so anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism was not permitted.

Judaism was therefore tolerated in the late republican period, and Jews were positively protected by legislation when Julius Caesar gave the Jews a charter of religious liberty. This was extended by the first emperor, Augustus. Judaism thus became an authorized non-Roman cult throughout the empire. With the exception of a brief period of restriction under the emperor Hadrian after the Bar Kochba revolt, this charter would remain more or less in effect for over three hundred years. This tolerated status is normally known as *religio licita*, a name coined only in the third century AD by the church writer Tertullian. Even though this special status had been granted, it was necessary for the Jews to appeal periodically to the Roman authorities for those very rights that supposedly were theirs.

What privileges did this tolerated status give the Jews? They were not to be required to do anything that would go against their religion. This included an exemption from military service (for reasons of kashrut) or service in any civil capacity that would involve religious acts against Jewish belief. Jews were not obligated to perform any action that would violate the Sabbath. The tax that every Jew paid to the Temple in Jerusalem was protected by the Romans. Most importantly, they were exempted from participation in the worship of the emperor; instead, they agreed to pray for the welfare of the emperor. In fact, the first official act in the Jews' revolt against Rome in 66 AD was the cessation of the offering in the Temple of sacrifices on behalf of the emperor.

Even though the Jewish people and their religion enjoyed this special toleration, they nevertheless presented a special problem for the Romans. While a person was born into the religion, which was identified with the people, Judaism also welcomed converts from other religions. The right to convert pagans to Judaism was not included in the privileges granted by Rome. But the Jews were sometimes fairly aggressive about making converts, and one of the requirements for conversion, circumcision, was considered by the Romans to be an abominable mutilation of the body. As early as 139 BC, the small Jewish community in Rome was expelled for attempted proselytization. Similar expulsions (from which the Jewish inhabitants always returned) are reported for the years 19 and 49 AD.

The Jewish Church

Let us now turn our attention to the first generations of those who believed in Jesus for their salvation. It is well known (although it has often been forgotten in church history) that Jesus and those who first believed in him were all Jews. As Jews, they enjoyed the same rights and privileges as other Jews in the empire. Specifically this meant that they would not have been faced with the dilemma of offering pagan sacrifice. As Jews they were exempt from such sacrifices.

The apostles formed the first leadership group in the church. Apart from the apostles there was a tendency to give special honor to the physical family of Jesus. James, “the brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:19), was the recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem, and he was succeeded in that position by Simon bar Clopas, who is said to have been a cousin of Jesus.³ According to the tradition, Simon continued as the leader of the Jerusalem church until about the year 106. Approximately ten years before that the emperor Domitian ordered the execution of members of the line of David. Writing several decades after the event, the church writer Hegesippus, quoted by Eusebius (*Church History* III 20), gives us this account:

“Of the family of the Lord there were still living the grandchildren of Jude, who is said to have been the Lord’s brother according to the flesh. Information was given that they belonged to the family of David, and they were brought to the Emperor Domitian by the Evocatus [a senior soldier who had completed his military service but reenlisted to serve]. For Domitian feared the coming of Christ as Herod also had feared it. He asked them if they were descendants of David, and they confessed that they were. Then he asked them how much property they had, or how much money they owned. Both of them answered that they had only nine thousand denarii, half of which belonged to each of them; and this property did not consist of silver, but of a piece of land which contained only thirty-nine acres, and from which they raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labor.” Then they showed their hands, exhibiting the hardness of their bodies and the calluses produced upon their hands by continuous toil as evidence of their own labor. When they were asked concerning Christ and his kingdom, of what sort it was and where and when it was to appear, they answered that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly and angelic one, which would appear at the end of the world, when he should come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and to give to every one according to his works. Upon hearing this, Domitian did not pass judgment against them, but, despising them as of no account, he let them go, and decreed that the persecution of the church should

³ Eusebius, *Church History* III 11. Eusebius adds that Simon was chosen by those apostles who were still alive, disciples of Jesus, and physical relatives of the Lord.

stop. But when they were released they ruled the churches because they were witnesses and were also relatives of the Lord. And peace being established, they lived until the time of Trajan.

The Gentile Church

Even though Eusebius says that “they ruled the churches,” in fact by the time of Trajan (98–117) the great majority of the church—and even its leadership—was not Jewish. The Roman authorities had not required Jews to offer sacrifices, whether those Jews believed in Jesus or not. However, the exemption from sacrifice was not valid for non-Jews. By the last years of the first century, the question of sacrifices became an important one for the church.

If a non-Jewish believer was faced with a situation where he was required to sacrifice, how should he respond? The question was a very real one, because Roman authorities sometimes used the act of sacrificing to test whether a person was a Christian or not. An early example comes from the province of Bithynia-Pontus along the southern coast of the Black Sea. The Roman governor Pliny was confronted with a spreading Christian faith in his province. In about the year 111 he wrote to the emperor Trajan asking for instructions on how to act toward Christians. Here is the situation as Pliny describes it.

Because I have never been present at any judicial investigation concerning the Christians, I do not know the usual type of questions to ask or extent of punishment to inflict. Nor am I sure concerning these points. Should there be some distinction made when dealing with the young, or should they be treated no differently from adults? Should a pardon be given for recanting, or should someone who was known to be a Christian gain anything by ceasing to be one? Should the name “Christian” itself be punished when no crimes have been committed, or should only the crimes associated with the name be punished?

For the time being, I have followed this procedure with those who were accused before me as Christians. First, I asked them if they were Christian. If they admitted that they were, I asked a second and a third time, while threatening them with punishment. Those who persisted in their admission I ordered to be led away for execution. I did this because I had no doubt that, whatever they were confessing, stubbornness and unyielding obstinacy warrant nothing less than punishment.

Pliny goes on to report that someone had published anonymous lists of Christians. He investigated people who were named. “For those on the list who denied that they were or had been Christians, if they repeated after me an invocation to the gods and made offerings of incense and wine to your statue ... and also cursed Christ—for it is said that a true Christian

cannot be compelled to commit any of these acts—then I concluded that they ought to be released.” Participation in the cult of emperor worship was not yet mandatory. Pliny could not force a person to make an offering to the image of the emperor, but he could ask for a voluntary offering as proof that the accused was not actually a Christian.

The answer of Trajan is much shorter:

You have followed the proper judicial procedure, my dear Secundus, when examining the cases of those formally accused before you as Christians. For, it is impossible to establish something of universal application that has a more or less fixed procedural rule. These people should not be sought out. If they are accused and found guilty, then they should be punished—provided, however, that if they deny being Christians and make this evident by their actions (that is by making offerings to our gods), then they should receive a pardon for their recantation, however suspect they were of being Christians in the past. Moreover, anonymously published pamphlets should not be admitted as evidence in any criminal charge; for this not only sets a dangerous precedent but also does not keep with the spirit of our times.

There is much that could be said about this correspondence, but for our purposes in this book, the important point is that people could be asked to offer sacrifice as proof that they were not Christians.

What did this mean for a non-Jew who was confronted with the choice between making a pagan offering and being punished? Several options may have been available to the believer in this dilemma. (1) He could refuse to offer, as did some who were brought to Pliny, and pay the consequences. As we saw, this could bring the death penalty. (2) He could offer the sacrifice, in his heart tell God that he did not really mean it, and hope that God would understand him and forgive him. The early church did not forgive such an action, and such people were expelled. (3) In certain circumstances he might have been able to claim that he was Jewish. If the Roman official had no reason to believe he was lying, he would not be required to sacrifice. This solution may possibly be reflected in a couple of passages in the book of Revelation, written around the time of the persecution of Domitian.

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. (Rev 3:9–10; see also 2:9–10)⁴

4 Eusebius (*Church History* VI 12) mentions a certain Domnus, who left Christianity for Judaism during a time of persecution. This was before 211, perhaps in the region of Antioch.

(4) None of these on-the-spot solutions would have looked very attractive to a sincere Christian. One other option lay open for the church: try to convince the Roman authorities that Christians were good citizens who did not pose a threat. Of course, this was not something that could be done when a soldier came knocking on your door. It was a long-term solution. Many Christian writers undertook to present the case of the Christians to the emperor, to the senate, or to some other high official. Such a written defense of the faith is called an apology. The apologies were not only a simple request to go easy on the Christians. The apologists attempted to convince the reader of the truth of the Christian religion and even of its superiority over pagan religions.

Some Christian writers went a step farther. It was well known that the Jews enjoyed exemption from pagan worship, and it would have been difficult for Christians not to envy that status. However, *religio licita* was not something a new religion could just request by filling out the proper paperwork. In fact, it would have been impossible for a religion like Christianity with no ethnic base, a religion that took its followers from other religions.

Christian writers set about to show the authorities that the new faith was quite distinct from Judaism. In the first decades of church history, the Romans had made no distinction between Jews who believed in Jesus and Jews who did not. However, with uprisings in 66, 115, and 132, the Jews gained themselves a reputation as a troublesome and rebellious people. With the outbreak of the revolt under Bar Kochba, the emperor Hadrian decided that enough was enough. He forbade circumcision and the rebuilding of the Temple. While the prohibition against circumcision was a general one for all peoples subject to Rome, in practice it was aimed at the Jews. He also outlawed the ordaining of rabbis. His intention was clear: he wanted to put an end to the Jewish religion.

At about the same time (the third decade of the second century), Christian apologists, in their efforts to avoid trouble from the authorities, began to distance themselves from the Jews. Nevertheless, their message was a mixed one. While not wanting to suffer at the hands of the government because of the actions of the Jews, they still coveted the special status enjoyed by the Jews. Some apologies included the assertion that the church should have the exemption from sacrifice that the Jews held, not in addition to the Jews but in place of the Jews. An underlying ingredient of this claim was the belief that God was now finished with the Jews, that the church had replaced them as the "true Israel."

The claim to be the true Israel was actually a common feature of the in-fighting between Jewish groups in the time of the New Testament. The Pharisees, for example, declared that "all Israel have a portion of the world to come" (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1), but the text then immediately explains that this does not include those who deny that there will be a resurrection from the dead, i.e., the Sadducees. In other words, according to the Pharisees, the Sadducees do not belong to "Israel" because they have bad doctrine.

As long as the church was just another sect of Judaism, this claim to be the true Israel was understood by everyone to be a normal part of the polemic. However, the Jesus movement was unique among Jewish groups in that it allowed non-Jews to join as full members without converting to Judaism. What is more, by the end of the first century its non-Jewish members far outnumbered its Jewish members. Now the claim to be the true Israel—made by non-Jews—had a very different ring to it. And it was a claim that was made very strongly by some writers.

Writing to the church at Magnesia (10:2–3) at the beginning of the second century, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, says, “Put aside the evil leaven, which has grown old and sour, and turn to the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ ... it is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity.”

At about the same time, we find this in the *Epistle of Barnabas*:

... heaping up your sins and saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours. It is ours: but in this way they finally lost it when Moses had just received it, for the Scripture says: “And Moses was in the mount fasting forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, tables of stone written with the finger of the hand of the Lord” (Exod 34:28). But they turned to idols and lost it ... And Moses understood and cast the two tables out of his hands, and their covenant was broken, in order that the covenant of Jesus the Beloved should be sealed in our hearts in hope of his faith. (*Barnabas* 4:6–8)

The clearest and strongest claims that the church is now the true Israel are to be found in the writings of Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* describes an imaginary debate between a Jewish rabbi and a Christian philosopher who is Justin himself. Justin declares that “the true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham ... are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ” (*Dialogue* 11,5).

At a later point in the dialogue, Trypho is astonished by Justin’s words, and he asks, “What then? Are you Israel and is he [God] saying such things to you?” Justin does not back down at all: “As therefore from the one man Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, all your nation has been called Jacob and Israel; so we from Christ, who begat us unto God, like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David, are called and are the true sons of God, and keep the commandments of Christ” (*Dialogue* 123,9).

From the time of Justin onward, it became a standard part of church doctrine that the believers in Jesus—and not the Jews—are the true people of God, the true Israel.

3. Relations before Constantine

Early Christian Ideas about Jews Inherited from Pagans

In the first chapter we saw some of the ideas about Jews that developed in the pagan world. As the church expanded, it included more and more non-Jews. Before the start of the second century, the great majority of the members of the church were not Jews by birth. We should be very surprised indeed if they did not bring with them misconceptions about Jews that had been part of their pagan culture.

Some of these ideas, of course, could not ultimately be supported from the Bible, and they were either dropped or adjusted. For example, it could not be claimed by Christians who had the Bible that Jews worshipped animals such as the donkey or the pig. The answer to the question “Why don’t Jews eat pig meat?” was clear in Scripture. Neither could Christians go along with the pagan version of the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt.

The accusation that Jews are atheists would seem to fall into the category of things that would not be said by Christians, but that is only partially the case. Christian writers, holding to the definition of “atheist” as one who does not believe in the right gods, will accuse Jews of *asebeia*, impiety. This is indeed the same word used by the pagans. It means that the Jews are wrong in their faith, specifically because they refused to believe in Jesus.

Some pagan writers suggested that the conditions in which the Jews found themselves—poverty, defeat in war, temple destroyed, scattered from their land—were because of evils they had done, a kind of punishment by their God. Christian writers continue with this idea, but now they connect the Jews’ misfortunes to the death of the Messiah. And, of course, Christian writers can attach sayings from the biblical prophets to support their condemnation of the Jews. Ironically, this will rarely be mentioned in Christian writings before the cessation of persecution against the church in the fourth century. Before that time, the church itself was suffering many misfortunes, although no church father would

have suggested that these misfortunes were because of evils done by Christians.⁵

Other ideas common in the pagan world were adopted almost without change by the Christians. It will be commonly claimed, for example, that the Jews are antisocial, that they hate other peoples. Pagan writers had written that Jews were a nation of slaves. Christians repeated that and connected it to the death of Jesus, saying that Jews were now condemned to be slaves forever.

The ritual murder accusation, that Jews periodically kill a human being as part of their worship, will also be made by Christians against Jews, but only after many centuries. Perhaps one reason that this accusation did not surface for such a long time is because the Christians were themselves accused of ritual murder in pagan writings. It was claimed that this took place during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, that a baby was killed and eaten.

In a similar way Christians were accused of flagrant sexual immorality, with organized orgies in dark rooms. Compare this with the words of Tacitus about the Jews in the first century AD: "They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and, although as a race they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful" (Tacitus, *History* 5,2).

In the early third century Hippolytus, a church leader in Rome, wrote a treatise against the Jews based mostly on Psalm 69. Several quotes will show that the reason for the depressed state of the Jews is the way they treated the Messiah.

You condemned Jesus of Nazareth to death and gave Him vinegar and gall to drink ... let us consider together ... whether this is not the cause of your present condition with so many troubles.

Why was the temple made desolate? ... It was because they killed the Son of their Benefactor.

Because you covered the eyes of Christ and then beat him, for this reason too you will bend your back in servitude forever. And since you angrily poured out his blood, listen to what you will get in return: "Pour out your indignation upon them, and let anger take hold of them"; and "Let their house (their celebrated temple) be deserted." (Hippolytus, *Against the Jews* 1; 7; 6)

Temple Destroyed because of Jesus' Death?

The idea that the temple was destroyed because of the death of Jesus was common in early Christian writings. It is still widespread today. In several

5 Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 13, actually uses the persecutions suffered by the Christians as proof that they have the truth: "We, of course, who have succeeded to, and occupy, the place of the prophets, at the present day sustain in the world that treatment which the prophets always suffered on account of divine religion: for some they stoned, some they banished; more, however, they delivered to mortal slaughter."

places in his history of the church, Eusebius makes a direct connection between the death of Jesus and the disaster that would come to the Jews one generation later. Here is one example: "Omitting then the details of their misfortunes from the sword and other things, I think it is only necessary to show their sufferings from famine in order that those who study this work may have some partial knowledge of how the punishment of God followed close after them for their crime against the Christ of God" (*Church History* III 5,7). Later in the same book (III 7,7) he mentions "their destruction full forty years after their crime against Christ."

A similar example is found in Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 13:

Therefore, since the Jews still contend that the Christ is not yet come, whom we have in so many ways proven that he has come, let the Jews recognize their own fate, a fate which they were constantly foretold as destined to incur after the advent of the Christ, on account of the impiety with which they despised and slew Him ... For "the Lord of Sabaoth hath taken away, among the Jews from Jerusalem," among the other things named, "the wise architect" too, who builds the church, God's temple, and the holy city, and the house of the Lord.

What basis might there be in Scripture for this idea? There are really only two passages that could be used to support this doctrine, Daniel 9:25–26 and Luke 19:41–44. Tertullian, in fact, in the discussion we have just quoted, uses both passages. Let us have a close look at them.

Daniel 9:25–26

Know therefore and understand that from the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one [*mashiah*] shall be cut off, and shall have nothing; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed.

Many interpretations have been given to these verses, and not all of them agree that this has to be speaking about the death of the Messiah. The phrase "*mashiah* shall be cut off, and shall have nothing" does not necessarily have to mean that this anointed one will be killed. If it does not, then of course the passage may have nothing to do with Jesus' death.

However, let us assume that "cut off" means "killed," and that this is speaking prophetically about Jesus. Does this passage make any connection between the death of this anointed one and the destruction of the temple? Yes it does, a sequential connection. In other words, it says first this will happen, then that will happen. The anointed one will be

cut off, and afterward Jerusalem and its temple will be destroyed. But a sequential connection does not necessarily mean a causal connection. Just because one thing follows another does not mean that the second was caused by the first. We cannot say, on the basis of these verses alone, that the temple will be destroyed because of the death of Jesus, only after his death.

Luke 19:41–44

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Some scholars have rejected this as an authentic saying of Jesus, claiming that the information in it proves that it was written after the temple was destroyed. However, there is really no valid reason for this claim. Such a saying is very much in line with normal prophetic speech, and there is nothing in Jesus' words that could not have been said before 70 AD.

The question we must ask is whether Jesus is making a causal connection between his death (or rejection) and the temple's destruction. First of all, let us ask to whom Jesus is speaking. Literally, he is addressing the city of Jerusalem. Now we would all agree that he is not speaking to buildings and streets, but rather to people. But which people? Is he speaking only to the 80,000 inhabitants of the city at that time? Perhaps the city is just representative of a broader group. Who would that be? All Jews living at that time? Just a certain group of Jews from that time? All Jews of all times? Jesus does not say whom he means, and we are left to interpret. In such a case we need to be careful. We certainly would not be justified in building an entire doctrine of Jewish guilt based solely on our interpretation.

But this is not the only thing in Jesus' words that is not clear. Unlike the verses in Daniel, here we do have a causative phrase, "because you did not know the time of your visitation." The word "visitation" is frequently used of an activity of God, usually for blessing, sometimes for punishment. Presumably, the visitation Jesus is speaking of is a positive one, because the judgment only comes after it is not recognized or is rejected.

The statement "You did not know the time of your visitation" seems strange, coming as it does immediately after Jesus was welcomed joyfully into the city by crowds of people shouting "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD." Perhaps he is speaking about someone else. Perhaps he is speaking about a time still to come.

Finally, let us notice a story in Luke 7:11–16. Jesus came to the town

of Nain and there raised a young man from the dead. The response of the crowd is noteworthy: "Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!'" Here, clearly, some people did recognize Jesus' activities as a visitation from God.

What then is the conclusion? This passage may have something to say about a relationship between Jesus' rejection or death and the subsequent destruction of the city (the temple is not mentioned). However, there are many open questions, and we would be unwise to build a doctrine based just on these verses. Even taken together with Daniel 9, this cannot be made to say that the Bible teaches that what happened to Jerusalem in 70 AD was because of what was done to Jesus.

A related idea, which we sometimes hear, is that the Jewish people were scattered because of Jesus' death or rejection.

Which prediction was thus also fulfilled, that "on the first day of unleavened bread" you slew Christ; and (that the prophecies might be fulfilled) the day hastened to make an "eventide,"—that is, to cause darkness, which was made at mid-day; and thus "your festive days God converted into grief, and your canticles into lamentation." For after the passion of Christ there overtook you even captivity and dispersion, predicted before through the Holy Spirit. (Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 10)

We need not waste much time with this claim. The best estimates are that only 20–25% of the Jewish people lived in the land of Israel at the end of the Second Temple period. They had been scattered long before Jesus was born. Here it would be even more difficult to find scriptural support for the claim.

Murderers of the Messiah

The most significant and far-reaching anti-Jewish doctrine that developed in the early centuries of the church declared that the Jews had murdered their Messiah. When combined with the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, this would become, in the fourth century, "murderers of God."

Justin (*Dialogue* 93) says, "You are always found to be idolaters and murderers of righteous men, so that you laid hands even on Christ himself."

The words of a later church father, Gregory of Nyssa (330–395), are worth quoting in full: "Murderers of the Lord, assassins of the prophets, rebels and detesters of God, they outrage the Law, resist grace, repudiate the faith of their fathers. Companions of the devil, race of vipers, informers, slanderers, darkness of the mind, pharisaic leaven, stone throwers, enemies of all that is beautiful."

What, according to the New Testament, was the role of Jews in the death of Jesus? When we ask a question like this, we need to take a close look at our assumptions. Is it valid to assume that something done by a

relatively small number of people is attributable to the entire nation? On what basis would we make such an assumption? And if the small group did represent the nation, is that necessarily a bad thing, or might it be a good thing? The church fathers assumed (1) that the actions of the few should be attributed to all Jews, and (2) that killing Jesus was an evil thing. If their assumptions were correct, then their words may have been justified. But if one of the assumptions is incorrect, then there was no justification for writing what they wrote.

Let us take for example the commentary of Origen (third century, Alexandria) on Matthew 27:25. Commenting on the words “his blood be on us and on our children,” Origen wrote:

Because of this, the things they did, they filled up the measure of their fathers not only in the blood of the prophets, but also in the blood of Christ ... as a result, the blood of Jesus is charged not only against those who actually did the deed but also against all generations of Jews afterward and forever. Because of this now and forever “their house is left to them desolate” [Matt 23:38].

Origen’s assumptions are clear: the people in Pilate’s courtyard—How many could they have been?—spoke for the entire nation. Their words obligated God, and evidently it made no difference that only few hours later Jesus asked God to forgive them. We see essentially the same thing a generation earlier in the words of Tertullian (*Against Marcion* II 15,3):

If you, however, accept the gospel of truth, you will discover on whom recoils the sentence of the Judge, when he charges the sins of the fathers to the sons, on those who had been hardened enough so that they spontaneously cursed and condemned themselves with these words: “His blood be on us and on our children.” God heard this and in his providence ordered that it take its full course.

The Torah as a Punishment

Pagan attacks on Jews had been mostly on the personal or national level. As we can see from the examples already given, Christian attacks added a theological level. One particularly odd example of this is found in several church fathers: God gave the Torah to the Jews as a punishment.

The following is quoted from Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*:

Moreover, that God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath, and imposed on you other precepts for a sign, as I have already said, on account of your unrighteousness, and that of your fathers,—as he declares that for the sake of the nations, lest his name be profaned among them, therefore he permitted some of you to remain alive,—these words of his can prove to you. This is how they are narrated by Ezekiel [20:19–26]: “I the LORD am your God; walk in my statutes, and be

careful to observe my ordinances, and hallow my sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I the LORD am your God. But the children rebelled against me; they did not walk in my statutes, and were not careful to observe my ordinances, by whose observance man shall live; they profaned my sabbaths. Then I thought I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand, and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols. Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not have life; and I defiled them through their very gifts in making them offer by fire all their first-born, that I might horrify them."

When we read a passage like this one, we need to bear in mind that the writer is basing his views on the Scripture he quotes. In order to reject Justin's conclusions, we will have to show that he has misinterpreted Ezekiel.

Jewish Involvement in the Persecution of Christians

Around the year 200, the North African church writer Tertullian wrote that "the synagogues of the Jews are sources of persecution" (*Scorpiace*, ii). This is not an isolated claim, but does it have anything to tell us about the relation of the church to the Jews during this period?

Before we even attempt to answer such a question from our sources, we might do well to consider a likely answer based on what we know of human nature. Generally, the history of relations between the church and the Jewish people was a negative one, and the general evidence is that the church persecuted the Jews. However, is it likely that the persecuted people never did anything to defend themselves or to retaliate? Jews did not like Christian doctrine any more than Christians liked Judaism. Is it likely that this dislike was never expressed in action? Even if we had no sources, this is something we would have expected to find.

Let us start with a strange piece from the Jewish sources (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a):

It is taught: Yeshu had five disciples: Matai, Nekai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah. They brought Matai [before the judges]. He said to them: Will Matai be killed? It is written (Ps 42:2) "When [Matai] shall I come and appear before God." They said to him: Yes, Matai will be killed as it is written (Ps 41:5) "When [Matai] shall he die and his name perish."

They brought Nekai. He said to them: Will Nekai be killed? It is written (Exod 23:7) "The innocent [Naki] and the righteous you shall not slay." They said to him: Yes, Nekai will be killed as it is written (Ps 10:8) "In secret places he slay the innocent [Naki]."

They brought Netzer. He said to them: Will Netzer be killed? It is written (Isa 11:1) "A branch [Netzer] shall spring up from his roots." They said to him: Yes, Netzer will be killed as it is written (Isa 14:19) "You are cast forth out of your grave like an abominable branch [Netzer]."

They brought Buni. He said to them: Will Buni be killed? It is written (Exod 4:22) "My son [Beni], my firstborn, Israel." They said to him: Yes, Buni will be killed as it is written (Exod 4:23) "Behold, I slay your son [Bincha] your firstborn."

They brought Todah. He said to them: Will Todah be killed? It is written (Ps 100:1) "A Psalm for thanksgiving [Todah]." They said to him: Yes, Todah will be killed as it is written (Ps 50:23) "Whoever sacrifices thanksgiving [Todah] honors me."

While some scholars have seen this as possibly the record of a historical event,⁶ the form of the story as we have it cannot carry much reliable information. Only the first name seems anywhere close to the name of one of Jesus' disciples, Matthew. The structure of the tale, with pairs of verses in which the same word appears in apparent contradiction, all adds up to an exercise of some sort. The passage cannot be dated precisely, but it is not later than about 200 AD.

Having said that, the subject matter—five executions—does seem rather harsh. Is it possible that this passage reflects, if not an actual attempt to put to death disciples of Jesus, then at least a mindset that saw Jesus' followers worthy of death?

The Book of Acts records several occasions on which believers in Jesus were either executed or an attempt was made by Jewish authorities to have them executed. Of course, at that time it was all an in-house argument. The picture is fairly consistent until the end of the first century. The outstanding example is the death of James, the brother of Jesus, in the year 62.

In the early decades of the second century we continue to read of the persecution of Jewish believers by their fellow Jews. Justin Martyr (*First Apology* 31,6) reports the persecution of Jewish believers who refused to participate in the Bar Kochba rebellion: "For in the present war it is only the Christians whom Bar Kochba, the leader of the rebellion of the Jews, commanded to be punished severely, if they did not deny Jesus as the Messiah and blaspheme him." It is very likely that the prominent figure

6 Travers Hereford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1975 [1903]), 92, suggests, following an earlier scholar, that there may have been a real event like this during the Bar Kochba revolt.

in these acts against the Jewish believers was Rabbi Akiva, who had declared Bar Kochba to be Messiah the King.

Now, in addition to Jewish believers, also non-Jewish believers are being persecuted. Just two decades after Bar Kochba we read of Jewish incitement in the death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor.

In the early third century the Alexandrian theologian Origen wrote a defense of Christian faith. He wrote against Celsus, a pagan philosopher who had attacked Christianity around the same time Polycarp died (*Against Celsus* vi, 27).

He appears to me, indeed, to have acted like those Jews who, when Christianity began to be first preached, scattered abroad false reports of the Gospel, such as that "Christians offered up an infant in sacrifice, and partook of its flesh;" and again, "that the professors of Christianity, wishing to do the 'works of darkness,' used to extinguish the lights (in their meetings), and each one to have sexual intercourse with any woman whom he chanced to meet." These calumnies have long exercised, although unreasonably, an influence over the minds of very many, leading those who are aliens to the Gospel to believe that Christians are men of such a character; and even at the present day they mislead some, and prevent them from entering even into simple conversation with those who are Christians.

While there is no mention here of persecution as such, nor even of Jews inciting the authorities to persecute Christians, it does seem to reflect an active program of turning public opinion against the Christians. It is interesting to note that one of the accusations is a ritual murder charge.

Another passage from Origen, preserved in Eusebius' *Church History* (IV 16,2), is of particular significance. It comes in an attack on the Montanists, condemned by many church authorities as heretical.

Who is there, O friends, of these who began to talk, from Montanus and the women down, that was persecuted by the Jews, or slain by lawless men? None. Or has any of them been seized and crucified for the Name? Truly not. Or has one of these women ever been scourged in the synagogues of the Jews, or stoned? No; never anywhere.

Origen argues against the Montanists that they have never been persecuted by Jews. It is clearly implied—indeed it is the whole point of the argument—that real believers get persecuted by Jews. This is significant because the writer's argument would be weak if everyone knew that what he says is incorrect.

Other examples, all of them from the church fathers, could be given. No doubt many of them are exaggerated or even false. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the rivalry between the church and the synagogue was not all one-way traffic.

4. The Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Introduction

In the second decade of the fourth century AD the church went almost overnight from the heaviest sustained official persecution it had ever experienced into a position of power in the Roman Empire. The psychological effect of this turnaround was not surprising. The church set out almost immediately to put down those it considered to constitute a threat: the heretics, the pagans, and the Jews.

All three of these rivals were attacked by the church as it used its newly-gained influence in the empire. The first order of business was to clean house; heretical ideas posed a more immediate threat than anything from the outside. Church councils were held with some frequency to settle questions of doctrine, and many writers set their hand to refuting the many heresies they saw around them. This would take up most of the fourth century.

While Christianity had grown rapidly during the first three hundred years of its existence, it was far from being the majority religion of the Roman Empire at the start of the reign of Constantine. Various pagan religions, both traditional Roman religions and eastern mystery religions, were popular and widespread. Even though Christianity had been recognized in 313 and was firmly established by 325, its success was far from guaranteed. The struggle against the pagans on the official level was begun a bit later than the struggle against heresies, and it lasted into the early fifth century.

Church versus Synagogue

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Christian writers had been on the attack against Jews and Judaism since at least the beginning of the second century. The developments of the early fourth century introduced a new and dangerous element into the picture: now the church leaders had the backing of the secular authorities; now they could add action to their words.

In the first years after the Emperor Constantine recognized the church, he took a fairly dominant role in some of its affairs. He initiated church

councils to deal with doctrinal disputes and sometimes participated in the council meetings. In one case a number of bishops even appealed to the emperor for his support in negating the appointment of a North African bishop, an appointment which they considered to be invalid.

Imperial legislation influenced by the church

A number of laws passed by the Roman senate from the time of Constantine onward were aimed directly at the Jews. Many of these laws were clearly inspired by the new Christian reality in the empire.

One area resulted from the Christianization of the empire and caused hardship for some Jews, but it cannot properly be called persecution. There was a class of Roman citizens called decurions. These were honored citizens with wide powers in local administrations. They were responsible to ensure that their colony or city paid its full taxes to Rome, and this could sometimes make the job a heavy financial burden. An official position of this sort sometimes required the performance of certain symbolic pagan religious activities, and for this reason Jews had been exempt.

When Christianity became dominant in the empire, the requirement for the decurions to offer sacrifice was dropped. As early as the year 321 a law was passed requiring Jews to serve in the decurionate. The law at first gave an exemption to clergy, including both Christian priests and Jewish rabbis. Later, however, in 383, the Jewish clergy were included in the decurionate, unless they could pay to supply a substitute.

It seems likely that the rise of the church to its position at court caused some Jews to convert to Christianity. This must have led to a certain amount of persecution of the converted Jews by the Jewish community. In the year 315, only two years after the "peace of the church," a law was passed prohibiting violence against Jewish believers in Jesus. Constantine himself addressed the Jews, telling them that he knows it is their custom to pursue such converts "with stones and other violence." The penalty for doing so became death by burning at the stake. Such a law would have been justified simply in the name of good order; a government cannot have its citizens throwing stones at each other. However, an addition to that law made it a crime for a person to convert to Judaism.

The same law of 315 forbade Jews from circumcising any non-Jewish slave they already owned. Later legislation, in the time of Constantine's son Constantius, would make it impossible for Jews to own Christian slaves and, ultimately, to own slaves at all. In the economic framework of ancient society, this was tantamount to condemning the Jewish community to poverty. Under Constantius a Christian who became a Jew forfeited all his property to the imperial treasury, and any Jew who married a Christian woman was to be put to death. In the course of time several laws would be passed forbidding marriage between Jews and Christians. Such laws, of course, would have been viewed positively by the Jewish community.

Probably as early as the late fourth century, it was forbidden to build synagogues. Clear legislation against such building appears in 423, only

two years before the Christian empire abolished the office of Jewish patriarch.

Canon law and the Jews

In Jerusalem in the year 49 AD, leaders of the young church gathered to decide whether converts from among the Gentiles should be required to keep the commandments of the Torah. This gathering came to be known as the Jerusalem Council. It set the precedent for later formal gatherings to discuss and decide on questions of doctrine and practice.

The Jerusalem Council was possible because the men did not have to come from far away, and the new movement was as yet unknown to the Roman authorities. It would not be long, however, before they viewed Christianity as a “collegium,” a special interest group with political ramifications. Such groups were forbidden by the Romans. Practically speaking, it was not possible for large numbers of church leaders to gather together, especially if they came from widely scattered churches. Before the time of Constantine only one such council meeting was held, in the city of Elvira in Spain about the year 300. It was a national council, limited to delegates from Spain.

Several of the decisions of the Council of Elvira, called canons, dealt with the relationship of Christians with Jews. Church members were forbidden from marrying Jews, and one canon, rather surprisingly, explicitly forbids committing adultery with Jewish women! One canon prohibits Christians from joining the Jews in the celebration of their feasts, and another one notes that some Christians are having their fields blessed by Jewish clergy. This too is forbidden.

It will be noted that all of the canons dealing with Jews indicate the existence of relatively positive relations between the Christian “man in the street” and his Jewish neighbors. In a later chapter we will return to this phenomenon, which has been called philosemitism.⁷

As soon as it became possible for church leaders to travel freely throughout the empire, many councils were held. However, they all dealt with the immediate danger of heresies, mostly the Arian heresy, and none of them mentioned relations with Jews. It was not until 341 that one canon of the Council of Antioch forbade the eating of the Passover meal with Jews.

Another council was held in Laodicea in the year 360. Some canons were more or less repeated from Elvira. In addition, it was now forbidden for Christians to accept unleavened bread—or any gift related to a Jewish feast—from Jews. It was ruled that Christians are to work on Saturday but also that they are required to read the gospels on that day.

Finally we can note the canons from a collection known as the Apostolic Canons. The date of the compilation is uncertain, but it is probably from the early fifth century. Here we find a canon expelling any Christians who

7 There can be no doubt that Jewish leaders would have endorsed the separation implied by these canons, but sources to prove this are scarce. Jewish writings refer to Christians relatively rarely compared to Christian references to Jews.

deny their faith because of fear of the Jews. Oil is not to be taken into the synagogue during their feasts nor are lamps to be lit (probably a reference to Christians serving as "goyim shel shabbat"⁸), and indeed it is prohibited to enter a synagogue at all. Any priest who celebrates Easter "before the vernal equinox, with the Jews," is to be deposed. Finally, it is forbidden to feast or to fast together with the Jews. The idea that one should not fast with the Jews goes back as early as a document from the early second century, called the *Didache* (8,1), setting two Christian fast days a week: "Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays [the two weekly fast days according to rabbinic tradition], but you are to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays."

John Chrysostom

In the city of Antioch in the latter part of the fourth century, there was a young priest named John. He was a preacher, one of the most eloquent speakers of his time. In fact, his sermons were so well loved that they were recorded and preserved, and we still have about one thousand of them today. Because of his great eloquence, he was later called "Golden Mouth," in Greek *Chrysostom*, and that is how he is known today.

John Chrysostom was not only a gifted speaker, he also had the heart of a shepherd for the members of his church. One historian has written about him: "No preacher, either before or after him, has excelled Chrysostom in the degree to which he trained his hearers by systematic biblical exegesis." In the late summer of the year 386, the same year he was ordained, he observed what he considered to be a threat to the spiritual health of his flock, and he preached several sermons warning of the danger. What was this danger? Many in his congregation were in friendly contact with their Jewish neighbors and were attending the synagogue; in fact they were doing all those things that the church councils had forbidden. From his sermons we learn that Christians in Antioch were buying charms and amulets from Jews. They also felt that an oath sworn in front of the ark in the synagogue was more powerful than one sworn in a church, and if someone was sick, he preferred to call a Jewish doctor.

During the course of the next year and a half Chrysostom preached a total of eight sermons, usually around the time of the Jewish holidays, condemning the Jews and their religion.

Here are selected excerpts of some of the things John Chrysostom preached to his people.

What is this disease? The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us one after the other and in quick succession: the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Tabernacles, the fasts. There are many in our ranks who say they think as we do. Yet some of

8 Some Jews employed non-Jews on the Sabbath to perform acts that were forbidden to the Jew himself on that day.

these are going to watch the festivals, and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts. I wish to drive this perverse custom from the church right now.

I was ready to address your loving assembly again on the glory of the only-begotten Son of God. But the untimely obstinacy of those who wish to keep the first paschal fast forces me to devote my entire instruction to their cure. For the good shepherd does more than drive away the wolves; he also is most diligent in caring for his sheep who are sick. What does he gain if the flocks escape the jaws of the wild beast but are then devoured by disease?

To be with the Jews on the very day they murdered Jesus [Passover] is to ensure that on the day of judgment he will say, "Depart from me, for you have had dealings with my murderers."

[Citing Ps 106:37] They sacrificed their sons and daughters to devils; they outraged nature and overthrew from their foundations the laws of relationships. They have become worse than the wild beasts, and for no reason at all, with their own hands they murder their own offspring, to worship the avenging devils who are the foes of our own life.⁹

The temple was already a den of thieves when the Jewish commonwealth and way of life still prevailed. Now you give it a name more worthy than it deserves if you call it a brothel, a stronghold of sin, a lodging place for demons, a fortress of the devil, the destruction of the soul, the precipice and pit of all perdition, or whatever other name you give it.

In one of the sermons Chrysostom says that the holy books don't make the place holy, and in fact he hates the synagogue more because it has the holy books, because it is these that attract Christians. "Christ celebrated Passover with them, not so we should celebrate with them, but rather that he might bring truth itself from the shadow." The same is true for circumcision, the Sabbath, using unleavened bread, and keeping the festivals. Chrysostom also repeats many of the standard ideas, including the claim that Jewish misfortunes are proof that God is against them, that they have done evil. He mocks the Jewish patriarchs and the ark in the synagogue, and then he tries to convince all Christians to hate Jews. It is, he says, a sin for Christians to treat Jews with respect.

All of this is harsh indeed, and it would be easy to discount his motivation for speaking as he does. He was thoroughly convinced that God was finished with Jews and Judaism, and that any contact with them was a dangerous step backward. Listen to him as he calls for the lost [those Christians who are being attracted to Judaism] to be brought back:

⁹ Evidently some of his hearers objected to Chrysostom's use of the present tense as if Jews in his time were doing what is described in the psalm. In a later sermon he says that even if they no longer murder their own children, they have murdered the Christ, which is worse (Sermon VI 2, 3).

We don't want to leave any in the grave; we want to seek to make them all straight and whole. In earthly battles, such warriors as have fallen and died can never be called back to life; but in this struggle it is possible that we, by the grace of God, will be able to give life back to such a one as has been mortally wounded. Because this is no natural death but rather a death of will and intention. A dead or dying will can be reawakened; a dead soul can be persuaded to turn back to life and to recognize its Lord.

Chrysostom loved his people, and they loved him. In the year 398 he was consecrated as bishop of the capital city of Constantinople. When he spoke out against the loose way of life of the empress and others at court, he was deposed from his office. But then he was brought back by the popular demand of the people. The influential people he had attacked worked together to have him removed from the city, and he died in exile.

Ambrose and Theodosius I

We are probably never fully aware just how far-reaching our words and actions might be. The sermons of John Chrysostom would influence many generations of Christians. In fact his sermons against the Judaizers and the Jews seem to have spread fairly quickly. In the spring of the year 388 there was an incident that may have been a result of Chrysostom's words. It happened in the town of Callinicum, far to the east on the banks of the Euphrates River. The local bishop, accompanied by some monks and members of the Christian community, set fire to the local synagogue and also to a Gnostic temple.

Word of the incident, perhaps an appeal from the Jews of Callinicum, reached Emperor Theodosius I, himself a devout Christian. He ordered that the synagogue be rebuilt and that the cost should be borne by those who had done the deed, including the bishop.

At this time the most influential church figure in the west was Ambrose, bishop of Milan. Ambrose combined in himself a formidable set of credentials. He was the son of a praetorian prefect, the highest office after the emperor. He himself was appointed consular governor, with his headquarters in Milan. When it came time for the position of bishop to be filled by means of an election in the year 374, there was a real chance of a riot. As the secular authority, Ambrose came in to keep order. In a strange turn of events, the crowd proclaimed him as their choice for bishop.

During the earlier years of his bishopric he had acted as a kind of spiritual mentor to two emperors who came into office as children. This meant, of course, that he was very familiar with the court and held great influence there. Theodosius I was declared co-emperor in 378 while he was an army general. He was a Christian.

When Ambrose heard of the emperor's order to have the synagogue rebuilt, he sent Theodosius a long letter appealing to him to cancel the

order. The bishop of Callinicum, he said, would be put into an impossible position: either he disobeyed the command and would be punished by the emperor, or he obeyed it and would be punished by God. Ambrose said he himself would take responsibility for what had been done, and in fact he was sorry he had not destroyed the synagogue in his own city.

Theodosius did not reply, and Ambrose followed with a second letter. Soon afterward, the emperor attended a church service presided over by Ambrose. In his sermon the bishop emphasized the superiority of the church over the synagogue. The emperor admitted that perhaps he had been a bit harsh. Ambrose refused to continue—effectively denying the emperor the right to take communion—until the order was rescinded. Theodosius submitted.

The year before the Callinicum incident Ambrose was involved in another event that would have great ramifications for the history of the church generally and for the way it related to the Jews specifically. In that year—387—he baptized Augustine, whom he had helped come to faith.

Augustine

The writings of Augustine, from Hippo near Carthage in North Africa, have influenced the progression of Christian thought perhaps more than any other documents after the New Testament. Like many Christian thinkers before and after him, he had difficulty understanding the Jews, and he shared ideas and prejudices that were common in his day. To quote Flannery (*Anguish*, 50): [For Augustine] “Judaism, since Christ, is a corruption; indeed Judas is the image of the Jewish people; their understanding of the Scriptures is carnal; they bear the guilt for the death of the Savior, for through their fathers they have killed the Christ.”

Augustine tried to explain how it was that God was finished with the Jews and yet they were still around almost four hundred years after their time had come to an end. He found two ways to explain this.

Slave librarian

In ancient times most people, even those who knew how to read, could not afford to own a book. If a wealthy person had books, he might also have an educated slave—perhaps a teacher or scholar captured in war—who would carry the books and read them to his master. One ancient source describes the naturalist Pliny being shaved by one slave while another read to him.

Already by the end of the first century there was almost no one in the church who could read the Hebrew Bible. Augustine said that the Jews were the slaves who carried the books for the Christians. The very books they carried, he said, they did not understand properly.

Witness people

The second explanation of the Jews' continued existence is related to the first: the Jews are a living testimony that Christianity is true. To under-

stand this we need to know that the ancients believed that something was more likely to be true if it was old. Innovations in the area of religion were scoffed at. Christianity was at a serious disadvantage because it had started many hundreds of years after the state religions of the Greeks and Romans. Everyone knew that the religion of the Jews went back a long time. For the new Christian religion, it was actually an asset to be identified in some way with Judaism, because it gave Christianity credibility in the eyes of the pagans.

On this background Augustine declares that the Jews have been kept alive as proof of the truth of Christianity. He was not the first to do so, and after him the concept would be expanded by others. In the mid-third century Hippolytus said this in his commentary on Psalm 59:11 [69:11 in the Septuagint text]:

For this reason, even up to our day, though they [the Jews] see the borders (of their country), and go all around them, they stand far off. And therefore they no longer have among them king or high priest or prophet, nor even scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees. He does not, however, say that they are to be cut off; and so their race still exists, and the succession of their children is continued. For they have not been cut off nor consumed from among men—but they still exist, yet only as those who have been rejected and cast down from the honor of which God considered them worthy long ago. But again, "Scatter them," he says, "by your power," and this word has come to pass. For they are scattered throughout the whole earth, and everywhere they are in servitude, engaging in the lowest and most servile occupations and doing the worst kinds of work because of their hunger.

For if they had been destroyed from among men and none of them remained living anywhere, they could not see my people and not see how my church has prospered. Therefore "scatter" them everywhere on earth, where my church is to be established, so that when they see that the church has been founded by me, they may be roused to imitate its faith. And in fact the Savior also asked the same things for them.

It will be seen from this passage that, like Paul, Hippolytus held out hope that the Jews would be jealous and come to faith, and for that reason God kept them alive.

Augustine would also take up this idea. Because of his great influence on the development of church thought, his exegesis of the same passage, Psalm 59:11, would be repeated frequently.

For there is a prophecy given previously in the Psalms (which they still read) concerning this, where it is written: "Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law; scatter them by your power." God thus demonstrated to the church the grace of his mercy upon his

enemies the Jews, because, as the Apostle says, “Their stumbling is salvation for the Gentiles.” Therefore, he did not kill them—that is, he did not make them cease living as Jews, although conquered and oppressed by the Romans—lest, having forgotten the law of God, they not be able to provide testimony on our behalf in this matter of our present concern. Thus it was not enough for him to say only, “Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law,” without adding “scatter them.” For if they were not everywhere, but only in their own land with this testimony of the scriptures, the church, which is everywhere, could surely not have them among all the nations as witnesses to the prophecies given previously regarding Christ.

In Augustine’s understanding, the words “slay them not” meant more than just “do not kill them.” It also meant that they should be permitted—even encouraged—to continue practicing their Judaism. In fact, Augustine admired the Jews because they had managed to preserve their identity despite oppression by Gentile rulers. Augustine’s doctrine of “slay them not” was adopted and repeated by many Christian writers in the centuries to follow.

Nevertheless, there was a serious potential danger in the doctrine that the Jews only continued to exist as a witness people. Once you believe that the sad condition of the Jews is somehow proof of the truth of Christianity, then perhaps the sadder their condition, the greater the proof. While Augustine never suggested such logic, this thinking lay behind some of the legislation that would later make the lot of the Jews even more miserable.

We should not conclude without noting that Augustine managed to display a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness toward the Jews that was in great contrast to the attitude of Chrysostom. In a treatise he wrote *Against the Jews*, he concludes with this call to his Christian readers:

This, my dear friends, let us preach to the Jews, wherever we can, in a spirit of love, whether they welcome our words or reject them. It is not for us to boast over them as “branches broken off.” Rather let us consider by whose grace and with what loving-kindness and into what kind of root it was that we were grafted. For then, “as not minding high things, but agreeing with the humble” [Rom 12:16], we shall be able to say to them without exulting over them—though we exult in God—“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” They may indeed refuse, “but as for me,” says the church to Christ, “I am a fruitful olive tree” [Ps 52:8].

5. East and West until Islam

Purim and Easter

In the year 2005 the eve of Purim fell on Thursday, March 24. The next morning, the day of Purim, was Good Friday on the Christian calendar, commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus. This coincidence of dates is caused by the fact that both Purim and Easter are holidays that do not fall on fixed dates on the secular calendar, but within a range of about five weeks. They can fall very far apart, but they can also fall together.

On a number of occasions since the beginning of Christianity this coincidence of the two holidays has led to problems for Jews. Purim celebrations normally include the mocking of Haman. When the text of Esther says that Haman was hanged, it was frequently interpreted to mean that he had been crucified. It was not unusual for an effigy of Haman to be placed on a cross and mocked. (Execution by hanging the condemned man by the neck with a rope was unknown in the ancient world.) It has long been part of Jewish custom to indulge in alcoholic drinks on Purim, almost to an extreme.

As early as the year 408 AD we read this order from the emperors Honorius and Theodosius:

The Governors of provinces shall prohibit Jews from burning or exhibiting the representation of the Holy Cross, with the sacrilegious intention of bringing it into contempt, on the festival day when they celebrate the punishment of Haman; nor shall they place the emblem of our faith upon their own houses, but they can retain their rites without manifesting any scorn for the Christian religion.

According to the church historian Socrates Scholasticus (*Church History*, VI 16), a similar incident took place several years later:

At a place named Inmestar, situated between Chalcis and Antioch in Syria, the Jews were amusing themselves in their usual way with a variety of sports. In this way they indulged in many absurdities, and at length, impelled by drunkenness, they were guilty of scoffing at Christians and even Christ himself; and in derision of the cross

and those who put their trust in the Crucified One, they seized a Christian boy, and having bound him to a cross, began to laugh and sneer at him. But in a little while becoming so transported with fury, they scourged the child until he died under their hands. This conduct occasioned a sharp conflict between them and the Christians; and as soon as the emperors were informed of the circumstance, they issued orders to the governor of the province to find out and punish the delinquents.

While the report of Socrates may not be objective and must be treated with caution, neither should we automatically dismiss the possibility that something of the sort could have happened at times of friction between Jews and Christians. A person who has followed the Purim custom of drinking until he does not know the difference between "cursed be Haman" and "blessed be Mordechai" may also find it difficult to distinguish between beating an effigy and beating a real person. The phrase "transported with fury" also reminds us that even at this relatively early date Jews had suffered at the hands of the newly ascendant church; there could have been a lot of pent-up anger.¹⁰

Gregory I

No bishop of Rome was more powerful or more influential in antiquity than Gregory I (590–604). It has been said that he may be the first one properly called "pope," as he was the first whose authority was recognized by all of the western church.

Gregory related to the Jews in a way that some would call inconsistent. On the one hand, he steadfastly upheld the church policy that forbade Jews to own slaves who were Christians or might become Christians. His reasoning went something like this: All Christians are members of Christ's body, and all honor the head. But it is contradictory to honor the head and at the same time to allow the members to be oppressed by those who are opposed to Christ (Cohen, *Letters*, 78).

In the following passage Gregory shows that he shared the basic negative attitude toward Jews that characterized church leaders generally.

While the people of the Jews remained under the rule of the Law, and the whole Gentile world knew none of God's precepts, the former appeared to rule through their faith, and the latter lay deeply

10 The same kind of action is probably hinted at in the so-called *Las Siete Partidas* in Spain, in the year 1265: "Because we have heard it said that in some places Jews celebrated, and still celebrate Good Friday, which commemorates the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by way of contempt: stealing children and fastening them to crosses, and making images of wax and crucifying them, when they cannot obtain children; we order that, hereafter, if in any part of our dominions anything like this is done, and can be proved, all persons who were present when the act was committed shall be seized, arrested and brought before the king; and after the king ascertains that they are guilty, he shall cause them to be put to death in a disgraceful manner, no matter how many there may be."

suppressed because of their disbelief. But when Judea denied the mystery of the Lord's incarnation, the Gentile world believed, and the rulers sank into disfavor, and they who had been suppressed in the guilt of their unbelief were raised in the liberty of the true faith. ... For when he removed the spoils of virtue from the Jews, he let the splendor of his gifts dwell in the heart of the Gentiles, wherein, on account of its faith, he considered it fitting to reside. This in fact occurred when the people of the Jews accepted the words of God only according to the letter, which kills, and the Gentile world, having been converted, infused those words with the spirit, which gives life. (Cohen, *Letters*, 80)

This, in fact, reflects an opinion that we still hear frequently today: Jesus came to the Jewish people, and they rejected him; then he went to the Gentiles, and they accepted him. Such a generalization is a gross misrepresentation of reality. It would be much more accurate to say that most of the Jews rejected Jesus while a small percentage accepted him, just as most Gentiles rejected Jesus while a small percentage accepted him. The percentages may differ on the two sides, but the words of Jesus remain true: "The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt 7:14).

Pope Gregory I was motivated by an evangelistic spirit, and this is reflected in other things he wrote about the Jews. Even though he said that the Jews "denied the mystery of the Lord's incarnation," he still held out hope that Jews could be reached with the gospel. There were others who wanted to see Jews come to faith in Jesus, but they believed that such a high goal justified any means to make it happen. These people tried to convert Jews by force. Gregory strongly rejected such an approach.

Many of the Jews dwelling in those areas have been led to the baptismal font more through the use of force than by preaching. I grant that intention of this sort is worthy of praise, and I admit that it derives from love for our Lord. But unless sufficient support of Holy Scripture follows this same intention, I fear that either nothing worthwhile will proceed from it or, additionally, that those souls which we wish to be saved might eventually—may it never happen—be lost. For, when anyone approaches the baptismal font not as a result of the sweetness of preaching but under duress, he returns to his earlier superstition, and then dies in a worse state, because he seemed to be reborn.¹¹

While Gregory must encourage the dedication to the Lord that wants people to come to faith and be baptized, he rightly rejects force as a means to get people into the church. The proper approach, he says, is

11 Letter to Virgilius, Bishop of Arles, and Theodorus, Bishop of Marseilles, June 591, in *ibid.*, 75f.

to preach in an attractive and convincing manner. On many occasions Gregory opposed the use of violence against Jews. How different might have been the history of the relations between the Jewish people and the church if Gregory's insistence on non-violence had always been heeded.

Even so, his strong desire to see Jews come to faith led him to approve non-violent methods that were not limited to preaching alone. In one of his letters he gives instructions that if any Jews living on church lands and paying rent to the church should come to faith, then their rent should be lowered, "so that others also, enticed by this benefit, may be moved to a similar desire."

Those whom our Redeemer chooses to convert to himself from Judaistic perdition we ought, with reasonable moderation, to assist; lest (God forbid) they should suffer from lack of food. Accordingly we charge you, under the authority of this order, not to neglect to give money every year to the children of Justa, who is of the Hebrews.¹²

Spain

The first actual forced conversion of Jews may have taken place on the island of Minorca, off the east coast of Spain. In a letter by Bishop Severus of Minorca, written in 418, we read that, three years earlier, he incited fighting between the Jewish and Christian citizens in the streets of the town of Magona. The synagogue was burned, and a few Jews fled to the mountains and tried unsuccessfully to escape the island. In the end many of the distinguished members of the community yielded, and over five hundred converted to Christianity.

Under the first Visigothic rulers (Arian Christians, who believed that Jesus was neither divine nor human but a kind of supernatural creature), the Jews of Spain seem to have been treated more or less equally with Christians. However, this was to change before the end of the sixth century. In the year 589, at the end of the third Council of Toledo, the Visigothic king Recared converted from Arian Christianity to Catholic Christianity. Canon 14 of that council dealt with Jews:

It shall not be permitted for Jews to have Christian wives or concubines, nor are they permitted to purchase Christian slaves for their own use, and if from such unions offspring should be born, they shall be baptized; they shall not be appointed to public office in which they may impose punishment on Christians, and if any Christians have been dishonored by them, by the Jewish rites, and circumcised, they shall return to the Christian religion and be granted freedom without paying the price. (Bango, *Sepharad*, 159f)

12 Gregory, *Letters*, Book IV, Letter XXXIII, To Anthemius, Subdeacon.

Recared issued his own laws paralleling the council decisions, but he did not succeed in enforcing them. The first to do so was King Sisebut in the early part of the seventh century. Sisebut is in fact credited with the first official persecution of the Jews in Spain. He decreed that Jews should release all of their slaves and that they would not be allowed to hold slaves in the future. Actually this was a somewhat unnecessary measure, because he also ordered that within one year all Jews must convert to Christianity or leave the kingdom, forfeiting all their property. Many Jews did pack up and leave, but an even larger number—the sources say over 90,000—converted to Christianity, allowing them to keep their slaves and the rest of their property.

How did the church react to these measures taken by a secular ruler? A certain Archbishop Aurasius of Toledo took a very hard line, and he may even have been the one to push Sisebut to make these anti-Jewish laws. (Just a year or two before Sisebut's decree, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius forbade the practice of Judaism in the empire. This too may have influenced Sisebut, even though Spain was not part of the eastern empire.)

A far less severe position was taken by the bishop of Seville, Isidore. In many of his writings he takes a moderate, even pastoral line regarding the Jews. He wants their conversion, but he does not usually speak against them in the harsh language that was already part of Christian writings and would become even harsher in later generations. In the year 633 Isidore headed the fourth Council of Toledo, which dealt with the phenomenon of forced conversion of Jews:

Concerning the Jews, the holy synod has decreed henceforth to compel no one to accept the faith, because God has compassion for whom he wishes and renders obstinate whom he wishes; for not against their will should such people be saved, but with their consent, so that the semblance of justice be kept intact. Just as man, obeying the serpent of his own free will, was ruined, so a man is saved through believing—owing to the call of God's grace and the conversion of his own mind. Therefore, rather than be subdued they should be urged to convert, not under compulsion but through the power of their free will. (Quoted in Cohen, *Letters*, 102.)

So far so good. This reflects the position already declared a few years earlier by Gregory I, and, with a few exceptions, this was the position consistently held by the church throughout its history. It may surprise us, then, to read the next words of the same paragraph from this canon of Toledo:

Those, however, who were previously coerced to become Christian, as happened at the time of the most pious ruler Sisebut—for it is now a fact that they, having been admitted to the divine sacraments,

have received the grace of baptism, have been anointed with chrism, and have partaken of the body and blood of the Lord—they should appropriately be forced to retain the faith which they adopted (even though it was through compulsion or out of necessity) lest the Lord's name be blasphemed, and the faith which they have adopted be deemed vile and contemptible.

In the years between the third and fourth councils of Toledo (and after Sisebut's death), many Jews had come back to their homes and begun to practice their Judaism openly. Now the church was faced with a dilemma, one where doctrine conflicted with humane treatment of people. It was officially forbidden to baptize any person (a Jew or anyone else) by force. However, the church saw baptism as a holy act, a sacrament. It was not just a symbol but was filled with spiritual reality. When a person was baptized, something really happened. At the time of baptism two other acts were performed: the person was anointed with oil for the filling of the Holy Spirit, and they were immediately given the elements of the communion. It was believed that the Holy Spirit really came, and the words of Jesus, "this is my body," were taken with utmost seriousness.

Once a person was baptized and anointed, and partook of the communion, God had placed his seal on them. They were now under the authority and discipline of the church, obligated to live in a certain way, upholding the doctrines accepted by the church. To refuse to do so was no longer simply opposition to the Christian faith (as it had been as long as the person was not a "Christian"); now it was heresy. In the self-understanding of the church, it would be a serious degrading of Christian truth to allow a baptized person to walk away and deny that truth. Even here there were exceptions. On the day that Richard I was crowned king of England in 1189, the leader of the Jewish community was baptized by force. When the archbishop of Canterbury was appealed to, he ruled that if the Jew wished to return to his worship of the devil, he should be allowed free choice.

Nevertheless, from seventh century Spain and onward there would be countless cases of Jews forced into the church. Sometimes it was at the point of a sword, sometimes under the threat of the loss of all possessions and expulsion from the Christian country where they lived. Almost never were those conversions the result of some official church policy; they were forced by mobs or by secular rulers, as in the case of Sisebut. It sometimes happened that children were physically kidnapped from their parents and baptized.

In the case of those adults who had been baptized against their will, the situation of their children presented a problem at a different level. The converted Jews were formally members of the church, and it was a matter of routine that they baptize any child born to them. The baptism of these children was, technically, not done by force, even though the act may have been far from the wishes of the heart of the parents. It was hardly to be expected that the church, with its doctrine of baptism and its

constant watch for backsliders, would see any reason to allow baptized church members to begin practicing Judaism.¹³

In the years following the council in 633 a number of measures were taken, aimed for the most part at the converted Jews and their offspring. King Sisenand (631–636) ordered that where children had been baptized and their parents not, they should be taken from their parents and given to Christians or to the monasteries to be educated. Baptized Jews who were caught practicing Jewish ceremonies were to be sold as slaves. The community of converted Jews gave the king a written statement declaring that they would live as good Christians, but under his successor they resumed open practice of Judaism.

Consequently, King Chintila commanded in 636 that only Christians be allowed to remain in Spain, and this was confirmed by another Toledan council two years later. King Receswind (642–653) ordered that those Jews who relapsed to Judaism should be beheaded, burned, or stoned to death. In 653 the Jews of Toledo promised to observe the church regulations, even agreeing that they would not abstain from eating pork. Even so, most Jewish converts ignored many of the rules, and the church constantly had to police its wayward and unwilling members. The ninth Council of Toledo (655) ruled that all baptized Jews must spend both Jewish and Christian festivals in the presence of a bishop.

This up and down (but mostly down) pattern continued until near the end of the seventh century. It reached its lowest point under a Gothic king and a Jewish bishop. The archbishop of Toledo was a man named Julian. We do not know much about his family background except that it was Jewish (probably *conversos*), and that Julian was raised as a Christian. He was a man highly respected in his time, a prolific writer, and the first Catholic bishop whose authority was recognized throughout Spain. He presided over four councils in Toledo and wrote a treatise "against the Jews," which was, in fact, an attempt to persuade Jews of the truth of Christianity via the messianic prophecies of the Bible.

In 681 the twelfth council, under Julian, declared that "Jews shall not themselves abstain from nor withhold their children or slaves from baptism. Jews shall not presume to observe the Sabbath or any festival of their religion. Any person having a Jew in his service shall deliver him up to the demand of any priest."

After the council, Julian influenced King Erwig to apply the council's decisions on the political level. Until this time most civil legislation had been aimed at the converted Jews. Erwig's legislation repeated and strengthened most of those laws, but he also acted directly against those Jews who were not under the authority of the church. Jews were now ordered to accept baptism; refusal would mean the loss of their property or even being

¹³ In an interesting parallel, the same Council of Toledo was petitioned by certain (non-Jewish) young men who had been pledged as children to be monks. These children had grown up and decided they did not want to be monks. The council ruled that they could not leave their monasteries; they would be monks for life.

expelled from the country. Circumcision was forbidden, as was the reading of any "anti-Christian" writings. Jews were removed from public office, and they could have no Christian slaves or tenants. Ironically, if they were not expelled, they were forbidden to enter seaports, lest they try to escape overseas. Converts were exempted from taxes, and the taxes they would have paid were added to the tax burden of those Jews that remained.

Under Christian kings in Spain things were up and down for the Jews. Some kings made or renewed harsh legislation against Jews, while others used Jews as personal physicians and high court officials, and whole Jewish communities as guards at strategic points along the borders of the kingdom.

Meanwhile, a new and militant religion, Islam, had arisen and was moving rapidly westward across North Africa. The threat was felt in Spain. In addition to the traditional negative treatment of Jews by the church, this approach of Islam would add to the picture. Many Jews did in fact flee to North Africa, joining Jewish communities there. The seventeenth council of Toledo accused the local Jews of conspiring with Jews in Muslim areas. All Jewish practices were banned, and all Jewish children over the age of seven were to be taken from their parents and given to Christian families or institutions. Measures like these were evidently too harsh for some of the clergy. Erwig threatened to fine or even excommunicate those priests who did not comply with the anti-Jewish laws, and he ordered that bishops report on other bishops who were too easy on the Jews.

When the Muslim invasion finally came in the year 711, Spanish Jews openly celebrated, and it was even said that they helped the invaders. This may well have been true. They certainly had nothing to hope for under the church and Christian rulers.

For the most part, however, the lot of the Jews under the Muslims in Spain was not appreciably better than under the Christians. The exception was the tenth century, when Jews achieved high status at court and generally enjoyed considerable freedom. It was during this period that Spain became the most important center for the study of the Talmud.

However, the eleventh century brought persecutions. There were rivalries between Muslim rulers vying for power, and Jews had to choose sides. Sometimes they even found themselves fighting in opposing armies. In the middle of the twelfth century a new Muslim regime, the Almohades, invaded Spain and gained control. They killed large numbers of the followers of the old Muslim regime, considering them to be heretics. The militant Almohades then forced Jews to convert to Islam. Jewish property was confiscated, and women and children were taken and many sold into slavery. Many Jews pretended to convert to Islam. Many more, however, fled Muslim-held areas and went to the Christian kingdom of Castile, where they were welcomed by the tolerant King Alfonso VII (1126–1157). Others fled to northern Spain or southern France. In general, though, the lot of Jews has been more positive in areas ruled by Muslims than in countries ruled by Christians.

On the side of the church, affairs were about to take a serious turn. In

the last year of the twelfth century, Pope Innocent III issued a constitution for the Jews that was relatively tolerant. There he repeated Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 59, that Jews preserve the books of the Christians and therefore should not be killed, and the ruling of Pope Gregory the Great, that no violence should be done when attempting to get Jews to accept Christianity.

For we make the law that no Christian compel them, unwilling or refusing, by violence to come to baptism. But if any one of them should spontaneously, and for the sake of faith, fly to the Christians, once his choice has become evident, let him be made a Christian without any calumny. Indeed, he is not considered to possess the true faith of Christianity who is recognized to have come to Christian baptism, not spontaneously, but unwillingly.

Innocent ruled that no one should take Jewish property by force, interfere with them in the celebration of their festivals, or disturb their cemeteries. Anyone who did these things was to be excommunicated.

As we have seen, this stand against baptism by force had been the official position of the church since at least the seventh century, and it would continue to be so.

Naturally enough, the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity raised difficult questions for the Jewish community as well. Were these people still to be considered Jewish? How was a marriage affected if one partner was forced to convert? What was the status of the children? Many other questions can be imagined. We have an interesting responsum from Rashi dealing with one such question:

Herewith do I, the undersigned, answer him who has questioned me concerning the marriage of a certain girl who was married at a time when she and the groom, as well as the witnesses to the ceremony, had already been forced by Gentiles to disavow the Jewish religion.

I am of the opinion that this woman requires a bill of divorce before she can marry another man. The marriage of a Jew who has even voluntarily become an apostate and then marries is legal [according to Jewish law]. For it is said [Josh 7:11]: "Israel has sinned," meaning [Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 44a] that even though he has sinned he is still an Israelite. How much the more is this true in the case of all these forced converts who at heart are still loyal to God. Notice in this particular case how their final conduct reflects their original attitude, for as soon as they were able to find some form of escape they returned to Judaism. And even though the witnesses may have led a loose life while living among the non-Jews and may be suspected of the iniquities of the Gentiles, nevertheless their testimony to the marriage does not thereby become invalid. ...

Peace! Solomon the son of Rabbi Isaac. (Quoted in Marcus, *Jew*, 301f)

Note the words, "even though he has sinned he is still an Israelite." It is the opinion of Rashi that the people remain Jewish even after they have converted to Christianity, whether that conversion was forced or voluntary.

It would be misleading to say that the Jews of Spain ever enjoyed equality with the Christian citizens. There were always discriminations and persecutions to a lesser or a greater degree. Nevertheless, there was rarely a time in the various courts of Spain when Jews did not occupy positions of highest importance. This was especially true during much of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A succession of kings placed more and more power in the hands of Jews, sometimes even as treasurers for the kingdom.

6. The Phenomenon of Philosemitism

Introduction

Most of our knowledge of the history of the relations between the church and the Jews comes from Christian writers at what might be called the official level. A much smaller amount of material is also available in Jewish writings from certain periods. Ironically, we rarely hear the voice of the average Christian, one who was neither a leader nor a writer.

What was the relationship between the things being written and the attitudes of common people in the church? Do the writings reflect the popular position on the things being written? Or do the writings in fact influence and help form popular attitudes? It should be kept in mind that the Christian writings were, to a large extent, pastoral in nature. That is, their aim was to speak to a situation in the church, to correct wrong practices and to lead the flock in the direction the shepherd considered to be right. In this regard, then, these sermons and treatises do reflect the attitudes and actions of the people, but they reflect them only indirectly. They often speak against certain actions, and this tells us that people were actually thinking and doing the opposite.

While there is do doubt that anti-Semitic ideas became entrenched in the popular mindset of Christians in the Middle Ages, there are many indications that Christians and Jews often lived side by side in harmony.

Canon Law

We noted in an earlier chapter that church councils passed canons against certain contacts between church members and the Jewish community.¹⁴ Perhaps the most common of these contacts came at Passover.

Canons declaring that Christians are not to eat the Passover with Jews were passed at Elvira in 300, Antioch in 341, Laodicea in 360, Vannes in 465, Agde in 506, and in many other councils scattered over a wide geographical area. The inescapable conclusion is that it was quite common for Christians to join their Jewish neighbors for the Passover meal. Some

¹⁴ Canons from Christian councils relating to the Jews were first collected in James Parkes, *Conflict*, 381–386.

of the canons specifically forbid clergy from joining the Jews in their feasts, indicating that even some local leaders were attracted to Jewish customs.

The passing of a canon at a church council is not something that just pops up overnight. We can assume that a phenomenon had to be widespread and frequent for it to warrant the attention of the gathered bishops. The fact that canons had to be repeated is an indication that the social habits of the "judaizing" Christians were hard to break.

If we start from the assumption that a council canon is legislated in order to forbid something that is actually happening, then we must conclude that Jews and Christians were often in respectful contact with each other. This would have included activities such as exchanges of gifts at the festivals of the two religions; intermarriage; Christians having their fields blessed by rabbis, serving as shabbas goyim both in synagogues and in private Jewish homes, having their children circumcised, and even converting to Judaism; and Jews attending church. The canon legislation is scattered both geographically and chronologically, and we must not get the misimpression that such positive contacts were going on everywhere or all the time. Nevertheless, this sort of "reverse reading" of the legislation does indicate that we may need to soften our image of Jewish-Christian contacts.

Agobard

A fascinating chapter in the history of relations between the church and the Jews begins toward the end of the eighth century. Not only were Jews sometimes treated positively by Christian neighbors, they also began to be granted privileges by the authorities. During the reign of Charles the Great (768–814), who ruled a large part of Europe, the Jews were treated with respect and even held positions of importance at court. This was nothing like a complete liberation, of course, and Charlemagne's legislation still shows a Christian bias. For example, if a Jew brought a charge against a Christian in court, he had to provide between four and nine witnesses, while the Christian only had to bring three. Both Christians and Jews had to obtain the official approval of the church in order to get married.

On the other hand, Jews were not required to swear a Christian oath in court. Instead, a special oath was formulated just for Jews. The Jew was to hold in his hand a copy of the Torah, preferably in Hebrew, and to swear: "So help me God! the same God that gave the Law on Mt. Sinai; may the leprosy of the Syrian Naaman not come upon me, as it did on him, nor the earth swallow me up as it did Dathan and Abiram; in this matter I have done to you nothing that is evil."

The status of Jews continued to improve under Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious (814–840). His wife held Judaism in great respect, and the king had a Jew as his personal physician. Louis granted Jews letters of protection. In one of these he notes that the teaching of Scripture tells us

to "follow divine mercy and make no distinction between believers and non-believers." Louis established the office of *Magister Judaeorum*, the Magistrate of the Jews, to handle cases that arose between Christians and Jews. The underlying motivation for the creation of this office seems to have been to protect the Jews from actions of the church.

While Jews were still forbidden to own Christian slaves, Louis decreed that they could own Muslim or pagan slaves and even convert them to Judaism to make things more convenient for the Jewish owner. Even more significantly, he forbade such slaves to convert to Christianity as a way of getting free from their Jewish masters. Jews were allowed to employ Christians, except for on Sundays or Christian holidays, and they could hold official positions where they would have authority over Christians. In a show of respect for Judaism, Louis did not allow public markets of any kind on the Sabbath. Jews were given charters to act as merchants, called "merchants of the palace," and they were granted autonomy in their activities. In a change of policy from earlier centuries, they were now allowed to build new synagogues.

One of the most outspoken and vehement opponents of these developments was the archbishop of the city of Lyon in southern France, a man named Agobard. In some ways, Agobard was unusual for his time, perhaps even ahead of his time. He wrote a number of treatises attacking popular superstitions, such as the belief in witchcraft, the idea that storms were caused by magic, and the use of the ordeals of trial by fire and trial by water. Like some others of his time, he opposed the worship of images in the church, but he carried this even further and wrote against the adoration of the saints.

In 826 Agobard sent Louis a letter called "The Insolence of the Jews." This writing was primarily a complaint against Eberard, the Magistrate of the Jews, and what he had done against the church, according to Agobard. In this letter he gives us a picture of how simple Christians were relating to their Jewish neighbors. Among other things he says that ignorant Christians claim that the Jews preach better than their own priests. The king, who had appointed the magistrate and probably had given him his instructions, paid no attention to the archbishop's complaints.

Agobard now tried a more direct approach. He tried to baptize a female slave who was owned by a Jew. Had he succeeded, the slave would have been lost to her Jewish master; it was against the law for a Jew to own a Christian slave. When he then tried to explain his action to the emperor, Agobard received a very cold reception. As a result, he wrote a letter to three influential men in the court, trying to enlist their help. Once again Agobard was unsuccessful.

What exactly was Agobard's justification for his actions? In the letter to the three courtiers it is very clearly stated. There are pagan slaves, evidently people captured in war, who are living with Jews but are very attracted to Christianity and want to convert. The law should not be able to prevent them doing so. After all, he says, only God owns their souls, and man should not be able to forbid them from finding salvation. There

should be no difference here between slaves and free men. In fact, the example of the apostles shows that they were ready to baptize slaves without first asking permission from their masters.

Agobard does not suggest that the slaves should be taken away from their Jewish masters without compensation. The going market rates should be paid for them, but, says Agobard, the Jews are demanding exorbitant amounts, knowing that this is an issue in the church.

In another letter, Agobard declares that it is the sacred duty of every priest to work for the salvation of unbelievers. We pray publicly for their salvation, he says, and surely we must do everything in our power to make it possible for them to come to Jesus.

Here, too, Agobard's efforts did not change the king's mind. Several years later, when Louis' sons tried to rebel against him, the archbishop supported them. When the revolt failed, Agobard was deposed and exiled, but later he was reconciled with Louis and returned to his office.

In his fight against the Jews, Agobard was opposed not only by the civil authorities, but even by some of the clergy. Nibrius, the bishop of Narbonne, maintained very friendly relations with Jews in his diocese, even inviting them to dine with him. Agobard wrote to him, trying to convince him to change his ways.

It seems to me to be unworthy of our faith that the sons of light should associate with the children of darkness, and that the church of Christ, which ought to present herself for the kisses of her celestial spouse without blemish and without wrinkle, be disgraced by contact with the defiled and repudiated Synagogue. ... You know that one should not only not make use of those who do not want to accept the apostolic preaching, but should shake off the dust of their dwellings; in the Day of Judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah will be pardoned sooner than they.

Because the Jews boast of being of the race of the Patriarchs, the nation of the righteous, and the children of the Prophets, writes Agobard, ignorant Christians think that the Jews are the only people of God and that the Jewish religion is better than their own. Here we encounter a strange conflict between popular ideas and official doctrine. Because the Old Testament was highly venerated, the average Christian could easily relate to the Jewish people as the people of God. On the other hand, it had long been accepted doctrine in the church that Christianity had inherited the privileged position formerly held by the Jews.

An even stranger chapter in the story began in 839, about a year before the death of Agobard. A certain Bodo, a priest in the court of the emperor and possibly the emperor's own chaplain, became thoroughly disenchanted with disputes over doctrine and with the low moral standards in the court of the pope in Rome. Bodo left the Christian faith, converted to Judaism, and married a Jewish woman. Naturally he could not stay where he was, and he fled to Spain, where he seems to have become

actively engaged in working against his former religion. According to his accusers, he attempted to convert Christians to Islam and Judaism and sold Christian slaves to Muslims.

The successor of Agobard was Amulo. He was very disturbed by the conversion of Bodo, and he continued where the former archbishop had left off. Amulo tried to lessen the privileges and influence of the Jews in the kingdom. In the year 845, at the Council of Meaux, he pushed through a number of canons against the Jews. In fact he and his fellow bishops reinstated many rules against the Jews that had long been ignored. Jews should not build new synagogues or hold public office. They should not marry Christians or even socialize with them. The council also wanted the reactivation of old laws regarding the Jews from the time of Theodosius II and onward. They presented their demands to Charles the Bald, who had been crowned as emperor in the same year Amulo became archbishop.

Charles was at least as sympathetic toward Jews as Louis had been. His personal physician was a Jew, and another Jew was his closest personal confidant. Charles ignored the demands of the bishops and dissolved the council.

Positive Legislation

The Carolingian kings were not the last to pass laws that benefited the Jews in their kingdom. We should point out, however, that some of the positive measures were not as selfless and considerate as they might seem at first. Kings (and often other people in authority, including bishops) were not motivated only by religious considerations. They were first and foremost responsible for keeping law and order. Some laws were simply meant to reduce friction and potential confrontations between citizens.

Teruel, Spain

King *Alfonso II of Aragon* issued a law in the year 1176 that included a number of positive measures regarding Jews. If a Christian and a Jew went to court against each other, the case was to be judged by two citizens, one a Christian and one a Jew. If there was an appeal, it went before four judges, two from each religion. Similarly, witnesses were to be evenly balanced between Jews and Christians.

Letter of Innocent III

In the year 1199 Pope Innocent III issued a constitution for the Jews. It was summarized in a letter from which we quote here.

We decree that no Christian shall use violence to compel the Jews to accept baptism. But if a Jew, of his own accord, because of a change in his faith, shall have taken refuge with Christians, after his wish has been made known, he may be made a Christian without any opposition. For anyone who has not of his own will sought Christian baptism cannot have the true Christian faith. No Christian shall do

the Jews any personal injury, except in executing the judgments of a judge, or deprive them of their possessions, or change the rights and privileges which they have been accustomed to have. During the celebration of their festivals, no one shall disturb them by beating them with clubs or by throwing stones at them. No one shall compel them to render any services except those which they have been accustomed to render. And to prevent the baseness and avarice of wicked men we forbid anyone to deface or damage their cemeteries or to extort money from them by threatening to exhume the bodies of their dead.

Siete Partidas

The so-called "seven part law" was formulated in Castile, Spain, about the year 1265, under King Alfonso X. The laws only went into effect in the year 1348. While they were based on earlier legislation which was mostly negative toward Jews, they show a remarkable tolerance and even a readiness to educate the reader about the Jews. We will quote several passages.

TITLE XXIV: CONCERNING THE JEWS

Jews are a people, who, although they do not believe in the religion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, yet, the great Christian sovereigns have always permitted them to live among them.

LAW I. WHAT THE WORD JEW MEANS, AND WHENCE THIS TERM IS DERIVED

A party who believes in, and adheres to the law of Moses is called a Jew, according to the strict signification of the term, as well as one who is circumcised, and observes the other precepts commanded by his religion. This name is derived from the tribe of Judah which was nobler and more powerful than the others, and, also possessed another advantage, because the king of the Jews had to be selected from that tribe, and its members always received the first wounds in battle. The reason that the church, emperors, kings, and princes permitted the Jews to dwell among them and with Christians, is because they always lived, as it were, in captivity, as it was constantly [a token] in the minds of men that they were descended from those who crucified Our Lord Jesus Christ.

LAW V. Saturday is the day on which Jews perform their devotions, and remain quiet in their lodgings and do not make contracts or transact any business; and for the reason that they are obliged by their religion to keep it, no one should on that day summon them or bring them into court. Wherefore we order that no judge shall employ force or any constraint upon Jews on Saturday, in order to bring them into court on account of their debts; or arrest them; or cause them any other annoyance; for the remaining days of the week are

sufficient for the purpose of employing compulsion against them, and for making demands for things which can be demanded of them according to law. Jews are not bound to obey a summons served upon them on that day; and, moreover, we decree that any decision rendered against them on Saturday shall not be valid; but if a Jew should wound, kill, rob, steal, or commit any other offense like these for which he can be punished in person and property, then the judge can arrest him on Saturday.

LAW VI. No force or compulsion shall be employed in any way against a Jew to induce him to become a Christian; but Christians should convert him to the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ by means of the texts of the Holy Scriptures, and by kind words, for no one can love or appreciate a service which is done him by compulsion. We also decree that if any Jew or Jewess should voluntarily desire to become a Christian, the other Jews shall not interfere with this in any way, and if they stone, wound, or kill any such person, because he wishes to become a Christian, or after he has been baptized, and this can be proved; we order that all the murderers, or the abettors of said murder or attack, shall be burned ... we also order that, after any Jews become Christians, all persons in our dominions shall honor them; and that no one shall dare to reproach them or their descendants, by way of insult, with having been Jews; and that they shall possess all their property, sharing the same with their brothers and inheriting it from their fathers and mothers and other relatives just as if they were Jews; and that they can hold all offices and dignities which other Christians can do.¹⁵

The examples just given were intended to prevent confrontation and violence—and, to some degree, injustice—between the citizens of a given area. There were other positive measures that came from less admirable motives.

Moneylending and Finance

Several places in the Torah (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:36–37; Deut 23:19–20) forbid the taking of interest when a loan is given. While the prohibition is given to Israel, it was understood by church authorities to apply to Christians. Consequently, in many parts of the Christian world Christians were forbidden to lend money at interest. However, an economy will only stay healthy if there is cash available to finance new projects, trade, etc. The Christian empire needed an element of society that would act as its bankers. Banking had been a well-developed institution in the Roman Empire, but it disappeared almost entirely with the fall of the Empire in the fifth century.

15 There were other clauses in the *Siete Partidas* that were not so tolerant.

In the thirteenth century trade began to increase in Europe, and banking began to make a comeback. Before that time, however, Jews often served as bankers for kings and bishops. They were granted official permission (in the form of a charter) to lend money at interest. Then the king would take a large part of the interest from the Jews in the form of a tax. This served the dual purpose of supplying both a cash flow and an attractive source of income to the kingdom. It was a very effective indirect tax, but instead of the government being hated for high taxes, the Jews were hated for charging high interest rates.

Speyer

In the year 1084, the bishop of the city of Speyer on the Rhine River issued a decree that, on the surface, appears to be remarkably tolerant toward the Jews.

When I made the villa of Speyer into a town, I thought I would increase the honor I was bestowing on the place if I brought in the Jews. Therefore I placed them outside the town and some way off from the houses of the rest of the citizens, and, lest they should be too easily disturbed by the insolence of the citizens, I surrounded them with a wall. Now the place of their habitation which I acquired justly ... I transferred to them on condition that they pay annually three and a half pounds of the money of Speyer for the use of the brethren. I have granted also to them within the district where they dwell, and from that district outside the town as far as the harbor, and within the harbor itself, full power to change gold and silver, and to buy and sell what they please. And I have also given them license to do this throughout the state. Besides this I have given them land of the church for a cemetery with rights of inheritance.¹⁶

There are indeed some positive elements in this decree, including protection by the state and the granting of property for a cemetery. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the primary motive for this measure is economic. "Bestowing honor on the place" means making it prosper financially. While there is no mention here of a tax on their earnings, the Jews are required to pay an annual rent for the land the bishop has given them.

The phrase "disturbed by the insolence of the citizens" and the need to build a wall to protect the Jews (at a time before the term "ghetto" had been coined) give some indication that there are tensions between the Christian and Jewish communities. In the year 1090 Emperor Henry IV would grant a similar charter guaranteeing rights and protection to the Jews of Speyer and Worms. Only six years later the Jewish communities in these two cities were main targets of the First Crusade.

16 www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1084landjews.html.

7. The Early Middle Ages

Crusades

The land of Israel and Jerusalem came under Roman rule in 63 BC. When the empire itself became officially Christian under Constantine the Great, the land of Israel was for the first time under Christian control. The Christian emperors continued the ban—in place ever since the end of the Bar Kochba revolt—on Jews entering Jerusalem. Christian sovereignty over Jerusalem and the land continued for almost three hundred years, until Persian troops invaded in 614.

In 629 the Roman emperor Heraclius and his Christian troops recaptured Jerusalem from the Persians. However, Christian rule lasted a mere eight years, until the Muslim victory in 638. No attempt was made by Christians to regain control of the land for over 450 years. When such attempts were finally made, they were called “Crusades,” from the word for “cross.” While it is normal to count eight official crusades, it was the first and second that had the most effect on Jews. The First Crusade marks a major turning point in the relations between Christians and Jews.

The First Crusade

While we speak of this as a turning point, events in social and political history do not crystallize out of nowhere.

On the one hand, the church had long been at war with Islam, especially on the two ends of the Mediterranean. Christian Spain was conquered by Muslim armies in the year 711. Not long afterward Christian armies began to fight back, gradually taking territory. But Muslims remained dominant in most parts of Spain for several hundred years, and as late as the year 1000 Christianity looked to be in danger of losing out altogether. Defending Spain from the Muslims had taken on the status of holy war, and crusades of various sorts had been launched into the Iberian Peninsula. In the year 1065, for example, French Christian troops entered Spain to fight the Muslims. On the way, they killed many Jews. While Pope Alexander II ordered that the killing should stop, his call had little effect.

On the eastern end of the Mediterranean the situation was no better. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher had been destroyed in 1009 by a Muslim

ruler. In the year 1071 the Seljuk Turks occupied Jerusalem and began to make it increasingly difficult for Christian pilgrims to perform their religious duty of pilgrimage to the holy sites in the land of Israel. Reports of these interferences kept coming back to Europe. The Byzantine kingdom had lost much ground. The Turks were expanding their territory, and by 1092 the city of Nicaea (very near to the Christian capital) was in Muslim hands. The Byzantine emperor appealed to the Christians of Europe for help.

In fact the First Crusade almost happened in 1074, when Pope Gregory VII issued this letter:

Gregory, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to all who are willing to defend the Christian faith, greeting and apostolic benediction.

We hereby inform you that the bearer of this letter, on his recent return from across the sea [from Palestine], came to Rome to visit us. He repeated what we had heard from many others, that a pagan race had overcome the Christians and with horrible cruelty had devastated everything almost to the walls of Constantinople, and were now governing the conquered lands with tyrannical violence, and that they had slain many thousands of Christians as if they were but sheep. If we love God and wish to be recognized as Christians, we should be filled with grief at the misfortune of this great empire [the Greek] and the murder of so many Christians. But simply to grieve is not our whole duty. The example of our Redeemer and the bond of fraternal love demand that we should lay down our lives to liberate them. "Because he has laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," [1 John 3:16]. Know, therefore, that we are trusting in the mercy of God and in the power of his might and that we are striving in all possible ways and making preparations to render aid to the Christian empire [the Greek] as quickly as possible. Therefore we beseech you by the faith in which you are united through Christ in the adoption of the sons of God, and by the authority of St. Peter, prince of apostles, we admonish you that you be moved to proper compassion by the wounds and blood of your brethren and the danger of the aforesaid empire and that, for the sake of Christ, you undertake the difficult task of bearing aid to your [Greek] brethren. Send messengers to us at once to inform us of what God may inspire you to do in this matter.

However, Gregory's call met with too many obstacles. Europe itself had been experiencing a time of instability and infighting. Two of the most powerful rulers, Philip II of France and Henry IV of Germany, were in constant conflict with the church, to the point that Henry invaded Rome in 1084, expelled Pope Gregory VII, and appointed the antipope Guibert. Pope Urban II, who was elected in 1088, was unable to take his place in the Vatican until 1094. He achieved this only after a number of military battles between his troops and the troops of Guibert.

Throughout most of the eleventh century, Europe had been torn by many private wars between rulers of both smaller and larger territories. The church had tried with limited success to curb the fighting with a device called the "Truce of God," which forbade fighting on certain days of the week. By the time Urban II entered Rome, there was a clear need for some measure to stop the fighting in Europe and unite the many factions for one common goal.

Viewed on this background, it is not difficult to understand the logic that led to the call for a holy war in the east against the Muslim occupiers of the holy sites. This call came from Urban II at the Council of Clermont-Ferrand in southern France, on November 27, 1095.

The declaration made no mention of Jews, and at first there seemed no reason for the Jewish community to fear the crusade. It was true that the leading figure of the crusade, Godfrey of Bouillon, was rumored to have vowed to kill Jews, but when the Jewish community in Germany appealed to Emperor Henry IV, Godfrey denied that he had any such intention. The Jews of Cologne and Mainz gave him a gift of 1,000 pieces of silver, and Godfrey never bothered them.

In fact, the problems of the European Jewish communities did not really come from the "official" crusaders, who were led by the nobility and supported by the higher clergy. The announcement of the campaign to free the Holy Land from the Muslims had been met with ecstatic enthusiasm by the common people. These needed far less time to get moving than did the knights, and a mob began to move up the Rhine River around Easter of 1096. While their goal was indeed to go to Jerusalem, they had been worked up into a frenzy by popular preachers against all of the "unfaithful." Later this would even mean bloody confrontations with Orthodox Christians in the Byzantine Empire. Before they arrived there, however, they would let out their anger on the "unbelievers" closest to home: the Jews.

Again and again a similar scene was repeated. As the mobs approached, the Jews appealed to a local bishop or noble for protection. The bishops (sometimes for a payment of money) protected the Jews in their own castles or dispersed them among towns where they might be safe. Then the crowds threatened the bishop and his troops. Sometimes the bishop had to flee for his own safety. In city after city, bishops held out for a while before surrendering to the mob and telling the Jews the only way their lives could be saved was to accept baptism.

For the most part, the Jews of the Rhineland refused to apostatize, preferring a martyr's death to becoming Christians. A very few accepted baptism without a fight, but many more were baptized by force against their will. The large majority of Jews, however, died for their faith—some by the sword, some drowned in the river, and some by suicide.

The official crusaders only started out in August 1096, after the slaughter by the rabble was at an end, reaching Jerusalem in the summer of 1099. On July 15 they captured the city and, contrary to the orders of their commanders, began to kill the inhabitants. Mosques and synagogues were

set alight, burning all those who had fled to them for refuge. Survivors were sold into slavery.

The Second Crusade

The next crusade began in a manner similar to the first. The crusader Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem was in danger, and armies would be sent to save them from the Muslims. In March 1146 Pope Eugene III proclaimed another crusade. All those who participated were to have their sins forgiven and their monetary debts cancelled. While the Jews were not mentioned in the proclamation, they would be hurt the most by the cancellation of debts. (Ironically, this may have been a lifesaving provision of the declaration. In the First Crusade many Jews had been targeted by those who owed them large sums of money.) Once again there was a wave of popular emotion, this time fired by a monk named Radulph, who exhorted the people to take vengeance on “those who had crucified Christ” before they set out against the Muslims.

The main preacher of this crusade—asked personally by Pope Eugene to promote it—was Bernard, abbot of the monastery of Clairvaux. Bernard visited and convinced several kings and higher personages to take up the cross against the Muslims. He was strongly opposed, however, to the activities of Radulph. Bernard appealed to several secular leaders and bishops to stop Radulph. In one letter he wrote, “It is an act of Christian piety both ‘to vanquish the proud’ and also ‘to spare the subjected,’ especially those [the Jews] for whom we have a law and a promise, and whose flesh was shared by Christ.”¹⁷

When Bernard’s efforts did not succeed, he went out personally to confront the wayward monk. The abbot’s personal presence and rhetorical skills were extremely influential, and he in fact managed to halt the crowds and send Radulph back to his monastery, where he was punished.

Some damage had already been done, and Jews had been killed. But the numbers were far lower than they had been in the First Crusade, thanks to the intervention of Bernard. Jewish chroniclers of the time praised his actions and noted that he had defended them without even being paid to do so. In his letters and writings of the time he declares that it is permissible to kill Muslims, but to take the life of a Jew would be like attacking Jesus himself.

Bernard is representative of the way some more “enlightened” Christians in his day related to Jews. While he was putting himself in some danger by stopping the riots against them, he was also advocating that interest owed to Jews by the crusaders should be cancelled as a means to help finance the crusade. It is hardly to be expected that Bernard or any other individual would be entirely out of step with the spirit of his times. Here is how he expressed his opposition to violence against the Jews:

17 It does not seem to have been part of Bernard’s theology that violence against Muslims was as evil as violence against Jews.

Your zeal needs the timely restraint of knowledge. The Jews are not to be persecuted, killed, or even put to flight. Ask anyone who knows the Sacred Scriptures what he finds foretold of the Jews in the Psalm. "Not for their destruction do I pray," it says. The Jews are for us the living words of Scripture, for they remind us always of what our Lord suffered. They are dispersed all over the world so that by expiating their crime they may be everywhere the living witnesses of our redemption. Hence the same Psalm adds, "only let your power disperse them." And so it is: dispersed they are. (Chazan, *Church*, 103)

Note the mixture. On the one hand, no violence should be done to Jews. On the other hand, the Jews are said to remind Christians of Jesus' suffering, and their dispersion is punishment for their crime. It is not difficult to imagine that a simple Christian hearing the words of Bernard would be impressed, not by the exhortation to refrain from violence, but by the reminder that the Jews killed Jesus and are being punished by God for doing so.

By the official count, there were eight crusades. In the Third Crusade (1189–1190), the Jews suffered even less than they had in the Second. The main loss of life came in the English city of York, where 150 Jews died in a suicide pact rather than face baptism. Subsequent official crusades did relatively little harm to Jewish communities.

Nevertheless, the crusading spirit from the first crusades spilled over into unofficial campaigns led by mobs that were out of the control of the authorities. The worst of these came in the year 1320, and was known as the Shepherds' Crusade. It moved through the south of France and was aimed almost exclusively at Jews. It is estimated that about 110 Jewish communities were annihilated. Many Christian clergymen who tried to oppose the mob were also killed. The crusade continued into Spain, where it was finally halted when the King of Aragon killed about 2,000 of the crusaders, but not before they had succeeded in killing many Spanish Jews.

In our study of the relations between "the church" and the Jews, we need to put the Crusades into perspective. The Crusades—the official ones—were an activity formally initiated and supported by the leadership of the church at the highest levels. However, never once was it official policy to attack Jews physically or even to baptize them by force. Numerous church proclamations even condemned such attacks on Jews, and as we have seen, some church leaders physically opposed the attacks.

A Jewish Pope?

Between the first and second crusades the church in Rome experienced a schism that is of some interest for our subject. In fact, the Middle Ages saw much instability in the office of bishop of Rome, more commonly known as the pope. On occasion there was such rivalry for the office that

there were two opposing popes at the same time. This has happened approximately thirty times in history, and about one-third of those were in the 12th century alone. Not infrequently the supporters of opposing candidates were divided not by doctrine but by politics. Rich families in Rome sometimes vied with one another to have a man in office who would serve their own interests.

Under Pope Leo IX (1049–1054) the head of a wealthy Jewish family converted to Christianity, evidently of his own free will. The man's name was Baruch (Benedictus in Latin). He was baptized by the pope himself, and he took the name Leo as his Christian name in honor of the pope. Baruch's son was called Pietro, and from his time the family was known as Pierleone. His son, also Pietro, became a priest and rose quickly in the ranks of the church, serving several popes in various important functions. Pope Paschal II made him a cardinal.

While most of what we know about Pietro Pierleone comes from his rivals, there seems little doubt that he was a man of great ambition who wanted for himself the position of supreme authority. When Pope Honorius II died on February 13, 1130, there were two hasty elections in Rome. In the morning a minority of cardinals, supporters of the wealthy Frangipani family, elected Innocent II; later in the day a larger number of cardinals (supporters of the Pierleone family) elected Pietro Pierleone as Pope Anacletus II. Neither election was entirely regular, and the church was bitterly split. For the next eight years Innocent and Anacletus ruled simultaneously, sometimes with both of them even living in Rome.

During these years letters were exchanged and councils held to debate the relative legality of the two rivals. The strongest voice against Anacletus (Pierleone) was that of Bernard of Clairvaux. While his main objections were on the level of canon law, he is also said to have objected to Anacletus' Jewish background. "It constitutes an injury to Christ," he said, "for someone of Jewish lineage to have seized the throne of Peter." This is the same Bernard who, only a few years later, would risk his life to oppose crusader attacks on the Jews of the Rhineland.¹⁸

Anacletus II, the Jewish pope, was never removed from office. He died in 1138, and the church was reunited again for a time. In the official annals of the Roman Catholic Church, Innocent II is listed as the true pope, and Anacletus rejected as "antipope."

Usury

The Pierleone family had made a fortune lending money at interest. By this time in medieval Europe many Jews were engaged in such "banking" activities. As a result, some of the richest families in Europe were Jewish. Ironically, this development came about because of Christian doctrine.

The Torah declares (Deut 23:19–20), "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother, interest on money, interest on victuals, interest on any-

18 For a full discussion of Bernard's view of the Jews, see Cohen, *Living Letters*, 221–245.

thing that is lent for interest. To a foreigner you may lend upon interest, but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest; that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are entering to take possession of it." Both Jewish and Christian interpretations of these verses would lead to the situation where Jews loaned money to Christians.

In Judaism it was actually encouraged to lend money to a fellow Jew if it was not at interest. It was considered a way to help the needy, who were most often those who needed to borrow. Usury, however, was quite another matter, and the Talmud compares lending money to a fellow Jew at interest to murder. Lending money to a non-Jew was permitted, although some authorities opposed even that.

As Christianity gradually became the dominant cultural factor in European society, fewer and fewer occupations were open to Jews. Jews could not be employed by Christians, nor could Christians buy any food items produced by Jews. This would be expanded to include the purchase of clothing. Many professions were controlled by guilds, an institution similar to unions today. The guilds also had religious aspects, and they were restricted to Christians, effectively barring Jews from most professions.

Church doctrine interpreted the verses in Deuteronomy to apply to financial relations between Christians, so that technically there should be no interest charged between Christians. However, an economy cannot function properly without a supply of fluid capital. An obvious solution to the doctrinal and practical problem was to put the money market in the hands of the only significant non-Christian segment of European society, the Jews.

While control of the flow of money carried with it the potential to accumulate wealth, it was also open to serious dangers both from the ruling class and from the common people. In the case of the average Christian, it must be remembered that no one loves the person to whom he owes large sums of money. The Jews already had a negative image among Christians, and being in the position of demanding repayment of loans could only make that image worse. As we saw earlier, people were sometimes ready to take advantage of an anti-Jewish atmosphere to rid themselves of their Jewish creditors.

The rulers usually took a very different attitude to the banking activities of the Jews, but it could be just as unpleasant for the Jewish community. Official documents were published permitting Jews to loan money at interest, and the officials took pains to ensure that this right was undisturbed. The same ruler would then charge the Jewish moneylenders exceptionally high rates of tax. This effectively made the Jew a kind of money sponge for the king. He avoided the displeasure of the church by not dealing in transactions that could be defined as lending money at interest, but he benefited just as much from the money market. And as a bonus, the common people, the ones with the debts, did not direct their anger against the ruler but against the Jew.

This became such a central fixture of European society that rulers treated Jews as valuable property. A transfer of land between two kingdoms might or might not include the Jews who lived on that piece of land. If they were included, the price went up. We frequently find kings speaking of "my Jews." On some occasions a ruler could get himself into such a financial bind that he squeezed almost all the money from "his" Jews. This caused great hardship to the Jewish community, which was affected in its entirety by what happened in the money market.

Ritual Murder and Blood Libel

The beginning of the Crusades in Europe seems to mark the starting point for other serious anti-Semitic phenomena. The earliest is the so-called ritual murder accusation. According to this, on some fixed date Jews kill a non-Jew as part of their religious ritual. It is possible to find accusations of this sort among pagan writers even before the rise of Christianity, and indeed a similar accusation was sometimes made by pagans against Christians.

It is a bit surprising, then, to find that no such accusation appears in Christian writings before the 12th century. The first time was in the year 1144. Shortly before Easter the body of a boy named William was found in a woods near the English city of Norwich. The boy's uncle declared that the Jews had killed him, and a local abbot immediately declared William to be a martyr. Following on this, a man named Theobald, a Jew from Cambridge who had converted to Christianity, issued a report stating that each year at Passover the Jews sacrifice a boy. This year, said Theobald, they had drawn lots to see where the sacrifice would take place, and the lot had indicated Norwich. However, the local authorities did not believe the accusation, and nothing was actually done to the local Jewish community.

Several more such accusations would be made before the end of the century in England, in Bury St. Edmonds (1181), Bristol (1183), and Winchester (1192). In none of these was a trial held. The phenomenon spread fairly quickly to the continent. In 1171 in the French city of Blois, a Jew was accused of killing a Christian child, failed a trial by water ordeal, and forty Jews were burned to death as a result.

It is common to distinguish between two types of accusation against the Jews, the "ritual murder" accusation and the "blood libel." The ritual murder accusation claimed, as we saw in the case of Theobald of Cambridge, that the Jewish religion requires human sacrifice for certain of its rituals. The most common explanation was that blood was used in the making of matzot for Passover. This strange idea probably stems from developments in the doctrine of communion, where the church had declared that the bread and wine were the actual body and blood of Jesus.

The blood libel did not start from the rituals of the Jewish religion. Instead it came out of what was believed about the Jews as people. The crowd in Pilate's courtyard had cried out (Matt 27:25), "His blood be on us

and on our children!" Since that day, so went one explanation, the Jews had suffered from certain sicknesses peculiar to them alone. In order to rid themselves of these diseases (or at least to keep them under control), they needed to have Christian blood. A later version of this would claim that Jews were not actually human, and that to maintain the appearance of humanity they needed regular doses of human (Christian) blood.

During the centuries to follow there were about a hundred and fifty recorded cases, and surely many more that were not recorded or the records of which were not preserved. The pattern became painfully familiar. A body was found, usually of a Christian child, often sometime near Good Friday or Passover. Family members or others blamed a Jew or a group of Jews for killing the child. Sometimes there was just a mob action, and Jews were killed. Usually, however, there was a trial, conducted by people who started from the "common knowledge" that Jews regularly killed Christians. The accused were questioned under torture (which was thought to be the only sure way to get the truth), and they confessed to the crime. They were then killed and, because such crimes were thought to be part of Jewish ritual, many other Jews were also rounded up and put to death.

There were many variations and inconsistencies. On at least one occasion it was discovered (after the massacre of the Jews) that the dead child was actually Jewish. In a number of cases there was just a rumor, with no body and no missing child. Or the missing child turned up somewhere after the Jews had confessed and been punished.

How did the authorities relate to these accusations? On many occasions the Jewish communities appealed to king and pope for protection. King Philip Augustus of France believed the blood accusation. In 1182 he had all the Jews in his realm arrested, freed them for a large ransom, and then expelled them. Some years later he realized that he needed "his" Jews, and so called them back.

Emperor Frederick II of Germany was known for his free thinking and his opposition to the papacy on many matters. When a blood accusation was made against Jews in the city of Fulda in the year 1235 (and thirty-four Jews, men and women, were murdered), he ordered an investigation. He reasoned that either 1) the Jews were guilty and should not be allowed to stay in his territory, or 2) they were innocent and the accusations should cease. But how would it be possible to get to the truth of what Judaism really requires or allows? If you ask Christians, they will repeat the common myths about Jewish ritual murder. If you ask Jews, they will surely not tell you they kill Christians, even if they do. Frederick called together a group of scholars, including a large number of Jews who had converted to Christianity, and assigned them the task of finding the truth. These men concluded that there was no basis in fact to the claim that Jews use Christian blood in their rituals.

Neither the Old nor the New Testament states that the Jews lust for human blood: on the contrary, it is expressly stated in the Bible, in the

laws of Moses, and in the Jewish ordinances designated in Hebrew as the "Talmud," that they should not defile themselves with blood. Those to whom even the tasting of animal blood is prohibited surely can not thirst for that of human beings, (1) because of the horror of the thing; (2) because it is forbidden by nature; (3) because of the human tie that also binds the Jews to Christians; and (4) because they would not willfully imperil their lives and property.

The emperor ordered that all such accusations cease:

For these reasons we have decided, with the general consent of the governing princes, to exonerate the Jews of the district from the grave crime with which they have been charged, and to declare the remainder of the Jews in Germany free from all suspicion.¹⁹

Church leadership in Rome never sanctioned the blood accusation, and many popes condemned it.

Host Desecration

In the year 1215, under Pope Innocent III, the Fourth Lateran Council declared that during the mass the bread and wine miraculously change into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus. This is called the doctrine of transubstantiation. This new doctrine gave rise to a new kind of Christian claim against Jews.

Devout Christians now believed in the actual physical presence of the Messiah in the bread and the wine. They also believed, of course, that the Jews had all persecuted Jesus. It was not a great leap to conclude that Jews would take any opportunity to persecute Jesus again if they could. One thing did require a great leap: it had to be assumed that the Jews also believed that the body of Jesus was actually present in the host (the bread), as the church had recently declared, otherwise there was no sense in persecuting a piece of bread. In fact, the accounts sometimes relate that the Jews were skeptical about the truth of Messiah's body in the host, only convinced after they had performed their indignities and seen resulting miracles.

Here too, as with the blood accusation, the result was usually the death of many Jews at the hands of angry Christian mobs or after an official conviction in court.

The first recorded accusation of host desecration was in the year 1243, in the town of Belitz, near Berlin. All of the Jews of Belitz were burned to death. The last instance was in 1631. In between, thousands of Jews were killed following at least one hundred such accusations. Ironically, it is probable that sometimes there did in fact appear blood-like spots on the consecrated wafers of the communion. Wafers that were not used

19 Hermann L. Strack, "Blood Accusation," in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 261.

in the mass were stored for later use. When the conditions were right (or wrong) in the place of storage, a particular fungus could develop. It formed red spots resembling drops of blood. In many cases, of course, even this mistaken evidence was not necessary for an accusation to be made.

As with the blood accusations and the popular crusades, church officials frequently condemned the lynch actions.

The Badge

Another act of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 was a canon ordering that Jews and Muslims should wear clothing that would distinguish them from Christians.

In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews or Saracens [Muslims] from the Christians, but in certain others such a confusion has grown up that there is no way to tell them apart. Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews or Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intermingling, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress. Particularly, since it may be read in the writings of Moses [Num 15:38–40] that this very law has been enjoined upon them.

Several interesting matters emerge from this edict. It seems, first of all, that there was little or nothing—in dress, speech, or perhaps even in location of the community—in which the Jews differed from their Christian neighbors in some of the provinces. This in itself could speak of fairly positive relations between members of the two religions.

The reason given for the new rule is to prevent relationships developing between men and women of different religions because of “mistaken identity.” We might think that the religious leaders of the Jewish community would actually applaud such a move by the church. In fact the Jewish citizens’ reaction was quite the opposite, as we learn from a letter written four years later by Pope Honorius III to the archbishop of Toledo and the king of Castile.

We have been informed that the Jews who reside in the kingdom of Castile are so seriously [upset over this new requirement], that some of them chose rather to flee to the Muslims than to be burdened with such a sign. Others conspire because of this and make secret agreements. As a result, the king, whose income in large measure derives from these very Jews, can hardly raise his expenses, and serious misfortune may befall the kingdom. (Chazan, *Church*, 179f)

Pope Honorius agreed to set aside the rule for a time in the kingdom of Castile. Indeed, the edict was practically ignored in Spain and Southern France for many decades. It is a curious thing that the Jews of Castile should decide to flee to Muslim territory because of this requirement, because as early as the first generation of Islam it had been required that Christians and Jews wear a distinctive mark on their clothing. However, it seems this was not always enforced.

But why did the Jewish community react so negatively? The edict itself refers to Numbers 15, where Jews are required by God to wear tassels on their clothing, something which would have distinguished them clearly from their neighbors. If the edict is accurate and “there is no way to tell them apart,” then perhaps Jews were not wearing the tassels, or at least not where they could be seen. Halachah evidently did not require that the tallit or its tassels be visible.

It is clear that the Jews of Castile considered the edict to be insulting. Was it the intention of the Council to legislate an insult against the Jews? While we cannot speak for sure of the intentions of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, we can be quite sure that later legislators, who often repeated and refined the ruling, did intend to insult the Jews. In fact, at a later date the list of those required to wear identifying marks was expanded to include heretics, lepers, and prostitutes.

The Council had not specified what form the mark should take, and in different countries it varied widely. In most places it was a kind of small patch sewn onto the front of the outer garment; in England the patch was in the form of the tablets of the Torah, but in most places it was simply round. In one place it was a strip of yellow sewn around the bottom edge of the garment, and in a number of countries it was a special hat.

8. Inquisition and Expulsions

Talmud Burning

Religions usually have their holy Scriptures. Judaism and Christianity, of course, are no exception. While the circumstances in which Christianity arose caused the two religions to share part of their holy Scriptures, this is unusual. Most religions have very little tolerance for the Scriptures of other religions.

After the initial appearance of Christianity, both religions developed their own additions to the Torah, Prophets, and Writings accepted by both. The church had its collection of writings which would later be known as the New Testament, and in the middle of the third century Rabbinic Judaism started writing down oral traditions in the collection known as the Mishnah.

The burning of religious books has a long history. The writings of Confucius were burned in China in 213 BC. King Antiochus IV of Syria burned Jewish Scriptures in the year 167 BC, in events that gave birth to the festival of Hanukkah (1 Macc 1:56). Jewish sources indicate that as early as the first decades of the second century AD Jewish rabbis may have burned Christian Scriptures (Tos. Shabb. 13,5).

In Acts 19, books of a semi-religious nature were burned by some people following their coming to faith in Jesus. Indeed, throughout the history of the church there have been many instances of book burning. The writings of the Arians were burned after the Council of Nicaea in 325. In 392 a whole library of pagan books was put to the torch in Alexandria, and about forty years later all the works of the heretic Nestorius were burned. Even Christian Scriptures were sometimes burned by Christians. In the 14th century John Wycliffe's Bible translation was burned, and it is said that pages from his translation were used to start the fire that burned his disciple John Hus at the stake.

Toward the end of the twelfth century a great controversy erupted within Judaism over the writings of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, or Maimonides. The battle was especially heated in southern France, and rabbis were excommunicating each other. In the year 1232 Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier turned to members of the Christian Inquisition for help. He told them Maimonides' writings were dangerous and asked that they

ban them. He even asked that some backers of Maimonides be arrested. The following year, in Paris, the Inquisition conducted a public burning of works by Maimonides.

This had an unexpected and undesired effect. Jewish sources tell us that only one month after the burning of Maimonides' works, the Inquisition burned some 12,000 volumes of the Talmud and similar writings. Certain converted Jews now began to denounce the Talmud to the Inquisition, saying that it insulted Christianity. In 1239 Pope Gregory IX ordered that all copies of the Talmud be confiscated and examined. The Jews were forced to surrender their books. There was some delay in the process, but in the year 1244, with the encouragement of the new pope, Innocent IV, some twenty wagonloads of talmudic writings were publicly burned.

During the following centuries this was repeated frequently in an almost set pattern: Charges were brought against the Talmud by a converted Jew; the pope issued a decree for its confiscation; the decree was carried out by the Inquisition; the Jewish community disputed the charges, including a defense of the work by the rabbis; finally, there was a condemnation and public destruction of the Talmud by burning. Very often other books, including even prayer books, were confiscated along with the Talmud.

One case in the early sixteenth century in Germany is particularly interesting, because the Talmud was strongly defended by a Christian scholar, Johannes Reuchlin. It began when two Dominican monks who were Jewish converts, Victor of Carben and Johann Pfefferkorn, brought the usual charges against the Talmud. In 1509 the king authorized the confiscation of Hebrew books throughout Germany, and the destruction of any that contained anything contrary to the teachings of the Bible or Christianity. There was some debate among the scholars, with Reuchlin and a few others defending the Talmud. The defense was unsuccessful, and Reuchlin was charged with heresy.

Conversion of Spanish Jews

In chapter five we saw that many forced conversions took place in Spain before the Muslim invasion, and in Christian areas afterward. This was significant for several reasons. For one thing, it meant Christian Spain had a tradition of forcing Jews to convert, even though this was against official church policy. Some would even have considered this tradition to be a "successful" one, because Jews had converted, and after a generation or two most seemed to have settled in as normal church members. Secondly, there had been created in Spain a special class of people, a kind of sub-culture. These were people of Jewish background (known as *Marranos*, *conversos*, or new Christians) who were now in the church.

Actually, it would be more accurate to speak of two new classes of people. In one group were those Jewish converts who had accepted the fact that they were now Christians, even if they had not wanted to be in the first place. These gradually adjusted their lifestyle to be good Christians,

and in some cases they rose to high positions in society and in the church itself. Among these were priests and even bishops. Many of these not only made no ongoing effort to maintain Jewish customs, they even adopted standard Christian anti-Jewish doctrines.

The second group comprised those converted Jews who never accepted the fact that they should now be Christians. They did, indeed, live outwardly as Christians, baptizing their children, attending church, giving tithes—in short, doing all that was required of them by the church. But inside they were still Jews; where they could, they continued certain Jewish practices and passed them on to their children. As we shall see later, maintaining these customs was to bring great sorrow on the community of converted Jews.

At the same time, there was still a sizeable non-Christian Jewish community scattered throughout the major cities of Spain. While longstanding and repeated legislation prevented Jews from engaging in many of the normal professions, they were used by the kings of the various parts of the Iberian Peninsula to collect taxes and to guarantee capital flow by means of moneylending. Many people, at all levels of Spanish society (sometimes even the king himself), owed money to Jews. We saw in the previous chapter how the kings took advantage of Jewish moneylending to keep their own treasuries stocked.

Another observation is in order here. Moneylending and usury had obvious material advantages for the moneylender. At times some Jews were extremely wealthy, and this wealth tended to benefit the entire community. Jews are human beings and subject to all of the temptations that the biblical prophets so often speak against. There were those who flaunted their wealth before their poorer (Christian) neighbors and used their money to gain privileges and influence.

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, these and other factors created the potential for a serious outburst of social anger and religious zeal. The overall picture had only been made worse by the fact that an unpopular king, known as Pedro the Cruel (1350–1369), was extremely favorable to the Jews. The catalyst for the explosion came in the form of a man of the church, an archdeacon from the southern city of Ecija named Ferrand Martínez.

In the year 1378 Martínez began to preach fiery sermons, inciting the people against the Jews. He advocated expelling them and destroying their synagogues. Martínez was rebuked and ordered to stop by one king after another, and even by his church superiors, but he persisted. The Jewish community of Seville, where he lived, took him before the highest court of the kingdom, which ordered him to cease his incitement. Martínez refused. His archbishop forbade him to perform any church functions and threatened him with excommunication. Still he refused.

Surely this would mean the end of his anti-Jewish activities. Ironically, within a matter of weeks both the archbishop and the king died. The new king was a child, and his mother was interim ruler. And who was the confessor priest of this queen? Ferrand Martínez. The man had a high reputa-

tion among the common people for exceptional piety, and they treated him as a saint. In December 1390 he was elected to the powerful position of vicar-general, and he immediately issued orders (on pain of excommunication) that all synagogues in his diocese be destroyed and that Jewish holy objects like Torah scrolls and menorahs be sent to him.

The common people gladly complied with these orders. The Jewish community appealed to the king, who ordered that the Jews be compensated and their property and synagogues returned to them. Martínez countered that he had more authority than the king, that the secular ruler should be subject to the church. Riots broke out in March 1391 and spread rapidly. As both secular and church authorities tried unsuccessfully to stop the violence, large numbers of Jews were killed throughout the kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Majorca.

The mobs (who often referred to themselves as “the little people”) seem to have been motivated to a large extent by religious considerations. Their demand was simple: convert or die. Where Jews converted—sometimes almost entire communities—the riots stopped. Many died, but many more converted. One of the leading rabbis of that generation, R. Hasdai Crescas, says:

the Lord bent his bow like an enemy against the community of Seville ... they set fire to its gates and killed many of its people; but most changed their religion, and some of the women and children were sold to the Muslims ... and many died to sanctify his name, and many violated the holy covenant.

The Inquisition

As we have seen, the burning of Jewish writings actually began when Jews invited the intervention of Christians into an internal Jewish affair. This is the first time in Jewish history that we find the activity of the institution called the Inquisition.

It is not a simple matter to trace the origins of the Inquisition. The church saw itself as the possessor and protector of divine truth, and from as early as the late fourth century some who were considered heretics had been put to death in Spain. However, it would be over eight hundred years before the establishment of the formal Inquisition to investigate the heretics called Albigensians in southern France. It was only a couple of years after this that Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham invited the inquisitors to help in his fight against the writings of Maimonides.

It is important to remember throughout our discussion that the Inquisition was an internal church organ. It was responsible to protect the church from enemies and traitors within, not enemies outside the church. (The case of the talmudic writings was actually very much an exception.)

Church thinkers had asked just how serious it is when a Christian turns his back on the true faith for something else. They took their answer from a parallel in the secular world: If a man committed treason against his

country, he would be put to death. Heresy, they reasoned, was treason against God. How could the penalty be any less? And it was even possible to quote words of Jesus to justify the supreme punishment: "If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). Augustine had been the first to apply the verse "compel people to come in" (Luke 14:23) to justify the use of force to bring people into the fellowship of the faithful, and this was applied by the inquisitors to the operation of forcing backsliders back into the fold. But where they refused and remained in their heresy, the penalty might be death.

The Inquisition investigated and executed a relatively small number of converted Jews in the early decades of its existence, primarily in southern France. However, the really serious problems were to begin in Spain in the second half of the fifteenth century. As we saw in the case of the persecutions of the previous century, it was one persistent man with the gift of eloquence who began to stir things up. The man was Alfonso de Espina, a Franciscan monk who served as rector of the University of Salamanca and confessor of King Henry IV of Castile. Espina was convinced that Spain was in danger from Jews and *conversos*. Around 1460 he wrote "Fortress of the Faith" against Jews, Muslims, and heretics, including *conversos*. He spoke of "public Jews" (those who were unconverted) and "secret Jews" (the *conversos*). He attacked both groups bitterly and called for the expulsion of the former and an inquisition to identify the latter: "I believe," said he, "that if a real Inquisition were introduced among us, countless numbers of them would be condemned to the stake; for countless numbers combine the adherence to Jewish customs with the observance of the Christian religion."

The efforts of Espina and others were effective, and in 1478 Pope Sixtus IV authorized the king and queen of Castile and Leon, Ferdinand and Isabella, to set up the Inquisition in Spain. It actually went into effect in 1480.

How the Inquisition Operated

It was the task of the Inquisition to keep the faith of the church pure. Its first goal was to identify people with wrong ideas ("heretics") and turn them back to the right way. To this end, the first step in the operation of the Inquisition in any location was to issue a call for people to give themselves up and repent of their heresy. They were given thirty or forty days to do so, and if they came forward within this "period of grace" they were promised forgiveness and could keep their lives and property.

Many did present themselves voluntarily. However, what they had not been told was that they would not receive the promised forgiveness and protection until they had supplied a list of other *conversos* who were secretly keeping Jewish customs. Those who were betrayed in this way would not enjoy the same "leniency." They were ordered to report within three days, and if they did not do so, they were dragged from their

homes to the court of the Inquisition. They were not allowed to know who their accusers were.

The inquisitors then issued a checklist for how to recognize a secret Jew, and this list was posted in public so that anyone could report someone they suspected.

Signs of Judaism

If they celebrate the Sabbath (wear a clean shirt or better garments, spread a clean tablecloth, light no fire, eat the food which has been cooked overnight in the oven, or perform no work on that day); if they eat meat during Lent; if they take neither meat nor drink on the Day of Atonement, go barefoot, or ask forgiveness of another on that day; if they celebrate the Passover with unleavened bread, or eat bitter herbs; if on the Feast of Tabernacles they use green branches or send fruit as gifts to friends; if they marry according to Jewish customs or take Jewish names; if they circumcise their boys or observe the "hadas" [a Babylonian superstition], that is, celebrate the seventh night after the birth of a child by filling a vessel with water, throwing in gold, silver, pearls, and grain, and then bathing the child while certain prayers are recited; if they throw a piece of dough in the stove before baking; if they wash their hands before praying, bless a cup of wine before meals and pass it round among the people at table; if they pronounce blessings while slaughtering poultry, cover the blood with earth, separate the veins from meat, soak the flesh in water before cooking, and cleanse it from blood; if they eat no pork, hare, rabbits, or eels; if, soon after baptizing a child, they wash with water the spot touched by the oil; if they give Old Testament names to their children, or bless the children by the laying on of hands; if the women do not attend church within forty days after giving birth; if the dying turn toward the wall; if they wash a corpse with warm water; if they recite the Psalms without adding at the end: "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," etc.²⁰

Some were condemned for possessing Hebrew books, and at least one woman was prosecuted because she was in the habit of eating the traditional Jewish dish chamin (tscholent) on the Shabbat.

Being accused was essentially the same as being condemned. A person who was suspected of being a secret Jew had few options. Many simply fled. This was considered an admission of guilt. Their property was confiscated, and they were burned "in effigy," which means symbolically. The family of such a person was left without any property.

Most did actually turn themselves in, confessing their "heresy" in writ-

20 Meyer Kayserling, "Inquisition," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, 589.

ing in great detail. They were allowed to keep their property, but they had to make a public recantation and for a period of time wear a special yellow garment with crosses on it anytime they left the house. Those who turned themselves in only after the period of grace had their property confiscated and could be imprisoned for life.

If a person admitted his apostasy and refused to repent, he was sentenced to death by being burned alive. If he denied that he was guilty, he was tortured. If he admitted under torture that he was guilty and repented, then he was condemned to death, but he was strangled before he was burned. If, after admitting his guilt under torture, he then claimed that he had not told the truth under torture, he was tortured again.

A large number of burnings was actually "in effigy." It is extremely difficult to estimate the total number of those who were killed, and the numbers vary widely according to who is doing the calculating. Most of the deaths happened within the first twenty years of the Inquisition's operation and must have numbered in the thousands. After that period the numbers dropped dramatically.

Not only people were burned. Hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Hebrew Bibles were also burned at the stake. In one instance in the year 1490, the best-known of the inquisitors, Tomas Torquemada, burned six thousand copies of the Hebrew Bible in the city of Salamanca.

The Expulsion from Spain

Torquemada recognized that many of the *conversos* were maintaining close contacts with the Jewish communities where they lived. As the Inquisition began, Jews, who had often been contemptuous of the *conversos*, encouraged their converted brethren to redeem themselves by being faithful to their ancestral religion. Torquemada was motivated by the desire to turn these same people from their error. He began to press for authority to investigate Jews (as distinct from *conversos*), but his demands were refused. He then proceeded to the next logical step: If Jews were the source of the problem but he was not allowed to prosecute them, then they should not be allowed to remain in Spain.

At first Torquemada was unsuccessful even in this attempt. The rulers, Ferdinand and Isabella, did not want to give up such valuable property as their Jews. Pope Innocent VIII, who did not have such economic considerations, also was not prepared to support Torquemada's request. However, the Chief Inquisitor was helped by events beyond his control. In the year 1490 one *converso* accused some other *conversos* of plotting the downfall of Christianity, of stealing a consecrated Host, and of crucifying a Christian boy. The accused were tried and burned. Torquemada took advantage of public outrage to press his case.

On January 2, 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella entered Granada, thus completing the reconquest of all of Spain from the Muslims. This was the final step in removing any need for keeping the Jews around. On March 31 the monarchs signed the order expelling all Jews from Spain; it went into

effect a month later. The last Jew left Spain on July 31, 1492; the Hebrew date was the 7th of Av.

Even this final expulsion seems to have been an attempt to get Jews to convert to Christianity. Together with the edict of expulsion, laws were enacted to make things easier for converts. They were guaranteed aid and protection from the Inquisition for a period of time while they adjusted to their new religion. All this was accompanied by an intense “evangelistic” campaign by the clergy. Some were indeed baptized, until one of the prominent rabbis began to preach strongly against conversion.

The French border was closed to Jews unless they had converted. Portugal was open, but only for a short time; after that time they had to convert or leave Portugal.

Expulsions from Other Countries

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain was on a larger scale than any other expulsion experienced by the Jewish people since the Babylonian exile. Estimates of the number of those expelled vary widely, ranging between 50,000 and 300,000. Unlike other expulsions, it was done as a single operation, not in stages, and it was a complete expulsion.

Scholars are generally agreed that the fundamental motive for the expulsion was religious. In this too the expulsion from Spain was essentially different from many other instances where Jews were exiled from kingdoms and cities. We will look at three examples.

France

The Jews were expelled from France several times. The earliest occasion came in 1180, at the hands of King Philip Augustus. The young king was pressed politically and needed finances. He simply imprisoned all the Jews and confiscated their property. Two years later, in 1182, he cancelled all debts owed to them, except for twenty percent—which he kept for himself. Then he ordered them to leave his kingdom, which was relatively small at that time. In 1198 he allowed them back, gave them permission to loan money, and taxed them heavily on their profits.

In 1306 King Philip the Fair kicked all the Jews out of his realm, again for non-religious reasons. Realizing that he needed them as a source of finance, he invited them back nine years later—but only for a limited period of twelve years—so that he could benefit from their taxes. One source tells us that he let them back in as a result of demands by the people, who felt that the Christian moneylenders were much harder on their debtors than the Jewish moneylenders were. The Jews were expelled from France again in 1394, this time for over two hundred years.

England

In England, as in most of the rest of Europe, Jews engaged in moneylending, one of the only professions left open to them. There, as elsewhere, their profits were heavily taxed for the benefit of the king. In 1254 and

1255 the Jews of England actually appealed to the government to be allowed to leave the kingdom before everything was taken from them in taxation. Their request was refused. Twenty years later, newly-crowned King Edward I declared a "Statute on Judaism." Following a church council decision the year before, in which usury was strongly forbidden, the statute outlawed moneylending by Jews. This effectively left Jews with no way to earn a living. They tried to find ways around the law, but this only resulted in the temporary imprisonment of all English Jews in 1278. Four years later the Archbishop of Canterbury closed all of the synagogues in his diocese.

Toward the end of 1286 Pope Honorius IV wrote to the archbishops of York and Canterbury. He was concerned that there was too close a relationship between Christians and Jews in England, a relationship that was hurting the church there. The next year the Synod of Exeter enacted a number of canons forbidding Jews and Christians to eat together, and Jews to hold public office, have Christian servants, build new synagogues, enter churches, and other things.

King Edward I was now left with little choice. If Jews were not to have any direct dealings with their fellow citizens, the only realistic alternative was for them to leave the country. All Jews were forced to leave England by the end of October 1290. While many Spanish *conversos* may have appeared in England after the expulsion from Spain, Jews were not officially readmitted into the country until 1655.

Portugal

When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, the majority of them went next door to Portugal, where they were at first received fairly well by King Manuel. However, in 1496 Manuel began negotiations with Ferdinand and Isabella to marry their daughter, also called Isabella. These, of course, were the monarchs who had expelled the Jews from Spain. They insisted that they would agree to the marriage only if Manuel expelled his Jews. When the young Isabella declared that she would not live in a country where there were Jews, Manuel agreed to expel them. It happened in 1497; Jews did not return to Portugal for almost three hundred years.

We can see that the expulsions from the countries along the Atlantic coast of Europe were caused by a mixture of religious and other factors. Often, as in the state of Israel today, it is difficult to draw a clear line between politics and religion. Christian rulers were increasingly under the influence—or even the authority—of the church in their decisions and legislation.

9. Evangelism or Persecution?

Introduction

One theme that returns repeatedly in this study, especially in the Middle Ages, is the efforts of the church to evangelize the Jews. The methods look strange to us today, even highly unacceptable, but there can be little doubt that the church never gave up in its efforts to “save some of them.” In this chapter we will discuss some of those methods in depth. As we do so, it will be important for us to try to understand not only what the Christians did to the Jews but also, from their point of view, why they did these things. As we do so, we should be ready to question our own methods of evangelism (or lack thereof).

Forced Sermons

One method of evangelism attempted by the church was the mandatory sermon. The phenomenon seems to have made its appearance as early as the 9th century, and grew more widespread in the 13th century.

The idea was no doubt based on a belief, first of all, in the power of the word of God spoken by his ministers, and secondly in the supreme logic of Christian doctrine. If Jews could only be made to listen to the gospel, surely they would believe. If they could be shown the error of Jewish doctrine, many of them would come to faith in Jesus.

The timing is significant. The early 13th century saw the rise of the so-called Preaching Orders of monks, primarily the Dominicans and the Franciscans. These orders represented a new trend in the monastic movement. Rather than going out to the desert or shutting themselves off from society in a walled monastery, the new orders lived very much in society. In fact, they did not have monasteries as such but wandered through the countryside, preaching the gospel and living on charity.

Francis of Assisi expressed the desire that the men and women of his order should not only “devote themselves to their own personal sanctification, but also to make their apostolate fruitful of salvation to the people in the world.” Note the last phrase: this was a missionary movement. Francis himself even made evangelistic trips into Spain and to Egypt, where he wanted to preach to Muslims and did preach even to the sultan himself.

The order of Dominican monks was officially known as the "Order of Preachers." Their constitution said, "Our order was instituted principally for preaching and for the salvation of souls." Among other methods to attain this goal they established academies for learning other languages—specifically Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek—for the purpose of sharing the gospel with non-Christians.

It is important to understand this background motivation as we note what methods were adopted to get Jews to hear the gospel.

In the year 1278, Pope Nicholas III issued a bull proclaiming the policy of required periodic sermons to the Jewish communities. The following year he officially recognized the central role to be played in this task by the preaching monks. The basic idea was that, several times a year, a Christian minister would come to the synagogue and preach the gospel to the Jews there. Attendance was required. At the door a Christian official checked that ears were not plugged with cotton, and there was someone assigned to move through the crowd to make sure no one fell asleep. It was often a requirement that at least one Jew had to accept the Christian faith.

In 1280, with the decree only a few months old, a rabbi by the name of Abraham Abulafia entered the picture. Abulafia was a mystic and wrote several books on Kabbalah. He said he was directed by an inner voice to go to Rome and convert the pope to Judaism. However, when he arrived in Rome, Nicholas was out of town in a place called Suriano. Officials in Rome informed the pope of Abulafia's visit and his declared intention. Nicholas ordered that the man be arrested and burned at the stake as soon as he arrived. Abulafia was not in the least deterred, and proceeded to Suriano. As he entered the gate of the city he was informed that the pope had died the night before of a stroke. He returned to Rome, where he was arrested but later released. He next appeared in Sicily, proclaiming himself to be a prophet and the Messiah, but he was condemned both by rabbis and by the common people.

The action of Abraham Abulafia was admittedly extreme and unbalanced. Others took more realistic approaches, countering the Christian sermon with their own sermons in the synagogue, sometimes preparing the congregants for what was to come, sometimes contradicting the Christian message after it was preached. Part of one such follow-up defense has come down to us, based on a verse from the Song of Songs.

If we remember that it was never official church policy to convert Jews by force, we must ask ourselves how such legislation could be initiated and justified by the bishop of Rome. Here we may quote the explanation of one Catholic scholar, Edward Synan:

Although no pope of any period has thought it permissible to force a Jew to accept baptism, medieval popes did not include in their conception of force the most extreme moral and psychological pressures, nor did they exclude the use of naked force to compel the attendance of Jews at sermons designed to convert them, in fulfillment of the provisions of *Vinea Soreth sicut* [Nicholas' proclama-

tion]. It must be concluded that, for medieval men, such sermons did not count as assaults on freedom. ... (Synan, *Popes*, 120)

Synan quotes another commentator: "To compel belief, and to compel the hearing of the Word of God, are totally different ... the second is persuasion, rather than constraint."

We would probably not agree with this last quibble, but Synan is correct when he says that we must try to understand medieval men on their own terms. Why did they try so hard to bring Jews into the church? If they really hated Jews, then they would want to keep them out. And yet there were many things written by Christian writers against Jews that can only be described as hatred. Is that inconsistent? Did they believe that a Jew who accepted the gospel and was baptized was no longer someone to be hated, but even to be desired as a brother in the church?

To complete this section we will quote from a decree issued in 1415 by Pope Benedict XIII. This man, whose name was Pedro de Luna, had accompanied Vincente Ferrer in 1390 on his preaching campaign against Jews in Spain. It was he who later ordered the disputation at Tortosa, which we will discuss below. Benedict was actually never properly the pope; because of internal fighting in the church, he is considered a false pope or antipope. However, things were not so clear at the time, and much of the church related to his decrees as authoritative.

In all cities, towns, and villages, where there dwell the number of Jews the diocesan may deem sufficient, three public sermons are to be preached annually: one on the second Sunday in Advent; one on the festival of the Resurrection; and the other on the Sunday when the Gospel, "And Jesus approached Jerusalem," is chanted. All Jews above twelve years of age shall be compelled to attend to hear these sermons. The subjects are to be: the first, to show them that the true Messiah has already come, quoting the passages of the Holy Scripture and the Talmud that were argued in the disputation of Jerome of Santa Fe; the second, to make them see that the heresies, vanities, and errors of the Talmud prevent their knowing the truth; and the third, explaining to them the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and the perpetuity of their captivity, as our Lord Jesus Christ and the other prophets had prophesied. And at the end of these sermons this bull is to be read, that the Jews may not be ignorant of any of its decrees.

We should note that four years later, in 1419, the man who would be recognized as the valid pope, Martin IV, issued the following decree, to some extent negating the decree of Benedict:

Whereas the Jews are made in the image of God, and a remnant of them will one day be saved, and whereas they have sought our protection: following in the footsteps of our predecessors we com-

mand that they not be molested in their synagogues; that their laws, rights and customs be not assailed; that they be not baptized by force, constrained to observe Christian festivals, nor to wear new badges, and that they be not hindered in their business relations with Christians.

Disputations

Confrontation and debate had, from the very beginning, characterized the relationship between believers in Jesus—indeed between Jesus himself—and those who did not believe in him. Paul engaged in a public debate lasting over two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10).

In the second century we begin to find recorded accounts of public discussions between adherents of the new faith and various Jewish figures. The best known (and best preserved) of these, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, was written in the middle of the century by Justin Martyr. We also know that even from this early time, believers began to write instructions on how to defend the faith. In one interesting piece from a commentary on the book of Isaiah, written by the Jewish Christian Nazarenes, we find this formula: “when the Scribes and Pharisees tell you to listen to them ... you must answer like this.” In fact, the genre of dialogues probably came into being not just to record a discussion that happened but also to provide help to those who might find themselves in such a discussion. This suggests that these debates were rather frequent occurrences, especially up until the fifth century.

While we have quite a few indications that there was a good deal of contact between Christians and Jews through the first millennium, not many accounts of public debates between the two religions have come down to us from that period. In the year 1010 Bishop Alduin, of the French city of Limoge, ordered some Christian scholars to have discussions with the Jews of his city in an attempt to persuade them to accept baptism. The debate lasted a month, at the end of which a handful of Jews converted, most fled, and some killed themselves or were killed.

The early debates were for the most part informal. Beginning in the 13th century there were significant, organized disputations. These were usually initiated by a Jewish convert to Christianity who petitioned either a secular or a religious authority to order such a confrontation. Here we will look at the details of just three of these events.

Paris, 1240 In the 1220s a Jew from Paris, Nicholas Donin, identified himself with the doctrines of the Karaites, who rejected the Talmud and the oral traditions. Donin was outspoken enough that he was excommunicated by the Jewish authorities. After about ten years Donin decided to turn to the Christians. Around the year 1235 he became a Franciscan monk, and his first act was to instigate a persecution against French Jews in which an estimated three thousand were killed. In 1238 he went to Rome and made serious accusations to Pope Gregory IX against the

Talmud. Gregory was easily convinced, and sent a letter to the rulers of several countries urging them to take action. Here is part of that letter:

If what is said about the Jews of France and of the other lands is true, no punishment would be sufficiently worthy of their crime. For they, so we have heard, are not content with the Old Law which God gave to Moses in writing: they even ignore it completely, and affirm that God gave another Law which is called "Talmud," that is "Teaching," handed down to Moses orally. Falsely they allege that it was implanted within their minds and, unwritten, was there preserved until certain men came, whom they call "Sages" and "Scribes," who, fearing that this Law may be lost from the minds of men through forgetfulness, reduced it to writing, and the volume of this by far exceeds the text of the Bible. In this is contained matter so abusive and so unspeakable that it arouses shame in those who mention it and horror in those who hear it.

Wherefore, since this is said to be the most important reason why the Jews remain obstinate in their unbelief, we earnestly urge and warn your Royal Serenity [the king] that on the first Saturday of the Lent to come, in the morning, while the Jews are gathered in the synagogues, you, by our authority, shall seize all the books belonging to the Jews of your Kingdom, those subject to your authority as well as those subject to the authority of your vassals, the nobles of the said Kingdom; and you shall have these books held in custody of our dear sons, the Dominican and Franciscan Friars. (Chazan, *Church*, 275)

This letter to a great extent reflects the wording of the petition which Donin had submitted to the pope. A couple of phrases deserve our attention. The grounds for seizing the books are that they are "the most important reason why the Jews remain obstinate in their unbelief." Here again, as so often before and after, there is an evangelistic motive behind the anti-Semitic act: if the Talmud is hindering Jews from believing in Jesus, then get rid of the Talmud.

The second point is subtle but very important. One has the impression that all this is quite new to the bishop of Rome. "For they, so we have heard, are not content with the Old Law which God gave to Moses in writing." They have developed something new, something that has replaced the Old Testament in importance. But this is over seven hundred years after the publication of the Talmud! Indeed, even Jesus himself had spoken about the conflict that sometimes arose between written Scripture and "traditions of men." And yet official Christendom seems not to know about what has developed in Judaism over the centuries. For them the Jew is still the Jew of the Old Testament, Judaism a religion frozen in time. In fact, according to church doctrine, as expounded hundreds of years earlier by Augustine, the main justification for the continued existence of the Jews is that they preserve the Scriptures. We might almost think that, if a Talmud-hating Jew with Karaite leanings had not

mentioned it, the church could have gone on for much longer unaware of the Oral Law. This "newly-discovered" Oral Law was to be the point at issue in Paris.

The only ruler to take action on the pope's letter was Louis IX, king of France. This man, who was known for his piety and was declared a saint only seven years after his death, had no love for Jews. He was once heard to say that the only real way to debate with a Jew was to stick a sword in his stomach. Nevertheless, he did the pope's bidding, ordered the confiscation of the rabbinic books, and set up the disputation in Paris in June 1240. The debate was actually like a trial, where the Talmud was the accused.

Several prominent rabbis defended the Talmud against Donin. When it was suggested that the Talmud should simply be removed, one of the rabbis shocked his hearers by declaring that "the Talmud is Judaism." Jews, he said, would rather die than lose the Oral Law. This was confusing to the learned Christian listeners. Jews were supposed to be the people of the Book. What had happened while our backs were turned? When had they abandoned the Old Testament?

The outcome was a foregone conclusion. Donin quoted Talmud passages which he claimed were blasphemous, others that were anti-Christian, still others that were foolish or obscene. The books were condemned and a couple of years later a large number (but not all) were burned. Prominent Jewish figures appealed to the pope, by this time Innocent IV, declaring that the Talmud was essential to their faith. The pope, who had earlier encouraged Louis IX to redouble his efforts against the Talmud, in 1247 ordered that the burning of the Talmud cease. Copies were to be returned to the Jewish communities, but only after all objectionable references to Jesus or Christians had been removed.

Barcelona, 1263 The next disputation was in sharp contrast to the first. The Jewish convert in this case was a man who, unlike Donin, was well trained in the rabbinic writings. His baptismal name was Pablo Christiani, and he had become a Dominican friar.

The head of the Dominican order in Christiani's area was a man named Raymond Peñaforte, also later declared a saint. At Christiani's request, he petitioned King James I of Aragon to set up a disputation between Christiani and Rabbi Moses ben Nachman ("Ramban"). The two men had already had a number of private conversations, and Christiani now felt that he could succeed in a public debate.

The disputation began on July 20, 1263, in the presence of King James himself and a number of high church officials. This was not like Paris. Not only was Christiani a more serious opponent than Donin, but also James I of Aragon was much more positive toward Jews than Louis IX of France had been. While the event was very serious, there was less of a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish defendant in this debate. Ramban received a promise from the king that he could speak freely without fear of punishment.

According to the ground rules agreed on by both sides at the outset, four subjects were to be discussed. Here they are, as listed in the brief Christian record of the disputation:

1. that the Messiah, interpreted as "Christ," and for whom the Jews are waiting, has, without a doubt, come;
2. that the Messiah, just as it was prophesied, must be both God and man at the same time;
3. that he suffered and died to save the human race;
4. that legal and ceremonial preparations were discontinued and never resumed after the coming of the said Messiah.

In the end, only the first three were discussed.

Ramban was a tougher opponent than Christiani and the king had reckoned on. The disputation took place on four days during the course of a week. At one point even James himself tried to compare the Trinity to wine that has color, flavor, and aroma. The rabbi felt free enough to reject the king's comparison and demonstrate its weakness.

There was an important shift in the approach of the Christian side and in the response from the Jewish side. Rather than simply attacking the Talmud as evil, as Donin had done, Pablo Christiani chose to use the Talmud to prove Christianity. In fact he treated the Talmud with respect. He brought midrashic texts that seem to prove that the Messiah had indeed come. This was not just another attempt to argue over the same old Bible verses. Now the Christians were using the Jews' own writings to prove Christian doctrine. It put Ramban in a difficult position: if he accepted the texts used by Christiani, he had to admit that the Messiah had come; if he rejected the texts, it was like denying the authority of rabbinic tradition.

It was a fine line Ramban had to walk. First of all, he did not reject the texts themselves, but he said that Christiani had not understood them correctly. This could be true on several possible levels: 1) the texts did not speak of the Messiah; 2) they spoke of the Messiah, but they were about his birth and not about redemption; 3) they may speak of the Messiah, but they could not possibly refer to Jesus. Secondly, he tried to go on the offensive by questioning Christian doctrine. How, he asked, could a reasonable man accept the doctrine of the incarnation? Here he could not succeed. One of the underlying rules of the disputation was that Christian theology was not open to debate. Thirdly, he tried to make a distinction between the kinds of literature used by Jews.

Know that we Jews have three types of books. The first is the Bible, and we all believe it completely. The second is called Talmud, and it is a commentary on the commandments of the Torah. For in the Torah there are 613 commandments, and there is not one of them that is not explained in the Talmud. We believe in the Talmud concerning explanation of the commandments. We have yet a third book called

Midrash, that is, sermons. This is analogous to the bishop standing and giving a sermon, with one of the listeners deciding to write it. In regard to this book, those who believe it well and good, but those who do not believe it do no harm. (Chazan, *Church*, 223)

This last explanation must have been difficult for him, because in the recent controversy over the writings of Maimonides, Ramban had strongly defended the authority of the oral traditions. It was a compromise, one forced on him by the new approach taken by the Christians.

While the general atmosphere in the confines of the disputation remained civil, people outside were not happy. It was common knowledge that the event was going on, and there is no doubt that reports of the proceedings were reaching people on the street. There were threats of riots, and probably for that reason the disputation was brought to an end before the fourth topic had been discussed. In his memoirs of the event Ramban quotes a compliment he received from King James: "I have never heard anyone defend a bad cause as well as you."

The Christian clerics were not happy that Ramban had come off so well and still enjoyed the good will of the king. They demanded that they be permitted to speak in the synagogue the following Sabbath. King James himself actually attended and addressed the gathered Jews, a unique occurrence in the Middle Ages. Ramban was allowed to make his own reply. Soon afterward, at the request of the bishop of Gerona, he wrote down his account of the disputation. Some Christians were upset that he took this bold step, presenting in writing his own statements against Christianity. There were calls for his arrest. King James gave the rabbi a large sum of money as a gift, and Ramban left the kingdom for a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He would never leave the Holy Land.

Pablo Christiani later (1269) tried to evangelize Jews in the area near his home in the south of France. In this he had the support of the same King Louis IX whom we met in the previous disputation. The king ordered the Jews of the southern province of Provence to listen to Pablo's sermons. (Louis, on the advice of Christiani, also commanded the Jews in his realm to wear the distinctive Jewish badge.) However, Christiani's evangelizing efforts met with almost no success.

Tortosa, 1413–1414 The last—and by far the longest—of the three major disputations also took place in Spain, in the Catalanian city of Tortosa. It had no less than sixty-nine sessions over a period of twenty months.

Once again it was a convert from Judaism who took the initiative. His Hebrew name was Joshua ha-Lorqi. We have met him already in the bull of Benedict XIII ordering sermons in the synagogues. He was the personal physician of this antipope, and converted to Christianity while in that position. His Christian name after baptism was Geronimo (Jerome, Hieronymus) de Santa Fe. This Geronimo had an even better command of the Jewish traditions and texts than did Pablo Christiani.

Even though the Tortosa disputation was longer and more ceremonious

than Barcelona, it did not really contribute anything new. In its atmosphere it was more like Paris than Barcelona. The Jews who participated were in constant fear for their lives; they certainly did not enjoy the freedom of speech that Ramban had. It is to be remembered that this took place only about twenty years after the major persecutions at the end of the fourteenth century. In addition, there lurked in the background the figure of Vincente Ferrer. This man had already preached many sermons that caused riots against the Jewish communities. It was he who had converted Joshua ha-Lorqi.

Unlike Barcelona, where one major Jewish figure was called on to defend the faith, the Christian authorities saw Tortosa as a major campaign to convert all of the Jewish communities to Christianity. Two to four rabbis from each town were ordered to attend the disputation. While they were away from their people, Ferrer went around preaching in the synagogues and generally arousing the populace against the Jews. There were many conversions, both willing and unwilling. The Christian side was represented by top people, and the (anti)pope himself sometimes participated.

The main topic of discussion in this dispute was the coming of the Messiah. Geronimo argued in this way: 1) anyone who fulfilled the prophecies was the Messiah; 2) Jesus fulfilled the prophecies; therefore 3) Jesus was the Messiah. (Compare Acts 17:2–3.) The prophecies, of course, were from the Old Testament. However, Geronimo made heavy use of the talmudic literature to argue his case. When his rabbi opponents did not agree with him, he accused them of not believing their own Talmud enough! How things had changed since Paris, where the Talmud was only bad. Ironically, however, as the disputation neared its end, Geronimo began to attack the Talmud using all of the same arguments that had served Donin in Paris.

The end result had never been in doubt. The rabbis were gradually worn down, and eventually had nothing more to say that they had not said many times already. The Christians declared themselves the winners. A decree was issued by Benedict and the king of Aragon ordering the Talmud to be censored.

Polemical Literature

As we saw earlier in this chapter, public debates between Jews and Christians were often described in writing. Sometimes, no doubt, the events described had not really happened; they were just a vehicle for presenting the Christian case against the Jewish one.

Over the centuries many works of literature were produced by both sides arguing the truth of one religion against the other. This literature is truly extensive, and we will only be able to look here at general outlines.

The earliest Christian writings against the Jews were often called exactly that: "Against the Jews," or in Greek *adversos ioudaios*. As early as the

start of the second century, the *Epistle of Barnabas* had leveled attacks at unbelieving Jews. Through the following centuries many of the church fathers set out to show the error of the Jews, both for rejecting the Messiah and for actually killing him. While their starting point is invariably the action of the Jewish people in the gospels, the Jews they address or describe are the Jews of the Old Testament. In other words, Christians knew Jews primarily from their Bibles. They might have contact with Jews on a personal basis, but the theological Jew against whom they wrote lived in the Old Testament and did his last significant act at the crucifixion.

Christian theology had no place for continued development among the Jewish people. God had finished with them. With Augustine's development of the idea of the witness people (see chapter four), the church saw no more significance for the Jews. As Augustine himself said, they "remained stationary in useless antiquity."²¹

The kinds of face-to-face debates we saw earlier in the chapter continued essentially throughout history. It was inevitable that some Christian would get the idea of preparing a kind of manual for how to argue with a Jew. One of the earliest of these appeared in the seventh century, written by Isidore, bishop of the Spanish city of Seville. This treatise was called *On the Catholic Religion, Against the Jews*. Here is part of Isidore's dedication to his sister:

I thought it was necessary to present a few of the innumerable passages from the books of the OT, which, in various eras, have been produced as evidence relating to the divine birth of Our Lord and Savior, the incarnation, his passion, his death, his resurrection, his reign and his judgment, so that in this way the authority of the prophets could confirm the blessing and the faith and condemn the ignorance of the faithless Jews. (Dahan, *Polemic*, 42f)

As Isidore's words indicate, these essays were collections of Scriptures that could be used when debating a Jew, usually accompanied by some thoughts on how to present them. Collections of this sort are usually known as "Testimonies," meaning that the Scriptures are brought as witnesses of the truth of Christian doctrine.

There is evidence that the Jewish community also had such lists of Scriptures from a relatively early period. In chapter three we read the passage from Sanhedrin 43a about the five disciples of Jesus. While we suggested there that the passage probably does not preserve a historical event, it does seem to be a collection of Scriptures used in debate. In fact, it gives us five verses used by believers in Jesus and five used by the rabbis to counter them. This was probably all before the year 200.

Another form of writing that appears frequently in this debate is the dialogue. The dialogue was different from the public debate in that it was between two people, and was sometimes even held in private. Here

21 *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos*, PL 42:51–67, quoted in Cohen, "Medieval Jews," 79.

is an excerpt from the record (written by the Christian) of a discussion between Gilbert Crispin, the abbot of Westminster, and an unnamed Jew, probably sometime before the First Crusade in 1096:

The Jew: "Since the Christians say you are well-read and trained in speaking, I hope that you will show me tolerance ... And, so that you may know that I want to see these matters more as a subject for logical reasoning than as a subject for dispute, let us remove ourselves from all the others and not occupy ourselves with wanting to know who, between you and me, wins most favor with our listeners."

The Christian replies in the same spirit: "These demands are completely reasonable and your questions are well worth posing. But, for my part, I ask you to show me patience. If we establish as a rule for our discussion that you will be in agreement with all testimony drawn from the text of your Law or with all proofs clearly established, I will devote myself to these subjects with you, there where you desire." (Dahan, *Polemic*, 55f)

The Jew is sincerely ready to talk and is not interested in a public show. Crispin displays unusual tolerance and is ready to grant the Jew's request to meet in private. (It may not have been limited to the two of them alone; Crispin adds that another Jew, listening on the side, came to faith in Jesus.) While this attitude of mutual respect was not common, it was also not unique. In a dialogue written in 1208 by Peter of Cornwall, head of a London monastery, called *Disputation against Simon the Jew*, we read this:

It is necessary to understand that when we met together for the first time to discuss matters, this Jew and I agreed to debate with each other without quarreling or shouting, without any desire for victory, but peaceably and in complete tranquility, neither one of us cutting the other off short and, should one of us bring up a problematic theme, the other quietly hearing him out until his argument was completed. (Dahan, *Polemic*, 62)

In this case, the Christian writer informs us that his opponent in the debate actually accepted the Christian faith and became an official in the church. This too is unusual; we rarely hear of people actually being convinced by these confrontations.

The debates were normally conducted in the local language, because Jews did not generally know Latin. Until the 13th century the records of such debates were written in Latin, but after that some are recorded in other languages.

Very often the argument was not carried out in person, but in writing. This could take a variety of forms, including an exchange of letters, sermons (which were written down), or special treatises defending one faith or attacking the other. These are essentially just a continuation of

the *Adversus Judaeos* tradition, and there is no real break in the chain of writings. Thus we have, for example, an attack on Judaism by Ildephonse, bishop of Toledo (607–669), successor of Isidore of Seville, in a work on the eternal virginity of Mary. Later in the same century Julian, the Jewish convert who was also bishop of Toledo, wrote *On the Demonstration of the Sixth Age*, on the date of the coming of Messiah. Agobard and Amulo, whom we discussed in chapter six, both wrote such essays in the 9th century. In his, entitled *That It Is Necessary to Baptize the Hebrews*, Agobard describes his efforts to convert Jews.

Here again it is no exaggeration to say that Christian works like these were written in practically every generation. While their wording is often mean and disrespectful, they have this in common, that they were motivated by a desire to convince Jews to believe in Jesus. We have space here only to speak of some of the more outstanding writers and to provide a brief analysis of their approach.

In the early 13th century there appeared *Quiver of the Faith, against the Jews*, written by Thibaud of Sezanne. He was a Jewish believer in Jesus and a member of the Dominican order. Thibaud was highly acquainted with the Talmud and rabbinical writings. His short treatise was a kind of manual for participating in the debate with Jews.

In disputing with the Jews, it is necessary to observe a three-part precaution. (1) Do your best to refute their errors in numerous discussions, as much because it is easier to refute the articles of their faith than to rely upon proving those of our own, as because the seeds of virtue and truth serve no purpose if the thorns and weeds of falsehood are not first rooted out. (2) Do not touch upon those points of contention which seem to come between us, at least until the Jew brings them up himself. Then, resolve them, as you will have found resolutions to them. (3) When you debate in the presence of many Jews, make them all keep quiet, except the single one who will respond, until that time when, the first one being defeated, another responds. In this way you will avoid being overwhelmed by their clamor, and when one of them speaks the others will not try to find ways out or cause distractions. (Dahan, *Polemic*, 85)

The most learned opponent of the Jews was Raymond Martin, a Spanish Dominican theologian in the middle of the 13th century. He and several others were commissioned to investigate Jewish writings for any anti-Christian elements. Martin's judgment was favorable: the writings contained things that proved certain Christian truths, and they should not be burned. He himself translated the Scriptures, using rabbinic commentaries to help him (he said they supported the Christian position). Martin wrote two books against the Jews, the more influential being the *Pugio Fidei* ("Dagger of the Faith"). In it he discusses God's omniscience, creation, immortality, and the resurrection of the dead. The work is considered valuable because of its extracts from the Talmud, the Midrash, and other rabbinic sources.

Finally, one of the most influential figures was Nicolas of Lyra, born around 1270 in northern France. (His family may have had a Jewish background, but this is not certain.) He joined the Franciscan order and later taught at the Sorbonne in Paris. Lyra wrote an essay against the Jews and was generally quite active in both preaching and writing in his efforts to turn Jews to faith in Jesus. He is best known, however, for his influence on Bible exegesis. Christian interpretation of Scripture had become extremely mystical, and Lyra insisted on the supremacy of the literal interpretation. He was strongly influenced himself by the writings of Rashi, and he translated long sections of Rashi's commentaries. (Martin Luther's exegesis of Scripture was indirectly influenced by Rashi, through Nicholas of Lyra.) For his knowledge of Arabic and Aramaic, as well as some of his writing about the Jews, Lyra was dependent on Raymond Martin, whom we mentioned above.

Jewish counterattack

For a long time there was almost no parallel on the Jewish side to these polemical writings. A few works from the 9th and 10th centuries, including *Emunot veDeot* ("Beliefs and Opinions") by Sa'adia Gaon, attacked Christian doctrine, but these attacks were small parts of larger works. As with many other things, it seems to have been the Crusades that changed the picture. Starting in the second half of the 12th century, only a few years after the Second Crusade, several specifically anti-Christian treatises were written by Jewish writers. These included *Wars of the Lord* (*Milchamot haShem*) by Jacob ben Reuben (who was actually a Karaite), *Sefer haBrit* (*Book of the Covenant*) by Joseph Kimchi, and *The Book of Joseph the Zealot* (*Sefer Yosef haMekane*) by Joseph Official.

Nitzachon Yashan

The most serious Jewish attack came in a book called *Nitzachon Yashan*, written in the late 13th or early 14th century. This book—the unknown author may have been a German Jew—collects the material used in the earlier books and probably adds to it from personal experience in debating Christians. It is remarkable for the author's knowledge of the New Testament, church writers, and current church practices. The author is exceptionally aggressive and does not hesitate to belittle and mock most major figures in Christian faith, including Jesus, Peter, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. He clearly has no fear of retribution.

The *Nitzachon Yashan* (probably meaning "The Ancient Argument") contains many long quotations from the New Testament. The book itself is in Hebrew, which make these some of the earliest Hebrew translations of parts of the New Testament. The author mentions the Latin Bible, and it seems likely that he has translated from the accepted Latin translation.

The first half of the book discusses passages from the Hebrew Bible, answering Christian claims that certain verses are speaking about Jesus or about the church. The second half of the book deals with the New

Testament, pointing out contradictions and inconsistencies. We will look at only a couple of examples from the New Testament section.

In a discussion of the genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke [section 155], the author brings up the familiar question of why both genealogies are of the line of Joseph, when Christians claim that Joseph was not Jesus' father. The author notes that Christian practice is to baptize people in standing water. This, he says, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, that running water should be used. After all, he says, Jesus' own baptism was in the Jordan River. If you claim to be using Jesus and John the Baptist as an example, why do you not use running water? Then he goes on to add: and if you really claim them as your example, why do you not circumcise your sons, just as Jesus and John were circumcised?

The *Nitzachon Yashan* was one of the longest Jewish polemical works until its time. It would be followed by other, even longer works in later centuries. Even in the shorter works, however, it is easy to see a repeated pattern of Scriptures that were part of the debate. These range from Genesis 1:2, "the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" and Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image," through Genesis 49:10 ("until he comes to whom it belongs") to familiar passages such as Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6. Frequently used are Psalm 2:7 ("You are my son, today I have begotten you"), and even Zechariah 11:12–13 ("they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver").

This debate could not have lasted long if both sides had not agreed on one essential point: the Scriptures are the ultimate authority. Here certain points of disagreement were gradually worked out so that the debate could continue. For one thing, church and synagogue did not have exactly the same canon of Scripture; the Christians had some extra books (like Tobit and Judith) that the Jews would not recognize as part of the debate. Also, the "authoritative" translation of the Old Testament for the Christians had long been the Greek Septuagint. In some cases there was a clear difference between the base text of the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text being used by Jews. In other cases, the difference was only in the vowel points. So, for example, Christians read the text of Isaiah 9:6 as if it were "vayikare shmo," predicting a future event,²² while their Jewish opponents said, "No, it should be read as a prophetic past tense, 'vayikra shmo,' telling about something that has already happened."

As time and the debate progressed, Christians began to make a point of learning Hebrew so that they could not be easily put off by the claim that "you are talking nonsense because you do not know the original language and are reading from a faulty translation."

Isaac Troki

We will end this chapter by considering the polemical work of Isaac Troki. Troki was a Karaite scholar, born in Poland in 1533. Toward the end of his life he wrote a book entitled *Hizzuk Emunah* ("Faith Strengthened")

22 The Septuagint has "his name is called," in the present tense.

defending Judaism and refuting Christianity. Troki attacked Christian dogma, the messiahship of Jesus, and what he saw as contradictions and inconsistencies in the New Testament. It is safe to say that almost every Jewish apologist against Christianity since Troki has made use of this book. Following is a quote from the beginning of the book:

As to the works of Jesus, we find that he says of himself, Matthew 10:34–35: “Think not that I am come to make peace on earth; I came not to send peace but the sword, and to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” On the other hand, we find Holy Writ attributing to the true and expected Messiah actions contrary to those of Jesus. We see here that Jesus says of himself, he is not come to make peace on earth, whereas Scripture says of the true and expected Messiah, in Zechariah 9:10, “And he shall speak peace unto the heathen,” etc. Jesus says he came in order “to send the sword on earth,” but Scripture says, Isaiah 2:4, “And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Jesus says he came “to put father and son at variance,” etc, but Malachi says (at the end of his book) that “before the coming of the true Messiah the prophet Elijah shall appear, and turn the heart of the fathers to their children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” Jesus says, concerning himself, Matthew 20:28, that he is not come to be served by the son of man, but to serve others. Concerning the true Messiah, however, Scripture says, Psalms 72:11 “Yea, all kings shall prostrate themselves before him; all nations shall serve him.” And Zechariah 9:10, “His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the end of the earth.” Thus states also Daniel 7:27, “And all rulers shall serve him and obey him.”

One more paraphrase will give us some idea of the reasoning adopted by Troki:

The Christian who opposes Judaism must believe that the Jews tormented and crucified Jesus either with his will or against his will. If with his will, then the Jews had ample sanction for what they did. Besides, if Jesus was really willing to meet such a fate, what cause was there for complaint and affliction? And why did he pray in the manner related in Matthew 26:39 (“take this cup from me”)? On the other hand, if you assume that the crucifixion was against his will, how then can he be regarded as God—he, who was unable to resist the power of those who brought him to the cross? How could he be the Savior of all mankind when he did not have the power to save his own life?

10. Martin Luther and Early Protestants

Introduction

Historians find it convenient to divide history into periods. In the last three chapters we have spoken of the Middle Ages. Now we move into a period commonly known as the Renaissance, literally meaning “rebirth.” In real life, of course, societies generally change slowly, rarely overnight. The Renaissance was a kind of cultural revolution. It began in Italy in the 14th century, and moved gradually to northern Europe by the 16th century.

The man on whom we will primarily focus in this chapter, Martin Luther, presents us with a kind of paradox. On the one hand, his ideas and actions did bring about a very rapid change in the religious landscape of Europe, undoubtedly giving impetus to cultural change. On the other hand, Luther’s thinking was influenced in many areas by the medieval mentality which was beginning to pass away.

Luther and the Reformation

Martin Luther was born in 1483 in eastern Germany to devout Christian parents. He attended university, planning to become a lawyer, and in 1505 obtained a master’s degree. However, after he was almost struck by lightning his plans changed, and he vowed to become a monk. In 1507 he was ordained as a priest, and he went on to earn two more bachelor’s degrees in biblical studies and theology. While working as a university professor, Luther earned a doctorate in theology in 1512. It was during this time that he began to develop the doctrine that people are justified by God’s grace by faith alone.

It had become the practice in the church to grant forgiveness of certain sins to an individual based on merit which had been earned. Such merit was usually achieved by acts of repentance. The instrument granting the forgiveness was called an indulgence. In the year 1506 construction had begun on St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican in Rome. This was a huge and expensive building project, which would take over one hundred years to complete. In order to help finance the building, the church began to sell indulgences. People could pay money to have their sins forgiven, and the more money they paid, the more sins were forgiven. Luther strongly ob-

jected to this practice. In his experience as a priest and confessor, he saw that people came waving a piece of paper, claiming they had bought forgiveness of their sins and did not need to confess them, repent of them, or pay any spiritual penalty.

Luther preached several sermons against selling indulgences, and then at the end of October 1517 he decided to fight the practice more publicly. He wrote out ninety-five propositions or “theses” and nailed them to the door of his church. This was a recognized method of publishing something, and people came to read Luther’s theses. His list was soon copied and circulated to other parts of Germany.

Since the authority for selling indulgences had been granted by the pope in Rome, Luther’s attack had the effect of denying a certain aspect of the authority of the pope. Luther had launched his protest, and this led to the formation of what soon came to be called the “Protestant” church. Because Luther’s intention had been to encourage the reform of certain practices in the church, the movement which he started came to be known as the “Reformation.”

There were initial attempts to bridge the gaps between church practice and doctrine and the positions Luther was preaching, but the two sides gradually hardened their stands until compromise was impossible. On January 3, 1521, Martin Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X. (Ironically, in 1567, exactly fifty years after Luther’s protest, the Catholic Church forbade the sale of indulgences.)

Luther’s Early Attitude toward the Jews

Luther was a man of his time, and even in his earliest writings we can find some of the standard medieval attitude toward Jews: God had rejected the Jews, as was obvious from the fact that they were scattered and did not enjoy a stable existence anywhere. They were enemies of Christianity, which means enemies of God; they tried to lead others astray; and only a small remnant of them would be saved.

Even so, once he was committed to going his own way in opposition to the church in Rome, Luther began to treat the Jews with some respect. Several factors seem to have contributed to this. But let us first set the stage with a background. During the lifetime of Martin Luther, relatively few Jews lived in the areas where he was active. The Jewish communities had been expelled from many cities and regions of the Holy Roman Empire in the 15th century, and Luther actually came into direct contact with few Jews.

Very soon after his excommunication, it seems that Luther was visited by two Jews, and one of them came to faith in Jesus. This may have encouraged him in the idea that his new revelations, with their emphasis on Scripture as the only authority, would be a tool of God finally to turn the Jewish people to Jesus.

Perhaps another part of the picture was Luther’s belief that the end times were near. In the year 1453 the city of Constantinople had fallen to

the control of Muslims, the first time it had been lost by Christians in over 1100 years, since its founding. Some Christian theologians felt that date to be significant for calculating the time of Jesus' return. Luther himself understood the "time, times, and half a time" of Daniel 12 to indicate 3½ generations of thirty years each, that is, 105 years. This would give great significance to the year 1558 (1453 + 105), which was within Luther's foreseeable lifetime.²³

It is very common, in scholarly writings about Luther and the Jews, to say that Luther started out positive but toward the end of his life turned against the Jews. It is true, as we shall see, that Luther's later writings are extremely negative toward Jews, and the wording is foul and nasty to a degree not found in his early writings. However, it would be misleading to say that Luther started out positive about Jews.

We can look at just a sample of things the reformer said about Jews during the period before 1517. In a series of lectures which Luther delivered on the Psalms between 1513 and 1515, we find the following:

In the preface to the lectures he refers to the Jews as Christ's enemies. Then at Psalm 4:2, commenting on the phrase "you love vain words, and seek after lies," he says, "To the present day they look for those carnal things from God and their Messiah, and they have no regard for faith in heavenly and spiritual goods." At Psalm 16:4, where David says "I will not ... take their names upon my lips," Luther adds, "The Jews do not have any good things concerning which he might be mindful of them. All of their things are false, as is clear from the fact that their concerns and hopes deal only with things of the flesh." There are many other such sayings in this pre-Reformation Luther. While they are relatively mild, they reflect ideas which we have seen in the Middle Ages. In fact, in Luther's writings about the Jews, he frequently cites earlier writers like Paul (Abner) of Burgos and Nicholas of Lyra, who had written polemics against the Jews.

That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew, 1523

In the year 1523 or shortly before, Luther was evidently accused by the Catholic Church of certain things, and he set out to defend himself in writing. The title of this writing was "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew." However, the introductory paragraph makes it clear that his primary reason for writing was not to discuss the Jews.

A new lie about me is being circulated. I am supposed to have preached and written that Mary, the mother of God, was not a virgin either before or after the birth of Christ, but that she conceived Christ through Joseph, and had more children after that. Above and

23 Carl Cohen, "Martin Luther and His Jewish Contemporaries," *Jewish Social Studies* 25 (1966), 195–204.

beyond all this, I am supposed to have preached a new heresy, namely, that Christ was [through Joseph] the seed of Abraham.²⁴

Soon after this Luther tells us that he has two goals in this writing:

Since for the sake of others, however, I am compelled to answer these lies, I thought I would also write something useful in addition, so that I do not vainly steal the reader's time with such dirty rotten business. Therefore, I will cite from Scripture the reasons that move me to believe that Christ was a Jew born of a virgin, that I might perhaps also win some Jews to the Christian faith.

A noble goal indeed, even if the main goal is to get back at his enemies in Rome. This we see in his very next words:

Our fools, the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks—the crude asses' heads—have hitherto so treated the Jews that anyone who wished to be a good Christian would almost have had to become a Jew. If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian.

The main focus of the first part of this work is actually on Mary, confirming that she was a virgin when Jesus was born, remained a virgin even after his birth, and had no more children. Like many of Luther's writings from the same time, it is first and foremost an attack on the church of Rome.

The second half of the writing turns to the Jews, not to praise them but to convert them:

While we are on the subject, however, we wish not only to answer the futile liars who publicly malign me in these matters, but we would also like to do a service to the Jews on the chance that we might bring some of them back to their own true faith, the one which their fathers held. To this end we will deal with them further, and suggest for the benefit of those who want to work with them a method and some passages from Scripture which they should employ in dealing with them.

The remainder of the treatise is then an argument for the truth of Christian doctrine, arguing from two texts that had served Christian apologists for centuries, Genesis 49 and Daniel 9.

Luther concludes his own attempt at convincing the Jews with these words:

²⁴ All quotations from *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* are taken from Walter I. Brandt (ed.), *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45, 199–229.

If the Jews should take offense because we confess our Jesus to be a man, and yet true God, we will deal forcefully with that from Scripture in due time. But this is too harsh for a beginning. Let them first be suckled with milk, and begin by recognizing this man Jesus as the true Messiah; after that they may drink wine, and learn also that he is true God. For they have been led astray so long and so far that one must deal gently with them, as people who have been all too strongly indoctrinated to believe that God cannot be man.

Therefore, I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along. Instead of this we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don't stink, and I know not what other foolishness. So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect to work any good among them? Again, when we forbid them to labor and do business and have any human fellowship with us, thereby forcing them into usury, how is that supposed to do them any good?

If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.

This appeal is positive, touching, even if it is still a dig at the "papists." On balance it is not really very different from the more polite attempts at Jewish evangelism which we saw in the previous chapter.

One might ask if Luther's attitude toward Jews had become more positive since he began the journey of Reformation. Perhaps this too was part of his revelation? This seems very unlikely. About six months after writing these things, he has this to say in another treatise: "In the meantime with the heathen and Jew you will be going to the devil, because you despise God's word and are willing to serve him, not for his sake but because of others."²⁵

In fact it is not difficult to find negative references to Jews in Luther's writings almost without a chronological break. The following year, in a letter to Georg Spalatin, we read this:

God withstood the Jews for a while so that they would not kill his Son. Finally when they were unwilling to desist, God gave him into their hands, letting them not only kill him, but also condemn him

25 *An Exhortation to the Knights of the Teutonic Order, that they Lay Aside False Chastity and Assume the True Chastity of Wedlock*. On the dating of this work, see Brandt in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 45, 138.

to the most shameful of deaths. Thus the iniquities of the Amorites were completed and God's wrath against the Jews was fulfilled.²⁶

In another series of commentaries on the Psalms in 1526, Luther interpreted all of Psalm 109 as speaking of the Jews, not only in the time of the psalmist but also in his own time. Again and again he emphasizes that the Jews are "the people of Judas." Here is just one passage from many in this commentary:

109:17: *He loved to curse; let curses come on him! He did not like blessing; may it be far from him!*

That is, he enjoyed cursing and malediction so much that he even cursed himself. Not that they overtly love cursing; but by these words the Holy Spirit indicates their horrible blindness and fearful obduracy, that they regard as a blessing what is the worst kind of curse and regard as a curse what is the most sublime blessing. Thus the Jews before Pilate cried out at Christ (Matt 27:25): "His blood be on us and on our children!" I am of the opinion that this is a curse which is still bearing down hard on them. But they thought it was a wonderful blessing, saying to themselves: "Getting rid of this evil doer is a good deed in the sight of God. We are willing to take our chances with whatever threats may be involved, for we know that we shall obtain a blessing for it. So let His blood pour right over us!"²⁷

In a very interesting discussion (1528) on what makes baptism valid (and whether it is necessary to rebaptize a person who was baptized as a baby and later came to faith), Luther's position reminds us of rulings of the church in earlier centuries when Jews were baptized by force:

Note well, therefore, that baptism is water with the Word of God, not water and my faith. My faith does not make the baptism but rather receives the baptism, no matter whether the person being baptized believes or not; for baptism is not dependent upon my faith but upon God's Word. If today a Jew were to be baptized, who was seeking only the sponsor's christening gift, and we baptized him nevertheless, the baptism would be genuine, for it is God's Word with water. And even though the Jew did not believe, the baptism would nevertheless not be false.²⁸

As we remember, it was this kind of thinking that led to the creation of the class of Marranos in Spain.

Sayings against Jews can be found with convincing continuity throughout Luther's career. It is true that his comments seem to become more

26 *Luther's Works*, Vol. 49, 73.

27 *Luther's Works*, Vol. 14, 267.

28 *Sermons on the Catechism* [1528], On Baptism, in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, 186.

frequent and harsher in his last years, but there is no real basis to claim that he was positive toward Jews in his early years. One highly significant change did happen: while the younger Luther was positive about bringing Jews to faith in Jesus, in his later years he seems to have lost the belief that such a thing was even possible.

Three Books

Around the year 1536, Luther was visited by three Jewish scholars. They argued against his use of some Old Testament Scriptures and may even have attempted to convert him to Judaism. Luther was already disappointed with the lack of Jewish response to his efforts to win Jews to faith in Jesus, and he now decided that it was a waste of time even to try. He vowed that he would carry on no more conversations with Jews.

The following year he received a letter from Josel of Rosheim, a highly influential Jewish businessman who spent much time defending the rights of the Jews. Duke John Frederick had ordered the expulsion of the Jews from Saxony. The duke was a strong supporter of the Reformation, and Josel requested a meeting with Luther to enlist his help. Luther refused even to see him, commenting to friends,

Why should these rascals, who injure people in goods and body and who estrange many Christians [from Christianity] with their superstitions, be given permission? For in Moravia they have circumcised many Christians and called them by the new name of Sabbatarians. So it goes in those regions where Protestant preachers are expelled ... I'll write this Jew not to return.²⁹

Against the Sabbatarians, 1538

Within a few months Luther published a writing against those same Sabbatarians. He had heard that they were actually converting Christians, convincing them to be circumcised "and to believe that the Messiah or Christ has not yet appeared, that the law of the Jews must prevail forever, that it must also be adopted by all the Gentiles." Luther was greatly angered. Not only were the Jews refusing to believe, they were even stealing souls from the church.

His arguments were not particularly original. They had been used by many Christian apologists before, but in their essence they go back to Job's advisors: the suffering that the Jews have endured and their humiliating external circumstances are proof that God has rejected them.

In brief, since these fifteen hundred years of exile, of which there is no end in sight, nor can there be, do not humble the Jews or bring them to awareness, you may with a good conscience despair of them.

²⁹ *Luther's Works*, Vol. 54, 239.

For it is impossible that God would leave his people, if they truly were his people, without comfort and prophecy so long. ... Because God for fifteen hundred years has ... let them live on and on in exile without any word of prophecy to them regarding it, it is evident that he has forsaken them, that they can no longer be God's people, and that the true Lord, the Messiah, must have come fifteen hundred years ago. What, do you suppose, might be the sin that continues to provoke such a terrible penalty and such silence of God other than their rejection, past and present, of the true Seed of Abraham and David, the dear Lord Messiah?³⁰

On the Jews and Their Lies and On the Divine Name, 1543

In 1542 a friend sent Luther a manuscript, written by a Jew, in which a Jew and a Christian engaged in a dialogue. It made him angry that a Jew would dare to disprove Christian doctrine and even attempt to turn Christians away from their faith. The following year he published his response, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. This was the longest treatise he would write against the Jews (over 170 pages in its English translation). He wrote even though he held out no hope that it would change the thinking of any Jew.

Until such a time [when they confess that the Messiah has come], it is much too early, yes, it is useless to argue with them about how God is triune, how he became man, and how Mary is the mother of God. No human reason nor any human heart will ever grant these things, much less the embittered, venomous, blind heart of the Jews. As has already been said, what God cannot reform with such cruel blows, we will be unable to change with words and works.³¹

First of all Luther attacked the "false boasts" of the Jews, what he considered to be an unhealthy pride in their descent from the patriarchs and in their homeland, and their spiritual dependence on the covenant of circumcision and the Torah.

The second section of the treatise, the longest, deals with biblical passages that prove Jesus' messiahship. This is familiar ground, covered by his predecessors and by Luther himself in *Against the Sabbatarians*.

In the third section his anger begins to grow. "We want to look at their lies about the person of our Lord, as well as those about his dear mother and about ourselves and all Christians." Here Luther deals with things like the way the name of Jesus has been turned into a curse (with a short discussion of gematria), claims that Mary was a prostitute, and a greeting meaning "Welcome, demon" used by Jews when they receive Christians.

Much of the material in this section derives from the writing of a Jewish

30 *Luther's Works*, Vol. 47, 96.

31 *Ibid.*, 139.

convert named Anton Margarita. This treatise, called *The Complete Jewish Faith*, was published in 1530 and was a favorite with Luther. He even had it read to him while he was taking his meals. In this short section Luther repeats (with some hesitation) many of the standard accusations made against Jews during the Middle Ages. Ironically, he now writes many of those same things that he had condemned in his 1523 treatise, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*:

They have been bloodthirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intentions, and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds. Thus they have been accused of poisoning water and wells, of kidnapping children, of piercing them through with an awl, of hacking them in pieces, and in that way secretly cooling their wrath with the blood of Christians, for all of which they have often been condemned to death by fire.³²

The more Luther writes, the harsher his words become. "We are even at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians ... We are at fault in not slaying them."

In the concluding pages of this hate-filled essay, Luther offers advice to his readers. He is aware that he has great influence with secular rulers in those places where the Reformation has taken hold, and he clearly hopes that his suggestions will be put into effect.

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? ... With prayer and the fear of God we must practice a sharp mercy to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames. We dare not avenge ourselves. Vengeance a thousand times worse than we could wish them already has them by the throat. I shall give you my sincere advice:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians. ...

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies. This will bring home to them the fact that they are not masters in our country, as they boast, but that they are living in exile and in captivity, as they incessantly wail and lament about us before God.

Third, I advise that all their prayer books and talmudic writings,

32 Ibid., 264f.

in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them.

Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. ...

Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. ... If you great lords and princes will not forbid such usurers the highway legally, some day a troop may gather against them, having learned from this booklet the true nature of the Jews and how one should deal with them and not protect their activities. For you, too, must not and cannot protect them unless you wish to become participants in all their abominations in the sight of God. Consider carefully what good could come from this, and prevent it.

Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. ... Such money should now be used in no other way than the following: Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted, he should be handed one hundred, two hundred, or three hundred florins, as personal circumstances may suggest. With this he could set himself up in some occupation for the support of his poor wife and children, and the maintenance of the old or feeble.

Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam (Gen. 3 [:19]). For it is not fitting that they should let us accursed Goyim toil in the sweat of our faces while they, the holy people, idle away their time behind the stove, feasting and farting, and on top of all, boasting blasphemously of their lordship over the Christians by means of our sweat. No, one should toss out these lazy rogues by the seat of their pants.

But if we are afraid that they might harm us or our wives, children, servants, cattle, etc., if they had to serve and work for us ... then let us emulate the common sense of other nations such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc., compute with them how much their usury has extorted from us, divide this amicably, but then eject them forever from the country. For, as we have heard, God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!³³

Luther continues with an exhortation first to secular rulers to put into practice the measures he has suggested, and secondly to the pastors to preach the things he has declared in his writing.

In that same year, 1543, Luther wrote a second book against the Jews. He called it *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* (*On the*

33 Ibid., 268–272.

Divine Name and on Christ's Lineage). It was written in response to the claim of some Jews (dating back hundreds of years) that Jesus used magic to work his miracles. The tone of this essay was even harsher than the previous one, the language more vulgar. The first section of the book was a translation of an earlier work with Luther's inserted comments. The second section is a bit less vulgar and comprises a discussion of Christian and Jewish treatment of certain OT passages.

We will add one quotation from the preface to Luther's commentary on Ezekiel, written in 1545, a year before his death:

In opposition to the blindness of the Jews, it should be known especially that all the prophecies which say that Israel and Judah shall return again to their lands and possess them in a bodily way forever, are long since fulfilled, and that the hopes of the Jews are utterly vain and lost ... there is not a letter in the prophets or the Scriptures which says or signifies anything of the kind. It is written, indeed, that they shall return out of all lands to which they have been driven, but not all of them, only some of them out of all lands. There is a great difference between a return of all the Jews and a return out of all lands. The return out of all lands is fulfilled, but the return of all the Jews was never prophesied, but rather the opposite; just as at Jerusalem, while it was yet standing, both before and after the Captivity, not all the people were the people of God, but most of them were the people of the devil, idolaters, and murderers, and the worst people on earth ... They are no longer Israel; for all things are to be new, and Israel too must become new, and they alone are the true Israel who have accepted the new covenant.

Understanding Luther

Many attempts have been made to explain why this man wrote the way he did about Jews. It is true that he had certain expectations at the start that were not realized. This may have led to bitterness. However, we have seen that this explanation is not enough, because Luther had most of the standard anti-Jewish ideas from the very beginning.

How much did unfulfilled end-times expectations bring about a frustrated reaction in Luther? While this may have contributed to his nasty expressions, it was probably not a big factor. Otherwise we would find it more often in his writings.

One important thing should be kept in mind. Martin Luther was a man of strong passions. His extremes of passion seem to have increased as he got older. When he set out to attack an opponent, tact or gentleness were rarely part of the picture. He invariably describes his opponents as moved by the devil, who appears with surprisingly frequency in Luther's writings. He wrote against the Anabaptists, for example, that they were not people possessed by demons; they were demons possessed by demons. Whether he wrote against Roman church leadership (the pope was

the antichrist, son of the devil), Jews, other Protestants with whom he did not agree, or Muslims (he called Muhammad an uncouth blockhead and ass, the devil's pimp), Luther cursed them in the strongest terms. This was particularly true in the later years of his life.

In writing in this way Luther was actually a product of his time. Other writings of this period—and not just on religious subjects—are full of references to toilet activities, pigs and donkeys, and devils. The year after Luther's death, Josel of Rosheim, whom we mentioned above, wrote in his memoirs that he hoped Luther was in hell, body and soul. The man who was Luther's most hated opponent from the side of the Catholic Church, Johann Eck, himself wrote a treatise *On the Jews*, which used even nastier language than that used by Luther.

Luther even referred to himself in similar vulgar language: "I ask that men make no reference to my name and that they call themselves, not Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? ... How, then, should I, a poor evil-smelling maggot sack, have men give to the children of Christ my worthless name?"

Nevertheless, it would be going too far to say, "Oh, that was just the way people argued in those days." When Luther's books appeared in 1543, and especially *On the Divine Name*, some of his fellow reformers and colleagues were dismayed and embarrassed by his language. One of them wrote that "if it had been written by a swineherd, rather than a celebrated shepherd of souls, it might have some—but very little—justification." Another reformer compared Luther's proposals to the methods used by the Inquisition. In some Protestant areas the secular authorities actually banned a second printing of *On the Divine Name*.

Some theologians have attempted to soften the effect of Luther's extremes by saying that his attacks were on the theological level, not on the racial level. Luther was defending his Lord and Mary and his flock. This argument points out what we have already seen in earlier centuries, that a Jew who came to faith in Jesus was accepted without reservation as a brother or sister in the Messiah. There were no limitations on his progress upward in the church, and no one would have thought of restrictions on whom he or she could marry. These theologians note that Jews were not even identified as a race in the sixteenth century, only as a religion.

This last explanation seems a bit too convenient and not really in line with the sources. Luther can very well attack Jews as a nation, and it would be splitting hairs to say this does not mean race. It is true that the idea of race had not yet been scientifically defined, but the phenomenon of racism existed nonetheless. Here is just one example from *On the Jews and Their Lies*:

No one can take away from them their pride concerning their blood and their descent from Israel. In the Old Testament they lost many a battle in wars over this matter, though no Jew understands this. All the prophets censured them for it, for it betrays an arrogant, carnal presumption devoid of spirit and of faith. They were also slain and

persecuted for this reason. St. John the Baptist took them to task severely because of it, saying, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" [Matt 3:9]. He did not call them Abraham's children but a "brood of vipers" [Matt 3:7]. Oh, that was too insulting for the noble blood and race of Israel, and they declared, "He has a demon" [Matt 11:18].³⁴

Fortunately, no secular ruler actually put into effect all of Luther's suggestions for dealing with the Jews, although some limited measures did follow and make life more difficult for the Jewish communities.

Other Reformers

Martin Luther had gotten the Reformation started, but he was soon joined by other capable theologians. It is not surprising that they would share Luther's general worldview about Jews, even if most of them did not share his violent ways of expressing himself. Some of Luther's writings were motivated by questions from his followers, or even requests that he would answer something written or said by Jews.

Martin Bucer

One opponent of the Jews was Martin Bucer, who was active in Strasbourg and, after Luther's death, in England. In 1539 he wrote to the ruler of Hesse, opposing the latter's proposal to give the Jews an official status. He advised him to require Jews to do the most menial jobs, such as breaking stone, making charcoal, and cleaning out chimneys and latrines (Eckardt, "Reformation," 120).

He also debated publicly with Josel of Rosheim. Bucer represents a certain undecidedness among the reformers about the Jews. In a comment on Romans he wrote, "we must oppose and love them at the same time, and treat them as both enemies and friends, enemies because of their infidelity and for the sake of the saints among the Gentiles, to whom the Jews stubbornly denied participation in the Kingdom of God," and "friends because of their original selection as God's people and for the sake of the Patriarchs, whose physical descendants they indubitably are." Bucer, like so many others, was strongly motivated by the desire to see the Jews come to faith in Jesus. He attempted to re-introduce the old medieval institution of the forced Christian sermon for Jews. Luther had already made such a ruling in 1529, but without any real success.

John Calvin

John Calvin was eight years old when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. After he joined the Reformation, he spent two years in Strasbourg, where Martin Bucer was the most in-

³⁴ Ibid., 141.

fluent figure. While in Strasbourg, Calvin may have had some contact with Jews, but it was not much. After he moved to Geneva, he no longer had any contact with Jews, because they had long before been expelled from the city. They had also been expelled from Calvin's native France before he was born.

Calvin's position regarding the Jews was mixed, or we might say inconsistent. He never wrote a specific work against them, but he did not hesitate to insert a negative comment. Even though he was a major player in the Reformation that Luther had started, he was not very much influenced by Luther's writings against the Jews. While much of Luther's Reformation theology was written in Latin, which Calvin knew well, Luther's writings against the Jews were in German, which Calvin could not read.

In one place (*Institutes* 8.10) he is able to repeat Augustine's old idea that the Jews serve as librarians for the church. However, here as elsewhere Calvin's language is calm, unemotional, and not extreme, and he does not say it with any sense of condemnation. It would be possible to quote statements he made against the Jews, but a survey of such statements shows that Calvin generally takes the Jews as representative of human nature. Even when he comments on texts that provide other commentators with an excuse to launch harsh attacks on Jews (for example, Matt 27:25; John 8; 1 Thess 2:14–16), he tends to forego extremes and focuses rather on what the individual believer can apply to his own life. This is not to say that Calvin has nothing harsh to say about the Jews, but his comments are incidental and notably more moderate than those of his contemporaries.

The Reformation in Jewish Eyes

Eckardt ("Reformation," 124f) gives an assessment of how Jews received the Reformation. Things had been going badly for Jews in Europe. Twenty-five years before Luther nailed his theses to the church door, all Jews had been expelled from Spain. All over Europe small Jewish communities were feeling increasing insecurity, and many wondered if the messianic age might not be approaching. Jews were impressed with Protestantism's new emphasis on Scripture as the sole authority and with its rejection of icons and the worship of saints.

There were those who rejoiced in the split in the church, which, they felt, could only help the Jews. It was, they said, God's punishment of the church for the way it had treated Jews. Some believed (although not in a way that Luther would have agreed with) that God was using Luther in the plan of redemption.

Nevertheless, as Luther became more and more bitter and aggressive against the Jews, positive attitudes toward the Reformation began to fade. Josel of Rosheim, as we have seen, was rejected by Luther and rejected Luther in his turn, even portraying him as a kind of Haman who wanted to wipe out the Jews.

It is generally agreed that the Reformation was, in the long term, a positive development for the Jews, though indirectly. For example, when John Calvin initiated the first public burning at the stake (of a Protestant) by Protestants, the public outcry against it (by Protestants) was so great that it led to greater tolerance for differences of opinion on religious matters. Jews, too, would benefit from the new emphasis on freedom of conscience.

In some countries where Protestant churches became dominant, Jews came to enjoy a much-improved status. Many Marranos who had been ejected from Spain and Portugal found a welcome in the Netherlands. For the most part they were able to practice Judaism openly. Jews would be allowed back into England in the middle of the 17th century. In 1656, England, under its Puritan dictator Oliver Cromwell, declared war on Spain. Marranos who were in England were still considered Spanish citizens. In an ironic twist of history, Cromwell gave these Marranos the option of choosing between being (Christian) Spanish citizens and being arrested or declaring themselves to be Jews and avoiding arrest. They took the opportunity to throw off their superficial Christianity and became open Jews again.

Jewish Converts against Judaism

Throughout this course we have encountered opponents of Jews and Judaism who themselves were born Jews and had become Christians. Often these were the initiators of persecution and the most stubborn opponents of the Jewish community. The period surrounding the Reformation was no exception. In fact at the exact time when Luther was taking his stand against abuses in the church, there was a widely publicized debate going on over what do to with Jewish writings.

Johannes Pfefferkorn

The two main participants in the debate were a converted Jew, Johannes Pfefferkorn, and a Christian humanist scholar, Johannes Reuchlin. Pfefferkorn, a Jewish butcher, was a convicted thief who had avoided imprisonment by paying a fine. Soon afterward he converted to Christianity and associated himself with the Dominicans. Even though Pfefferkorn was far from being a scholar, the Dominicans saw in him an opportunity to promote their longstanding program against the Jews.

Within two years of his conversion he began to write treatises against the Jews. Pfefferkorn wrote in German, and the Dominicans translated his works immediately into Latin, which he did not know. He demanded that Jews be expelled or given the most menial jobs, and that every Jewish home be searched and all Jewish books—except the Old Testament—be taken and burned. It is significant that Pfefferkorn denied that there was any truth to the blood libel. He succeeded in obtaining an edict from the secular authorities that led to the confiscation of books in Hebrew. The Jewish community protested, and a commission was set up to investi-

gate whether Jewish writings did indeed pose a threat to Christians. The main spokesman for the commission was Reuchlin, who declared that the books were good for study and should not be destroyed. The books were then returned.

This was not the end of the story, however, and Pfefferkorn and Reuchlin began to write essays against each other. All this took place between 1510 and 1520, when the pope finally declared in favor of Pfefferkorn.

Anton Margarita

We have already mentioned Anton Margarita, the son of a rabbi from Regensburg. He was baptized in 1522 and made a living teaching Hebrew at Christian institutions. In the year 1530 he wrote *The Complete Jewish Faith (Der Gantz Jüdisch Glaub)*, an attack on Jewish institutions and on Jews themselves. As we have seen, Luther made frequent use of this book. When Margarita published his book he was living in Augsburg. Josel of Rosheim was there at the same time, and he appealed against the book to Emperor Charles V. The emperor appointed a committee to examine the book, and it was condemned. Margarita was imprisoned and then expelled from Augsburg.

Jews, Christians, and Satan

In *On the Jews and Their Lies* Luther declares, “wherever you see a genuine Jew, you may with a good conscience cross yourself and bluntly say: ‘There goes a devil incarnate.’” We have already seen similar statements by Luther. What we need to consider now, however, is that it was very common among Christians to associate the Jews with Satan.

Of particular significance was the connection made—at least from the 10th century—between the Jews and the antichrist. The Jews expected a messiah, but, said the church, they rejected the true Messiah. It could only follow that they expected the antichrist and that they would worship him when he came. Various popular legends developed. One said that antichrist would be born in Babylon, the son of a Jewish prostitute and Satan. By the 11th century a formula was in use when a Jew became a Christian: He had to curse “all those who hope for the coming of the Messiah, or rather of antichrist.”

The book of Revelation aligns the antichrist with Satan. It only took a simplistic and uninformed reading of John 8:44, “you are of your father the devil,” and the demonic image of the Jew was sealed in the Christian mind.

After the events that led to the rise of the Inquisition in Spain, it was popularly thought that the antichrist would be one of the *conversos*, those Jews who had been converted by force and kept trying to go back to Judaism.

The church was troubled by the persistent refusal of the Jew to accept the gospel. In fact it often seemed like the Jew was simply not capable of understanding the message. We quote from Trachtenberg (*Devil*, 18):

How was it that the psychology of the Jews should be contrary to all human experience? The answer was that the Jew was not human—not in the sense that the Christian was. He was a creature of an altogether different nature, of whom normal human reactions could not be expected. "Really I doubt whether a Jew can be human, for he will neither yield to human reasoning, nor find satisfaction in authoritative utterances, alike divine and Jewish," protested Peter the Venerable of Cluny. What then? He was the devil's creature! Not a human being but a demonic, a diabolic beast fighting the forces of truth and salvation with Satan's weapons, was the Jew as medieval Europe saw him. One might as soon expect the devil himself to submit of his own free will to Christ, as the Jew.

The fact that Jews were not human was demonstrated by a number of other commonly acknowledged traits of the Jews. They were thought to be subject to certain diseases that were peculiar to Jews alone. One of these diseases had them bleeding each month from sores in their mouth, because they had declared "his blood be on us and on our children." Perhaps the physical distinction claimed most commonly against the Jews was that they gave off an offensive stink. The rare Christian writer explained that this was because Jews ate so many garlicks and onions. The accepted explanation, however, was that Jews were not really human. The so-called *foetor judaicus* (Jewish stench) was even subjected to scientific study (later promoted as truly accurate by the Nazis). Interestingly, medieval Christians generally acknowledged that a Jew who was baptized began to have the sweet fragrance of a Christian (Trachtenberg, 47–50).

11. The Holocaust and the Church

Introduction

In our survey of relations between the church and the Jews, we will now seem to skip over two or three hundred years. This is not because nothing happened during that time. There were indeed incidents, but either they were simply more of what we have seen already, or they were events that were not specifically Christian in origin.

So, for example, the various streams of Protestantism developed during these centuries, but for the most part they only refined existing ideas about Jews (almost all inherited from church tradition before the Protestant Reformation). If this book were a general history of anti-Semitism, we would already have included events such as the Black Plague of the 14th century, and at this point we would discuss the establishment of the ghetto, the Cossack massacres of the 17th century, and the pogroms in 19th century Russia. But in none of these was the evil suffered by the Jews a specifically Christian action, even if Christians were involved.

The centuries following the start of the Protestant Reformation brought radical social and intellectual changes in Europe, changes reflected in terms like Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and Nationalism. The church actually lost much of its hold on European society, and in a general way we could say that the lot of Jews in Europe was gradually improving.

It is all the more shocking then that the most horrible anti-Semitic event in all history took place in 20th century Europe. In this chapter we will try to understand how the Holocaust could come about, and how the churches and individual Christians related to it as it was developing and afterward.

Within the framework of this study, the Holocaust is on a unique level compared to other events we have considered. All other events have been direct confrontations between the two religions: what the church did to Jews or wrote about the Jews, and how the Jews reacted or what they wrote against Christians. With the Holocaust we encounter a third player, the Nazi regime and its "final solution." This was not about what the church or Christians did to Jews, but about how they reacted or did not react to what someone else was doing to Jews.

Race Theory

The treatment of the Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries was influenced by the founding of the new science of anthropology, which is the study of the origins and behavior of mankind. This new discipline only began in the 18th century, and mistakes were made. The most obvious differences between peoples are physical and external. Anthropologists at first identified three to five different races, based primarily on skin color. They even went so far as to connect mental and moral characteristics to these "races." Thus, for example, they declared that black people are mentally inferior to white people.

At first Jews were included in the white race. However, another development, this time in the field of linguistics, would change that. Some languages are related to each other, one perhaps having developed from another or several languages developing from a common ancestor. For example, French, Spanish, Italian, and several other languages are today known as "romance languages" because they all developed from the language of Rome, Latin. In the late 18th and early 19th century it was discovered that most European languages are related to each other, deriving from Sanskrit. Today this is known as the Indo-European language group. However, at first these were called Aryan languages. They were distinguished (on valid linguistic grounds) from languages belonging to the Semitic language group. Semitic languages include Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Amharic, and a few others.

Anthropologists made the mistake of subdividing their non-scientific races into sub-groups based on these linguistic divisions. They began to speak not just of Aryan and Semitic languages but also of Aryan and Semitic races. This was a complete mistake and one which is rejected today by anthropologists. Unfortunately it made its way into common thought in 19th century Europe. It had already been proven inaccurate before the rise of Adolph Hitler to power in 1933, but by that time it had become an essential foundation for the Nazi program, which was based on the doctrine of the superiority of the German (Aryan) race.

Race theory had its influence on church thinking. The traditional position—even during periods of Christian anti-Semitism—had been that a Jew who became a believer in Jesus and was baptized was indeed a new creature and should not be rejected because he was Jewish. However, once it was accepted that races were different in their very essence, that the supposed evil traits of the Jews were more than just religious or cultural, then nothing could help the Jews. They could not be changed, and baptizing a Jew was as effective as baptizing a dog.

Not surprisingly, Christians found themselves confused. There were some who recognized the potential evil of these theories of race, but most went along with the flow of "scientific progress" and public opinion. The following quotation, from the year 1913, comes from a man known in his generation as an advocate of evangelism among Jews:

Am I able to love the Jew? Certainly not on the natural plane! All too much separates me from him. His characteristic ways are so different from mine. He has another spirit. Not that his manner is to be deemed worse than mine, for I am far from being racially arrogant, but it is different. It is in stark contrast to my sentiments as a German. The Jewish disposition has an ever-increasing influence upon the ways of thinking and manners of my people, and I regard this as perilous to German existence. For a German to give up his peculiar characteristics is tantamount to the abandonment of his express ego, and that is the beginning of the end for individual and nation alike. In whatever way I consider the situation I am aware of a gulf separating me from the Jew, and no argument on rational grounds will level it ... As a human being the Jew remains a Jew, and I am German. There is honestly no way of getting over this. If I am to love the Jew, then I must have such love bestowed upon me. There is only one person who can give me this, and it is Jesus ... In the love of Jesus I have learnt to love the Jew, and I think I will never lose that love.³⁵

Nationalism and World War I

Another important development was the rise of nationalism in Europe. Until the late 18th century, Europe was divided into larger or smaller kingdoms. After the French Revolution, and especially after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte with his imperial aspirations, regions of common language and culture began to unite into what we recognize today as states. Italy, for example, became a unified state in 1861, Germany in 1871.

Nationalism not only drew new borders between states, it also tended to draw borders between people groups within the state. Nationalistic thinking (influenced by race theory) claimed that the state should only be governed (or even inhabited) by those who ethnically belong to the nation. In the last half of the 19th century political parties in Austria and Germany began to advocate a racially pure state. One such party focused on the Jews, "our misfortune," and called themselves "The League of Anti-Semites."

World War I had left Germany devastated in many ways. At the end of the war in 1918 the value of the German mark was 4.2 to the US dollar. By August 1923 it was one million marks to the dollar, and by November 20 of that year it was 4.2 million million! People actually used money to paper their walls and burned it in their stoves. Many top bankers and financiers in Germany were Jews, and the general public found it easy to blame the Jews for this economic collapse.

35 Superintendent Richard Biedling of Solding, from Graham Keith, *Hated without a Cause*, 222, quoting Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb: The German Evangelical Church and the Jews 1879–1950* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), who quotes from G. M. Löwen, *Die Juden und das Evangelium. Äusserungen hervorragender evangelischer Christen der Gegenwart* (Leipzig, 1913), 11.

The ego of the German people had been dealt a harsh blow in World War I, and they were ripe for a political party with the message of German racial superiority. That party was the National Socialists under Adolph Hitler.

Nazi Theology

Nazism was, of course, not a religion. Nevertheless, it did have its own kind of religious doctrines. These were a strange mixture of Christianity and what we might call the worship of the German spirit. While Germany at the time Hitler arose was about two-thirds Protestant (mostly Lutheran) and only one-third Catholic, several of the top Nazi leaders, including Hitler himself, were born Catholics. Nazi writers and propagandists made use of many Christian terminologies and concepts. Here, for example, are two quotes from Hitler's own *Mein Kampf*:

[The person who has the best interests of his nation at heart] has the sacred duty, each in his own denomination, of making people stop just talking superficially of God's will, and actually fulfill God's will, and not let God's word be desecrated. For God's will gave men their form, their essence and their abilities. Anyone who destroys His work is declaring war on the Lord's creation, the divine will.

[When he heard that World War I had begun:] Even today I am not ashamed to say that, overpowered by stormy enthusiasm, I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time.

The Nazi Party Program of 1920 stated that the party represented the standpoint of what it called "positive Christianity," a phrase that would be used frequently. Such use of spiritual terminology tended to lull Christians into a sense of security.

In addition, the Nazis spoke frequently in a positive way about Martin Luther. Because Catholicism was international while Protestantism had originated in Germany, they tended to see Protestantism as the more natural religion for the German people. Luther was referred to not only as the first Protestant, but as the first German.

Nazi theology faced a serious challenge in the fact that the Bible had originated with the Jews. They solved this in several ways. First of all, they simply dismissed the Old Testament as a Jewish tract that could and should be ignored and removed from the Christian Bible. But what should be done with Jesus, who was Jewish?

Nazi theologians were not ready to accept that Jesus was simply a Jewish Messiah. First of all, they said Jesus' whole character and teaching showed that he could not be a Jew (whose character was well-established in the anti-Semitic mindset). It was obvious that he had to have better roots, in fact German roots. They managed to prove this in an ingenious way.

A certain tradition, going back as far as the 2nd century (it appears in the anti-Christian writings of Celsus), claimed that Jesus was not born of the Holy Spirit but was the product of an adulterous relationship. Jesus' father is named by Celsus as one "Panthera."³⁶ Many theories have been put forth to explain this reference, and no one of them is yet accepted by scholars generally. One theory, however, was adopted by the Nazis. The name Panthera was not uncommon in the Roman world, and it was held by some soldiers. Nazi theologians said that Panthera was a German soldier in the Roman army, and it was he who had gotten Mary pregnant. So, they said, Jesus had an Aryan father.

But what about Mary herself? If she was Jewish, then Jesus was still a Jew, or at least of mixed race. They got around this problem by a device with even less scholarly basis. Mary was said to come from Nazareth, which, they said, had been first settled by immigrants from the east. Mary's ancestors, according to this theory, were Persian, hence she was herself an Aryan (and not Jewish). Thus, with a Persian mother and a German father, Jesus was a pure Aryan and acceptable for German Christianity.

The Nazis and the Churches

The Nazi regime was a totalitarian one. This means that it strove for control everywhere, not only in government but in every aspect of society. With amazing speed Hitler began to put his programs into effect. Just over two months after his appointment as chancellor on January 30, 1933, all non-Aryans were removed from government office. Four weeks later all trade unions were banned as part of a program called *Gleichstaltung*, meaning "coordination" or "synchronization." The goal of this policy was to bring everything in German society into line with Nazi thinking. Two months after removing trade unions, the government banned all political parties except the Nazi Party. It was only a matter of time—and not much time—until it was the turn of the churches to be "brought into line."

At first it seemed that the Nazi government would allow the churches to be autonomous. It soon became clear, however, that such "autonomy" would only be allowed as long as the churches presented no hindrance to the achievement of Nazi goals. While the National Socialist Party did not officially identify with either of the two main Christian churches in Germany, its relations with the Protestants were quite different from its relations with the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church

The most powerful political party in Germany after World War I was the Catholic Center Party. It had resisted the rise of the National Socialist Party, but after Hitler was appointed chancellor it reluctantly supported

36 Origen, *Against Celsus*, I 28. Jewish sources from a bit later (early 3rd century) call him ben Panthira, ben Pandera, or ben Pandira (*Tosefta Hullin* II 22–24). The rabbis being quoted are from the 2nd century.

measures to give him dictatorial powers. When the parliament banned political parties on June 21, 1933, the Catholic Center Party resisted, but under intense pressure it dissolved itself less than two weeks later.

The direction things were taking seemed clear to Catholic leadership, and they sought to guarantee the preservation of their institutions in Germany. In fact, the Catholic Church had been trying to reach an agreement with the German government well before the Nazi rise to power. It was Hitler himself who initiated talks in April 1933. The agreement was signed on July 20 of that year.

This agreement, known as the Concordat, was similar to agreements signed by the church with many governments, and in fact the one signed in Germany in 1933, with a few changes, is still valid today. It was negotiated for the Catholic side by Eugenio Pacelli, who would later be Pope Pius XII. The Concordat guaranteed certain rights and autonomy to the church, including the running of its own schools and other institutions. The church was also limited in certain matters. For example, clergy could not be members of a political party (including the Nazi Party), clergy had to be German, and they had to take an oath of allegiance to the state.

The Nazis had achieved what they wanted: they had a tool to keep the Catholic Church in Germany quiet. The fact that Rome had signed such an agreement with Hitler greatly enhanced his stature on the world stage. Almost immediately, however, the Nazi government began to ignore clauses in the Concordat that were incompatible with its goal to control all aspects of society. Again and again the church protested, and was ignored.

Finally, in 1937, Pope Pius XI issued a letter, named from its opening words "Mit brennender Sorge" (with burning sorrow). Technically it was a pastoral letter, that is, it was sent to the religious leaders in an attempt to correct tendencies toward wrong behavior in the church. However, it was based on the premise that the German government had not met its obligations. "The other contracting party emasculated the terms of the treaty, distorted their meaning, and eventually considered its more or less official violation as a normal policy."

The letter's purpose was to counter Nazi ideas which were gradually finding their way into the thinking of German Catholics. It was read in German churches on Passion Sunday 1937. Here are several excerpts.

In your country, Venerable Brethren, voices are swelling into a chorus urging people to leave the Church, and among the leaders there is more than one whose official position is intended to create the impression that this infidelity to Christ the King constitutes a meritorious act of loyalty to the modern State.

Whoever follows that so-called pre-Christian Germanic conception of substituting a dark and impersonal destiny for the personal God, denies thereby the Wisdom and Providence of God who "Reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly" (Wisdom 8:1). Neither is he a believer in God.

Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community—however necessary and honorable be their function in worldly things—whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds.

None but superficial minds could stumble into concepts of a national God, of a national religion; or attempt to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations before whose immensity they are “as a drop from a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15).

If the State organizes a national youth, and makes this organization obligatory to all, then, without prejudice to rights of religious associations, it is the absolute right of youths as well as of parents to see to it that this organization is purged of all manifestations hostile to the Church and Christianity. These manifestations are even today placing Christian parents in a painful alternative, as they cannot give to the State what they owe to God alone.

Should men, who are not even united by faith in Christ, come and offer you the seduction of a national German Church, be convinced that it is nothing but a denial of the one Church of Christ and the evident betrayal of that universal evangelical mission, for which a world Church alone is qualified and competent.

Should any man dare—in sacrilegious disregard of the essential differences between God and His creature, between the God-man and the children of man—to place a mortal, were he the greatest of all times, by the side of, or over, or against, Christ, he would deserve to be called prophet of nothingness, to whom the terrifying words of Scripture would be applicable: “He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them” (Psalms 2:4).

The letter systematically attacks doctrines of Nazi nation-worship, speaking of “aggressive paganism” and “the myth of race and blood.” To a great extent the Catholic Church had remained silent on such matters for fear of endangering Christians in Germany. However, things had gone so far that the pope had to declare that “there is but one alternative left, that of heroism.” The letter did indeed lead to the arrest of some Catholic leaders and even harsher measures against Catholics.

There is no direct reference in the letter to the lot of the Jews in Germany, and that was not its purpose.

Pope Pius XII

There has been much debate over whether the Roman Catholic Church did enough on behalf of European Jewry in the face of Nazi pursuit of the

"final solution." Particular attention has focused on Pope Pius XII, who took office in March 1939 and continued throughout the war. Did he do enough for the Jews? Let us consider a few facts.

- There is evidence that the Vatican did know about the atrocities being committed by the Nazis against the Jews as early as 1941 or 1942.
- No official statement was issued by Pius XII condemning these activities, not even right after the war.³⁷
- He never excommunicated any Nazi.
- The Vatican assisted in the hiding of large numbers of Jews. The pope personally invited some of them to hide out in papal estates.³⁸
- In September 1943, when the German army demanded a ransom from the Jewish community in Rome, the Vatican helped pay it.
- As soon as the war was over, several Jewish leaders publicly thanked Pius for his efforts on behalf of the Jews during the war. In 1945 Rabbi Herzog of Jerusalem sent a "special blessing" to the pope "for his life-saving efforts on behalf of the Jews during the Nazi occupation of Italy," and in the same year the World Jewish Congress made a large cash gift to the Vatican in appreciation for what the pope had done.
- When Pius died in 1958, Golda Meir, then Israeli ambassador to the UN, eulogized Pius: "We share in the grief of humanity at the passing away of His Holiness Pope Pius XII. In a generation affected by wars and discords, he upheld the highest ideals of peace and compassion. When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the pope was raised for the victims."
- Finally, quotes from two rabbis:

"Even though the 'Final Solution' was a Nazi invention, not a church one, the Pontiff who headed the Roman Catholic Church during the Holocaust period, Pius XII, did nothing to either condemn it or protest against it; his standing by while blood was being shed deserves full condemnation, on behalf of future generations as well." (Rabbi Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel, 2000)

"During the Nazi occupation of Rome, three thousand Jews found refuge at one time at the pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. Amazingly, Castel Gandolfo is never mentioned or discussed in the anti-papal writings of many of the pope's critics. Yet at no other site in Nazi-occupied Europe were as many Jews saved and sheltered for as long a period as at Castel Gandolfo during the Nazi occupation of Rome. Kosher food was provided for the Jews hidden there, where, as George Weigel has noted, Jewish children were born in the private apartments of Pius XII, which became a temporary obstetrical ward." (Rabbi David G. Dalin, 2005, author of *The Pius War: Responses to the*

37 One month after the end of the war, he did condemn Hitler in an address to the College of Cardinals.

38 Right after the war the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli, actually declared his faith in Jesus and joined the Catholic Church, in part because of how he had seen the church behave.

Critics of Pius XII [2004]. Note that Rabbi Lau speaks of Pius' silence while Rabbi Dalin speaks of his actions.)

In fact the accusation that Pius had done nothing was not heard before the 1963 publication of a stage play, *The Deputy*, which accused the pope of collaborating with the Nazis. The author of the play is reported to have admitted later that there was no historical basis for the accusations, but the impression remained. Many have since spoken of Pius XII in terms first appearing in the play. Even so, many prominent Holocaust survivors came to the pope's defense. What is of particular interest is that documents published after the war show that the Nazis thought that Pius was speaking out in favor of the Jews, even though he veiled his statements in non-specific terms,³⁹ and they may even have made plans to kill or kidnap the pope.

Activities of the church

The actions of the Catholic Church around Europe in some ways reflect what we have said about the pope. For the most part Catholics were silent. A document of repentance and reconciliation issued by the church in 1998 says that "many people were altogether unaware of the 'final solution' that was being put into effect against a whole people; others were afraid for themselves and those near to them; some took advantage of the situation; and still others were moved by envy."

Some did speak out, and in some notable cases individuals and members of the clergy were imprisoned, sent to concentration camps, and even put to death for supporting the Jews. Public protests by the pope's representatives in Rumania (1941) and Slovakia (1942) led to the temporary stopping of deportations to concentration camps.

While public action on behalf of the Jews was effectively impossible in areas under Nazi control, many positive stories came to light after the war. Church offices in Hungary and other countries issued Jews false baptismal certificates, because at that time baptized Jews were being left alone by the Germans (Friedman, *Roads*, 415). In some cases the baptisms were actually carried out, although more often the certificate was pure fiction. Even so, priests were often made to swear before a judge that the baptized Jews were valid members of their congregations (Snoek, *The Grey Book*, 26–29). Unlike the attitude of the church in the Middle Ages, where a baptism was considered binding even if it was done by force, these baptisms were viewed by the church as a means to save lives.

39 In 1942 Pius XII began preparing a statement condemning Nazi persecution of Jews. However, events showed him what might be the expected response. In July of that year the archbishop of Utrecht in the Netherlands issued a letter protesting against German persecution of Jews in Holland. The Nazis immediately rounded up large numbers of Jews and non-Aryan Catholics and shipped them to death camps. Many feel that the pope decided that quiet diplomacy and action would, in the long run, save more lives than angering the Nazis with a public statement.

Similar "mercy baptisms" were carried out by almost all churches, including Protestant and Orthodox.

It has been estimated (Lapide, *Three Popes*) that efforts by the Catholic Church as an institution may have saved between 700,000 and 860,000 Jewish lives.

The Protestant churches

As we have already noted, the greatest part of German Christianity belonged to the Lutheran Church. At first the Nazi program was to work within the church framework, while at the same time "synchronizing" the church to fit into Nazi control of all aspects of society.

In Hitler's first year in office, he formed the "Protestant Reich Church" by merging all of Germany's regional churches into one national church with its own bishop, the Reich Bishop, Ludwig Müller. This was in fact an outgrowth of a movement known as "German Christians," which had begun formally in 1932. The emphasis was definitely on "German" and much less on "Christian." It was based on "good Aryan blood."⁴⁰ The foundation for this church was that same "positive Christianity" that we referred to above. This meant purifying Christianity of Jewish elements, some going even so far as to remove the entire Old Testament. This had been done by others in church history, but always on theological grounds, not racial ones.

The experiment did not last long, even though there continued to be "German Christians" and theorists of the Protestant Reich Church even after the war started. Practically, however, the Nazi government stopped its cooperation even with the racist church within three or four years.

At the rise of Nazism there were about 17,000 pastors in Germany. Of these approximately 3,000 joined the Reich Church. While many remained outside of political struggles, there arose a significant movement of pastors who opposed the Reich Church and its very unchristian Nazi theology. This movement, known as the Confessing Church, actually had its beginnings in protest over the unconventional way in which Müller was elected president of the Reich Church. Among many other things it was opposed to the official anti-Semitic stand of the Reich Church. In particular, these opposition pastors rejected the treatment of members of their congregations who were of Jewish background. The Reich Church had also decided that no man of Jewish origin, or whose wife had Jewish ancestry, could serve as pastor.

Many pastors of the Confessing Church were removed from their pulpits and arrested; some were sent to concentration camps, and some died there. Thus did the Nazis deal with public protest.

So as not to give a distorted picture, only a few Protestant leaders actively opposed the Nazi regime. The great majority did not publicly challenge the discrimination and anti-Semitic actions.

40 In September 1933 the German Christians formally adopted an "Aryan paragraph," under which all non-Aryans (that is, Jewish converts) were removed from church offices.

Would protest have helped? Should the churches have protested even if they thought it would not help? Should they have protested if they believed it would make things worse? These are questions which are difficult for anyone to answer, who was not in the situation.

There is evidence that public protest may have done some small amount of good, although perhaps only temporarily. The Nazi doctrine of racial purity meant eliminating not only non-Aryans from society, but also “imperfect” Aryans. Almost as soon as they took power, they instituted a secret program of euthanasia, in which they killed the mentally ill, people thought to be terminally ill, and others. When this program came to light—after tens of thousands of deaths—there was a public protest which included Protestant and Catholic leaders. Hitler ordered that the program stop, but shortly afterward it was resumed again in greater secrecy, and expanded to include even more categories of “undesirables.” While this shows that the Nazis could be influenced by protest, it also indicates that protest may not have had a very lasting effect.

Unofficial Christian response

In the course of this book we have seen mixed attitudes among Christians toward Jews. For the most part, especially from the Middle Ages, the average Christian had very negative opinions of Jews, even if he had never met one. He was also quite capable of supporting violence against Jews because he had been taught that they were the enemies of God. While it is true that the lot of the Jews had improved somewhat in Europe by the 20th century, the old prejudices were very slow to die among the common people.

While it is now considered unlikely that anyone outside the very highest German ranks knew of the extent of German extermination of Jews, many or most had some idea that something was being done against Jews on a large scale. As one researcher has put it, “They knew enough to know that it was better not to know more.”⁴¹

Where the Nazis took control, they usually enlisted local help to locate and arrest Jews. While there were some Christians who endangered themselves by hiding Jews, there were many more who cooperated. Polish peasants, for example, killed Jews and delivered their bodies to the occupying army for one kilogram of sugar per Jew. Rarely did church officials interfere.

41 David Bankier, “The Germans and the Holocaust: What Did They Know?” in *Yad Vashem Studies* XX, Jerusalem, 1990.

12. The Relationship between the Church and the Jewish People Today

Introduction

After World War II a new phrase entered into the vocabulary of those writing about relations between the church and the Jews: “after Auschwitz.” These two words indicate that something changed, that the church could never again relate to the Jews as it had before; the Holocaust had changed all that. Most agreed that the murder of six million Jews in a nominally “Christian” European country would force the church to search its soul and to make fundamental changes in the way it related to its “elder brother.” Some Christians went so far as to announce that Christians no longer had the moral right to preach the gospel to Jews.

The subject of how the churches today relate to the Jewish people could fill a whole series of books, much more than a simple chapter in one book. In this chapter we will not attempt to cover the subject comprehensively. We will merely highlight a few matters that are of special interest to us.

What Do We Teach our Children?

For many Christians, most or all of what they know about Jews comes from their Bible—or what they were taught about the Bible. This means that their earliest (and most formative) impression of Jews came in Sunday school.

In 1963, Bernhard Olson published the results of a study of thousands of units of Sunday school material. Among other things, the study investigated how Jews were being portrayed in this material. Olson used lessons from four Christian publishing houses, ranging from very liberal to conservative evangelical. The results were not encouraging. In addition to an uncritical use of passages from the gospels, there was frequently a jump from something that happened in Jesus’ time to a contemporary application. Here is a representative comment on Matthew 10:24–25:

The Gospels illustrate how bitterly Jesus was hated by the Jews. The Pharisees called Him Beelzebub (or Beelzebul), a revolting title,

which they applied to Satan. Cp. 12:24. Similarly the Jews and other enemies of the Church have called the Christians all kinds of bad names.

The Matthew text only says, "if they have called the master of the house Be-el'zebul." The cross reference would seem to be Matthew 12:24, which attributes the saying to Pharisees. There is no reference in either passage to "Jews," which is rarely used by Matthew. Note how the Sunday school material calls "the Jews" the enemies of the church. If the child does know of Jews in his own time (including perhaps his own playmates), he has now been given the idea that these contemporary people call Jesus and Christians bad names.

According to Olson, the more fundamentalist the material, the more its writers tended to take the text literally, without bringing in any explanation of its background. Also, the more fundamentalist and evangelical the group publishing the material, the more likely it was to contain anti-Semitic material.

About ten years after the appearance of Olson's book, another scholar, Gerald Strober, did a follow-up study to see how Olson's findings had influenced the content of Sunday school material. First of all, Strober found that very little had changed. The only publisher which had taken Olson's results seriously was the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. In lessons describing the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, they now told the story in the first person: "We shouted, 'Crucify him'; 'We nailed him to the cross.'"

Strober noted other trends in the material he examined. The Judaism of Jesus' day is portrayed as dry and dead. Rarely is it mentioned that Jesus and his disciples were Jewish. The rejection of Jesus is normally described as a national action, including all Jews from all time. On this last point Strober makes an important comment: "Conservative Protestants lay particular stress on the individual's relationship to Jesus; yet apparently they are so blinded by handed-down distortions that they cannot perceive the Jewish response to Jesus as a matter of individual decision."

Other studies have been done more recently, and they indicate that there is some positive movement in how the Jews are presented in material for Christian children. Here again, however, the more conservative groups have been slower to change.

Formal Statements

The Roman Catholic Church

The decades since World War II have brought significant changes in official church attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. Clergymen and scholars from the Roman Catholic Church have led the way. Perhaps the earliest declaration came in August 1947 in the Swiss town of Seelisberg. It was issued by a joint group of Jews and Christians (both Catholics and Protestants) and included ten points. Here are three of those points:

Avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.

Avoid using the word "Jews" in the exclusive sense of the enemies of Jesus, and the words "the enemies of Jesus" to designate the whole Jewish people.

Avoid presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon all Jews or upon Jews alone. It was only a section of the Jews in Jerusalem who demanded the death of Jesus, and the Christian message has always been that it was the sins of mankind which were exemplified by those Jews and the sins in which all men share that brought Christ to the Cross.

Great momentum was added to the wind of change in the Catholic Church with the Second Vatican Council, which opened in October 1962 at the initiative of Pope John XXIII.⁴² The Council issued a declaration called *Nostra Aetate* (from its opening words, "In our time"), which dealt with how the Roman Catholic Church should relate to other religions.

Nostra Aetate includes a long and positive section on the Jewish people. Here are several excerpts:

The church cannot forget that it received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant. Nor can it forget that it draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (see Rom 11:17–24). The church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (see Eph 2:14,16).

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize God's moment when it came (see Luke 19:42). Jews for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed its spread (see Rom 11:28). Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (see John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from Holy Scripture.

Indeed, the church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, its common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration,

42 In the years before and during World War II, Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) had frequently come to the aid of Jews threatened by the Nazis. His actions are reported to have saved the lives of over 100,000 Jews.

but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, it deplors all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time or from any source. The church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all, so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the church, therefore, in its preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

While it is not stated directly, it is clearly implied in the last paragraph quoted that the church is in no way denying its duty to preach the gospel. This is even clearer in an earlier paragraph stating how Christians should relate to all non-Christians: [The Church] "proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (see 2 Cor 5:18–19), people find the fullness of their religious life."

Nostra Aetate was generally received positively by Jews. There were those who objected that it did not go far enough, that the Catholic Church should have renounced all attempts to evangelize Jews. This, of course, the church has not been ready to do. At about ten year intervals Rome has issued expansions on *Nostra Aetate* and guidelines on how it should be applied practically in teaching. Each pope since John XXIII has been supportive of the movement for reconciliation with the Jewish community. Unlike some Protestant denominations, as we shall see presently, there has been no compromise on the church's obligation to declare the gospel.

Orthodox churches

Official contacts between Orthodox churches and the Jewish community have been far less than those between Catholics and Jews. Several isolated statements have condemned anti-Semitism, and there have been some joint commissions to discuss common traditions regarding Scripture, but in total there has not been much. Partly this is because the Orthodox churches, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, do not have a single leader or hierarchical structure.

Additionally, Orthodox churches find it much more difficult than other churches to change old ways of teaching. This is because the traditions of the church fathers have become part of Orthodox doctrine and cannot be separated from the teaching of Scripture. In this, Orthodox Christianity is more like Judaism than it is like Catholicism. This is a remarkable position, and in order to understand it better, we will bring a quotation from an Orthodox writer:⁴³

43 Yuri Tabak, "Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Judaism: Past and Present," in *Jews of Euro-Asia* (Euro-Asian Jewish Congress), 1 (2003), www.eajc.org/publish_gen_e.php?rowid=17.

Thus the Western churches had the opportunity in the second half of the twentieth century to develop a new position in relation to Judaism. Unlike them, the Russian Orthodox Church has not taken such steps, being wholly governed by the writings of the holy fathers about the Jews "who crucified Christ." Russian Orthodox teaching still rests on medieval preconceptions; thus the most extreme Orthodox anti-Semites can logically claim that their monstrous anti-Jewish invective is based upon "Church teaching."

If, for example, St John Chrysostom, one of the most esteemed church fathers, called the Jews "unclean and foul" and the synagogue "a refuge of demons," then, given the accepted sanctity of Holy Tradition, the Orthodox Christian has no cause to think otherwise. Indeed nearly all of the most respected church fathers are not distanced from him in their attitudes towards the Jews, including the most respected church activists from Bishop Ignatij Bryanchaninov to St John of Kronstadt. Conversely, there is to our knowledge not even one church father who has professed a genuine love for the Jews in accordance with the Biblical commandments.

In 1991 Aleksii II, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, addressed the rabbis of New York, calling them "brothers" and rejecting all forms of anti-Semitism. However, this met with strong protest from various quarters of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the initiative of Aleksii seems to have fallen to the ground. Strong anti-Semitic writings continue to issue from the pens of other Orthodox leaders.⁴⁴

Protestant churches

The lack of organizational unity among the Orthodox churches is, of course, far more pronounced among the Protestant churches. Each denomination has its own dynamic regarding Judaism and Jews. All denominations of any significant size have some kind of contact or dialogue with Jews, and many of the statements issued by the various churches are similar.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed in August 1948. Its membership included almost all Orthodox churches and many Protestant and independent churches. Today it has a membership of over 340 churches. Its membership does not include the Roman Catholic Church, which, nevertheless, has close ties with the WCC. One of the documents issued by the Council's first assembly included a chapter entitled "The Christian Approach to the Jews." The first point of this report, entitled "The Church's commission to preach the Gospel to all men," declared that "All of our churches stand under the commission of our common Lord, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' The

44 For an overview of attempts at dialogue between Orthodox and Jews, see Petra Heldt, "A Brief History of Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Jews," *Immanuel* 26/27 (1994), 211–224.

fulfillment of this commission requires that we include the Jewish people in our evangelistic task.” The first recommendation at the end of the report repeats this:

1. To the member churches of the World Council we recommend:
 - that they seek to recover the universality of our Lord’s commission by including the Jewish people in their evangelistic work;
 - that they encourage their people to seek for brotherly contact with and understanding of their Jewish neighbours, and cooperation in agencies combating misunderstanding and prejudice;
 - that in mission work among the Jews they scrupulously avoid all unworthy pressures or inducements;
 - that they give thought to the preparation of ministers well fitted to interpret the Gospel to Jewish people and to the provision of literature which will aid in such a ministry.

While this positive approach to the Jewish people has continued in subsequent WCC statements, the exhortation to witness to Jews has been gradually replaced with emphasis on dialogue.

(1967) We all have to realize that Christian words have now become disqualified and suspect in the ears of most Jews. Therefore often the best, and sometimes perhaps even the only, way in which Christians today can testify to the Jewish people about their faith in Christ may be not so much in explicit words but by service.

(1982) There are Christians who view a mission to the Jews as having a very special salvific significance, and those who believe the conversion of the Jews to be the eschatological event that will climax the history of the world. There are those who would place no special emphasis on a mission to the Jews, but would include them in the one mission to all those who have not accepted Christ as their Saviour. There are those who believe that a mission to the Jews is not part of an authentic Christian witness, since the Jewish people finds its fulfilment in faithfulness to God’s covenant of old.

(2004) In dialogue we strive towards mutual respect. Dialogue partners are responsible for hearing and listening to the self-understanding of each other’s faith. Trust and confidence comes from allowing partners to define themselves, refraining from proselytism, and providing an opportunity for mutual questioning, and if appropriate justified criticism. Such practices promote an informed understanding of each other, which becomes the basis for all other relationships.

Among many religious communities, we come across people who seem to be primarily interested in the growth of their own community through various forms of mission including proselytism. They seem to have little interest in dialogue or may make use of it to further their missionary design. Such situations can be discouraging for people willing to engage in dialogue.

While there is talk of "witness," it has come to mean lifestyle without open attempts to convince. The word "proselytization" is treated very negatively.

WCC statements are very much an exercise in internal compromise. Some member churches would prefer to speak more forcefully in favor of witnessing to Jews. Others, like many churches in Germany, go to the other extreme, rejecting witness to Jews in any form. Here are some quotes from a document produced in 1995 by the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Hamburg (Germany).

The productive encounters between Jews and Christians still experience one obstacle in particular: the churches have not yet expressed a clear, unambiguous, authority supported renunciation of mission to Jews.

Only if the churches clearly refuse to missionize Jews, is their fight against anti-Judaism within the church and against every form of antisemitism in society really plausible.

Mission to Jews did not only become historically obsolete, it is also in conflict with biblical findings. The mission command Mt 28:19f. says that the disciples are sent out to bring the teaching of Jesus, that is his interpretation of the Torah, to the gentile nations in the world, that is not to the Jews who already have and guard the Torah.

The Executive Board ... asks all Christian churches in Hamburg, their responsible leaders and committees, to stand unequivocally with the Jews who live in our midst and with the Jewish communities by declaring publicly that a "Mission to Israel" is inconsistent with Christian faith.⁴⁵

In the last generation many churches—many of them members of the WCC—have issued their own official statements about their relations with the Jewish people. They are generally positive toward the Jews, condemn the Holocaust and manifestations of anti-Semitism, and call for their members to make efforts to understand Jews and Judaism better. Some of them even include long explanations of Judaism in a positive light.

In recent years some churches have pursued an active policy of joint services with a local synagogue. Rabbis are invited to deliver sermons in the church, and pastors are invited to the synagogue, where they give a sermon that will not offend the Jewish listeners.

By way of contrast, some evangelical churches have insisted on keeping evangelism as their first priority, ahead of dialogue. In 1996 the Southern Baptist Convention issued its own declaration, which read in part:

There has been an organized effort on the part of some either to deny that Jewish people need to come to their Messiah, Jesus, to be

45 www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=976.

saved; or to claim, for whatever reason, that Christians have neither right nor obligation to proclaim the gospel to the Jewish people.

We are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom 1:16).

We recommit ourselves to prayer, especially for the salvation of the Jewish people as well as for the salvation of "every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9); and ... we direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people.

Dabru Emet

On September 10, 2000, there appeared in the New York Times a full-page advertisement sponsored by the National Jewish Scholars Project. It was in fact a document entitled "Dabru Emet [Speak Truth], A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity," signed by over 170 Jewish scholars and rabbis. In fact this was a response to declarations that had been made by various churches. Here are the paragraph titles, each of which was expanded in the text:

Jews and Christians worship the same God.

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book.

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.

Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.

The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.

A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.

Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.

Dabru Emet received a mixed reception, especially among Jewish leaders. The most controversial part of the declaration was the paragraph on Christians and the Holocaust, which read in part,

Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians.

Some Jewish commentators felt this was too easy on Christians. Even some Christian commentators thought it did not go far enough.

Criticism was also leveled—by both Jews and Christians—against the first paragraph, which declared that Jews and Christians worship the same God. Some Christians felt that the statement was inaccurate, or at least misleading, in ignoring the revelation of Jesus, while some Jews said that the statement should have clearly stated that Judaism sees Christianity as *avodah zara*, idolatry.

Christian Zionism

Most of us are aware that the modern political Zionist movement began with Theodor Herzl, toward the end of the 19th century. We may also be familiar with other Jewish thinkers from earlier in that century, names like Alkalai, Kalischer, and Pinsker, who had begun to write about the need for the Jews to return to their homeland. It may come as a surprise, however, to learn that some Christians had begun to write similar things long before, as early as the 16th century. The first writers were British and American Puritans.⁴⁶

The early Puritan writers not only believed and wrote that God had not abandoned the Jewish people, as was being taught in most of the church, but they even affirmed that God would bring them back to their land. This belief was tied up inseparably with the idea that the Jewish people would turn and believe in Jesus as Messiah. There were even those who tried to work actively for the Jewish return to the land. We have already seen in an earlier chapter how Oliver Cromwell, in the mid-17th century, was convinced to let Jews into England on the argument that they had to return to the land of Israel from all the nations. The earlier Christian pro-Zionist writings maintain the idea of preaching the gospel to Jews. One of the foremost Christian pro-Zionists of the 19th century, Lord Shaftesbury, was also president of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.⁴⁷

The Christian Zionist movement gained momentum, but also underwent changes, in the latter half of the 19th century, with the rise of a theological system called Dispensationalism. The dispensationalists placed great weight on the literal fulfillment of prophecies concerning Israel, where "Israel" was to be understood in a physical sense. Dispensationalist theology tried to explain what seemed to some to be opposing theologies of the Old and New Testaments. It did this by dividing history into seven (or six) distinct periods ("dispensations") of God's dealings with mankind.

The literal/physical approach to prophecy fulfillment meant that there would come a time when the people physically descended from Jacob would one day return to the land once inhabited by their forefathers.

46 For an overview of what has been called "Christian pro-Zionism," see Janet S. Ross, "Beyond Zionism: Evangelical Responsibility to Israel," *Mishkan* 12 (1990), 8–27.

47 *Ibid.*, 11.

Most dispensationalists believe that it is right to evangelize Jews, but many do not think the Jewish people will come to faith in Jesus in any numbers until Jesus himself returns to begin a reign of one thousand years on earth. Some even prefer not to evangelize, saying that Christians should only give social and material aid to Jews, and political support to the State of Israel.

Christian Zionists subsequently came to be identified with dispensationalism, a theology which had not been developed when the Puritan pro-Zionists were writing. This new theological element has had the effect of making present-day Christian Zionism less evangelistic than its predecessors.

The Christian Zionist idea (Christian Zionists often prefer the term “Biblical Zionism”) was behind the founding of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem in 1980, in reaction to the removal of thirteen national embassies from the city.

Throughout most of our survey, Christian actions toward Jews have been characterized by anti-Semitism and the attitude that Jews can do nothing right. Many Christian Zionists seem to go to the opposite extreme, emphasizing that the Jews are the people of God, a people and State that can do little wrong.

Lausanne Committee on Jewish Evangelism

In one of those interesting coincidences of history, that same year, 1980, when the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem was founded, saw the start of an evangelical movement dedicated to sharing the gospel with the Jewish people. The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism (LCWE) began its work in 1974. During its consultation in Pattaya, Thailand, in June 1980, there were “mini-consultations” which discussed reaching specific people groups. Out of the group for “Reaching the Jewish People” was established the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

Since 1980, the LCJE has expanded from its initial twenty participants to include chapters in North America, Europe, Israel, South Africa, Australia, Japan, and Latin America. Members meet for international consultations every three or four years, and there are more frequent regional gatherings. The LCJE has become a network for sharing between many groups dedicated to Jewish evangelism. It is probably no exaggeration to say that for the first time in history, evangelism of the Jewish people is being approached systematically on a worldwide basis.⁴⁸

Anti-Semitism and Opposition to the State of Israel

Most would agree that the “nation” of Israel was formed at the time of the exodus from Egypt and the subsequent giving of the Torah. Forty

⁴⁸ The information in this section is taken primarily from David Harley, “The Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism,” *Mishkan* 1 (1984), 58–60. See also www.lcje.net.

years later, according to the biblical account, the people of Israel began to take control of the land God had promised to Abraham. The conquest lasted about one generation. The people enjoyed sovereignty over their land for about 450 years in the north and for another 120 years in the south. From 587 BC until the Maccabean victories, the people and their land were under occupation. The period of Hasmonean rule lasted for about one hundred years. From then (63 BC) until 1948, the Jews never exercised sovereignty over the land of Israel. All of this means that in the 3,200 year history of the nation of Israel, they have had sovereign control of the land (what we could call a "state") for roughly 750 years.

The focus of the biblical prophets is rarely—if ever—on the establishment of a state. Instead they speak of the return of the exiled people to their land.⁴⁹ It is the presence of the people in the land that seems more important than who is in control. From this point of view, the aliyah of the 1880s may have been of greater prophetic significance than the creation of the state in 1948.

Even with the new positive attitude of many Christian churches toward Jews, some have found it difficult to be as positive about the State of Israel. While Christian Zionists affirm without reservation that the foundation of the state was an act of God, this idea has not been accepted by all Christians (and indeed not even by all Jews).

The existence of the State of Israel has brought a new dynamic to the discussion of anti-Semitism. Some who have criticized actions of the State of Israel have been accused of anti-Semitism. Similar accusations can sometimes be heard against those who oppose Zionism. One can even get the impression from some extreme Christian Zionists that the measure of a person's Christian faith is whether or not that person supports Israel. These are questions that are being debated in our own day. While we do not have the space here to go into these questions, they are important ones to ask and to discuss.

Replacement and Two-covenant Theologies

While we have generally limited our survey in this book to historical developments and have avoided discussing theologies, we will close this chapter with a brief look at two conflicting Christian theologies regarding the Jewish people.

*Replacement theology*⁵⁰

In an earlier chapter we saw how, as early as the second century, some church writers were claiming that the church is now Israel. Over the centuries, this doctrine has developed into different forms. Some have said that the new covenant in Jesus has replaced the old covenant made at

49 For example, Deut 30:3–4; Isa 43:5–8. Passages that might be understood to predict Jewish sovereignty in the land: Jer 23:3–8; 32:37–44; Ezek 11:17.

50 See *Mishkan* 21 (1994).

Mount Sinai, while others have said that the church has now become the valid holder of the Mosaic covenant, which the Jews failed to live up to. This second idea is sometimes called Covenant Theology. There are other variations. The bottom line is that the Jews are no longer the people of God; that privilege now belongs to the church. The church has replaced the Jewish people as "Israel."

*Two-covenant theology*⁵¹

In modern times we have seen the appearance of an almost-opposite idea: Not only has God not rejected the Jews, they have their own special covenant by which they will be saved, and they do not need Jesus. According to this idea, the covenant in the blood of Jesus was God's provision for everyone with whom he had not already made a covenant, in other words, for everyone except Jews. Not surprisingly, this theology was first suggested by a Jew. In the summer of 1913, Franz Rosenzweig had decided to be baptized as a Christian. Before doing so, he thought he would visit the synagogue one last time on Yom Kippur. He came away from that experience with the "revelation" that Jews have their own covenant with God and do not need Jesus. Rosenzweig was even ready to acknowledge the truth of Jesus' saying in John 14:6—"no one comes to the Father, but by me"—because, he said, Jews do not need to come to the Father, they are already with him.

Two-covenant theology has been adopted by many Christian theologians, and even by entire Protestant denominations. It is these, of course, who find it easiest to conduct a dialogue with Jewish groups.

The Place of Messianic Jews in the Dialogue

Throughout this book we have encountered Jews who became believers in Jesus. Too often they were the initiators of official actions against Jews. Gradually, over the last couple of centuries, the phenomenon of Jews who believe in Jesus has become more of a movement and not just individual names. The occurrence of Jewish believers who attack other Jews or instigate persecutions seems to have become a thing of the past.

While it is not the purpose of this book to go into the subject of Messianic Judaism, we do wish to look briefly at the place occupied by Messianic Jews today in the dialogue between Jews and Christians. The picture was, in fact, summed up well by Mitch Glaser in an article in *Mishkan*⁵² in 2002. Jewish groups and organizations have consistently refused to enter into dialogue with Messianic Jews. Those Christian denominations that are having discussions with Jews are doing so on the tacit condition that Messianic Jews will not be present. Glaser documents several attempts to arrange discussions between Jews and evangelical groups. When the

51 See *Mishkan* 11 (1989).

52 Mitch Glaser, "Authentic Dialogue between Messianic and Non-Messianic Jews ... A Miracle Could Happen Here!", *Mishkan* 36 (2002), 87–96.

evangelicals have insisted that a Messianic Jew be present at the discussions, all attempts at dialogue have failed.

Until now Rabbinic Judaism has consistently refused to even consider the legitimacy of faith in Jesus by a Jew. In an article generally endorsed by all streams of Judaism, Laurence Schiffman⁵³ listed steps that should be taken to exclude Messianic Jews:

- denial of membership or honors in synagogues and/or Jewish communal organizations
- exclusion from burial in Jewish cemeteries
- refusal of Jewish communal funds to support any activities of Hebrew Christian or Messianic Jewish groups
- exclusion from access to Jewish communal facilities or mailing lists.

This brings into perspective the limitations on relations between Jews and Christians in our time. Christian partners in a potential dialogue may have to choose between good relations with their Jewish neighbors and loyalty to brothers and sisters in the faith who are themselves Jewish.

Summary

The sixty years since World War II have seen definite improvements in the relations between Christians and Jews. This does not mean that Christian anti-Semitism has disappeared; far from it. It takes generations to change traditional ways of thinking, and official statements by church leaders help only slightly to encourage such changes.

Attempts to change attitudes and long-standing doctrines have also resulted in some rather extreme swings, which tend at times to remove Jesus from the center of Christian thinking. On the one hand, there is an increasingly positive attitude toward Jews and a willingness to respect Judaism. That is clearly an improvement over the centuries of hatred and persecution. However, in some parts of the church the positive attitudes have moved to other extremes. The gospel has been sacrificed by some on the altar of mutual respect and dialogue. Others have placed Jews so much on a pedestal that they almost treat them as more than human.

Jewish attitudes toward the church and its gospel have undoubtedly changed considerably since the days when that gospel was first proclaimed. The intervening two thousand years of friction between Judaism and Christianity have made it much harder for Jews today to listen to the preaching of Jesus than it was for their ancestors on Shavuot in the year 30, as recorded in Acts.

53 Laurence H. Schiffman, "Meeting the Challenge: Hebrew Christians and the Jewish Community," originally prepared by the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York Task Force on Missionaries and Cults, 1993.

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