

Richard Millman

A History of Antisemitism in the World

agenda

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Preface

Hatred towards Jews has been around for millenniums. As a student of this malady I'm never surprised at the tenacity and continuity of the prejudice. Watching a steep increment in Judeophobia in the aftermath of the Gaza war of 2009, one is all the more convinced of the visceral dimension of antisemitism. As an historian one feels the need to recount objectively events. The events though have not been encouraging. Sporadic and violent attacks against Jews have increased dramatically. Nevertheless one has to guard against exaggerating, as many Jews have never been touched by antisemitism. Still there are victims and the threat is there. Society should be encouraged to do more to combat antisemitism. However in the final analysis it is the Jews who are the victims and it is for the Jews to do more to find a solution. Throughout this study one has the feeling that the Jews could have done more. As the proceeding chapters will reveal Jews were often distracted by other peoples' problems or certain ideologies that did not serve them well. Here it seems that for the situation to change, Jews will have to change and take more responsibility for their welfare.

As far the research itself goes, the study does not attempt to be an encyclopaedia on antisemitism throughout the ages. We have no desire to try and list the preponderance of the reported acts and abuses of this hatred in the world. Such an undertaking would be impossible in a one volume work, if at all. Rather our goals are more modest. Here we are concerned with highlighting certain periods and certain countries. While we do definitely delve profoundly into this hatred, deeds, insults et al, we are also concerned with uncovering long term trends about antisemitism and Jewish reaction to it. The reader will observe that our discussion is weighted towards the modern period and towards the West. The modern period because it is then that some Jews began to change and accept the negative stereotypes about Jewry, that were abound in society. Then too, it was in the modern period when being Jewish -in the eye of the other- had more to do with one's birth rather than one's religion. Previously we are told by historians of earlier periods,that prejudices towards Jews were usually based on religion. Now the message was starting to be, you cannot change, no matter what you do or do not believe in, you will always be considered a Jew.

In the modern era Jewish migration was generally towards the West. Cities like Berlin, Paris, New York emitted splendid hope in the minds of Jews. Even today after the Holocaust Germany is a rare country where the Jewish population is increasing. France, for its part (helped by its infusion of Sephardic Jews from North Africa), has the most elevated Jewish population in Europe and second only to the USA which houses easily the majority of the Jews of the diaspora. If trends continue, the Jewish population in eastern Europe along with those from Muslim domains may become extinct or at least marginalized. In the modern era (Israel aside) the West was (and is) the place where Jews hoped to settle and be considered as equal to other citizens. Western culture was (and is) admired by many Jews who aspired to assimilate in western lands.

This study took many years to complete, and was helped to become actualized with the help -to varying degrees- of the following people: Isaac Alteras, Shlomo Avineri, Arthur Hertzberg, Michael Korn, Konrad Kwiet, Vivian Liska, Jean-Marie Mayeur, René Rémond, and Eugen Weber.

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I wish as well to thank Danièle Séror-Millman for her superb contribution to this work as well as to dedicate the book to her.

Richard Millman, March 2009

Introduction

The Jewish People have made a magnificent contribution to society. In religion, with monotheism and the Bible, Jews rendered the world with unequalled gifts. Jewish humanism, which has benefited untold millions, springs as well from Jewish religious teachings. The superb involvement of the Jews in the sciences, medicine, law, finance, education, the theatre and the arts, has left an unparalleled legacy. For some of these latter contributions Jews have often received compensation. That is to say, many of them have lived a life enriched with recognition and financial reward. The average Jew today, in various countries like the United States, Canada, France, England etc., earns more money than his gentile counterpart: More or less as he did a hundred years ago in Germany, Austria and Hungary.

Yet Jews were in certain places and in certain times (and possibly still are) one of the least liked people that inhabited the earth. This has been particularly noticed in later periods. This does not mean that antisemitism has always dominated Jewish history. Not so. There have been eras in various countries when Jews have hardly had to contend with such. However, despite the vicissitudes of this redoubtable prejudice its eradication has proven unattainable.

In the Middle Ages, Jews for reasons that will be later discussed, lived a separate and different existence. Later, they then entered the gentile world. However, all was not well. In fact, much of modern Jewish history, the hub of it in essence, has been the attempt by Jews to “normalize” their condition in gentile society. Time and time again, Jewish scholars and observers have insisted that antisemitism was at last being eliminated, or at least being marginalized: Yet time and time again a new wave appeared, sometimes more lethal than the previous one.

In the twentieth century and particularly from 1948 onward- with the rebirth of the state of Israel- a new hatred was born, anti-Zionism. Here too objections were fierce to this Jewish effort to normalize its condition in Israel. Here too after ferocious efforts to eliminate a Jewish presence, experts informed everyone that peace was at hand. Throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, we were

told—usually by Jews— that the Jewish condition was finally being normalized. The world was ready to accord the Jews in Israel as well as the Diaspora, recognition and security. Yet the years 2000-2008 proved to be some of the worst in recent memory, as antisemitism and anti-Zionism came again to the fore.

One country where Jews have suffered less from antisemitism than most is France. In addition, Jews have successfully penetrated into many aspects of French society. Yet according to some, France appeared to take the lead with its sharp rise in antisemitic deeds at the turn of the century. The new century bore witness to a threefold increase in grave antisemitic incidents in that Republic [1]. While the rise in antisemitic violence was less dramatic in the United States and the United Kingdom, numbers of Jews in these special countries felt concern and even fear as well.

Previous studies on antisemitism have spoken little of the Jews themselves, other than their familiar role as the victim. Antisemitic behaviour and attitudes however, are not only limited to gentiles. Even beyond Jewish antisemites and Jewish self-hatred, Jews will be examined in this report. Wherein this study concentrates on the Diaspora, and the state of Israel is rarely mentioned, it often seems not far from the surface.

In modern times, both in Israel and the Diaspora, Jews have accomplished amazing feats. They nevertheless have often overlooked their own needs as a people in a hostile world. They failed to realize how detested they could be. Because they were frequently better educated and wealthier, some thought that they knew what was best: for the Arabs, the Blacks, Christian society, the Germans, the workers and others. They thought that they were being charitable when they told these others what was best for them. However, they were not listening to these others and inadvertently repeatedly created resentment that rebounded on Jewry. They have repeatedly displayed poor political judgement that has helped to bring about difficulties. When others warned that he meant business, some of their more illustrious sons haughtily scoffed at Adolph Hitler. The feeling here is that Jews could have done more for their own defence. How much more remains impossible to gage.

One of the problems among some, was that in addition to not listening, they didn't see themselves as being Jewish, or at least not all that Jewish. Even

some of those who saw themselves as being Jewish didn't realize how this in itself could create hatred towards them.

Early on it was the followers of the Jewish religion that could be subjected to prejudice and even persecution. However with time, and particularly in the modern age, birth was to become very important. Antisemites would target people of Jewish descent (especially if they were born to a mother of Jewish origin) whether they practised the Jewish religion or not. Even people who converted to other religions were often vulnerable to antisemitic attacks. In fact, as we shall see, people converting out of the Jewish religion at times suffered from antisemitic attacks, more than practising Jews as they could be seen as being opportunists and people of weak character who were just trying to circumvent antisemitic restrictions and prejudices.

Istvan Deak has stated in his book on Weimar Germany that "Not only the Rightists, but many liberals and Jewish writers ... diligently qualified anyone a Jew who had at least one Jewish parent. Even less did it occur to anyone to treat such converts as Karl Marx and the conservative theoretician Friedrich Julius Stahl or the antisemitic Jew Walter Rathenau as non-Jews"[2]. In the same vein Peter Gay has written "Everyone understood –everyone, philosemite and antisemite alike that even those former Jews who had repudiated Judaism by religious conversion... were still...Jews... Berlin was full of Jewish agnostics, Jewish atheists, Jewish Catholics, and Jewish Lutherans" [3].

As for the definition of an antisemite, Jean-Paul Sartre has provided us with the following: "If a person attributes all or part of his personal problems or that of the country he lives in, to the presence of Jewish elements in the community, and if he proposes to remedy these problems by depriving the Jews of certain rights or by excluding them of certain economic and social functions or by expelling them ... or by exterminating them, one can say he is an antisemite"[4].

Notes

Due to space constraints we have not added a bibliography, if we had the reader would have seen a greater list of material that was consulted.

1. Haaretz, (Left-wing Israeli daily, in Hebrew), “Antisemitism has Shaken the Faith that French Jews Have in Their Own Country”, June 22, 2001.
2. Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals : A Political History of the Weltbühne and Its Circle*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968, p. 24.
3. Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 174.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Paris, Morigien, 1946, p. 7.

1 - Legacy

A - Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Judaism

The Jews have a long and glorious history that dates back to what is believed to be about 4,000 years. Judaism has influenced the religion, morality, and thoughts of an enormous amount of people despite its small membership. It has inspired many to follow its monotheistic model [1]. To Jews ethics and human life have long been important. There is little talk in the Bible of resurrection and life after death. This only came later to Jewish writings as did the immortality of the soul, but human life in the here and now, has almost always been essential.

Accordingly, Judaism is very concerned with the care of the sick, the elderly, the poor and handicapped as well as widows and other needy people. In addition, the perpetuity of the Jewish people has strong importance and as such, the encouragement of marriage and a solid family life find central importance. The Greeks and Romans used to kill newborn babies as a means of birth control. To the Jews this had long been sacrilege. It was not until the year 318 AD that the emperor “Constantine the Great” adopted “the Jewish law” and forbade the killing of unwanted infants for the entire Roman Empire [2].

Relations between people are deeply rooted in Jewish thought, messages such as “Love thy Neighbour as thyself” and “Do not do unto others what you do not wish them to be done unto yourself” are an integral part of Judaism. Still, Jews have often looked inward and at times sought to separate themselves from gentiles. Justice and social justice in particular were and continue to be very important to the Jews. It was the prophet Amos in the eight century BC who dedicated much of his writings to the problem of justice. This concern at times even obsession –for secular as well as religious Jews- with justice has followed the Jews throughout history.

Humanity has benefited from the Jewish insistence on a day of rest, the Shabbat. Romans and Greeks often mocked the Jews for their “laziness”. Nevertheless, the Jews were obstinate and now almost the whole world recognizes the advantages of a day of rest.

In the 19th century, a movement that was essentially, German tried to say that the *Old Testament* is a collection of myths, and like other mythologies without any real or truthful basis. However, archaeologists and historians have since found evidence that in some ways lends support of this special work. Indeed, Judaism is a historic religion, which commemorates historical events. Passover celebrates the Exodus from Egypt and Hanukkah the victory over the Greeks (Seleucids) and Purim over the machinations of the wicked Persian minister Haman, etc...

The Jewish chronicles instead of being propagandist and chauvinist - as many doctrines are - point often to the human failings of the Jews. Only by recording such acts could a people face up to its shortcomings and hope to eliminate such mistakes in the future. Yet, these very failings have been used against the Jews by many of the enormous quantity of their antagonists to show that they are “depraved”.

Frequently talked about and criticized is the Jewish claim of “election” by the Almighty. Like so many other points central Israel’s enemies and friends alike often misunderstand it. For the Jews are “chosen” to obey the law in order to redeem all of humankind. For humankind is too large, but a chosen few could (according to Judaism) by living a pious life pave the way for the Messiah and do the Almighty’s work on earth by following His law. The “chosen” therefore have special duties and burdens. In modern times, many Jews have ceased to believe in their election, still gentiles have often thought of the Jews as being presumptuous, for claiming to be the “chosen people”.

The Jews

Abraham the father was said to have been born in Northern Mesopotamia and migrated to Canaan or the Land of Israel. The Land had an enormous importance and it is written in the Bible that the Almighty promised Abraham: “To

your descendants I give this land from the Egyptian river [i.e. the Nile] up until the great river, the Euphrates” [3].

According to the Jewish religion, the descendants of Abraham migrated to Egypt where they eventually became slaves and were led out by Moses the great lawgiver, in the 13th century BC. The ancient Hebrews were divided into twelve tribes; they often went their own way and were vulnerable to attack from their enemies. With that in mind, Saul was made king in 1020 BC, in order to give unity and coherence to the Jews.

David who was born in Bethlehem, followed him and was anointed king in Hebron in the year 1,000 BC; and soon afterwards, he captured the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem and made it capital of all Israel. David put the Holy Ark in Jerusalem and promised to build a temple. At the same time, he brilliantly joined the symbols of his dynasty with national conventions. This move of genius linked the Almighty of the Hebrews with the Davian dynasty and the chosen city of Jerusalem, henceforth into an indissoluble union. Throughout history Jews have emphasized the centrality of Jerusalem by admonishing never to forget “thou oh Jerusalem” and by promising to be “Next year in Jerusalem” as well as calling at a later date, their capital “Jerusalem of Gold”. To this day, many Jews and others call Jerusalem the city of David. It was from the line of David that the Messiah was to come.

Islam and Christianity also recognized David’s uniqueness and his city Jerusalem, to a lesser extent, is a holy city as well for these two faiths. According to the eminent Orientalist, Bernard Lewis, Jerusalem was not always considered a holy city for Muslims. Moreover, in earlier times if someone venerated Jerusalem to too great a degree she or he could be suspected or accused of “Judaizing”. As Professor Lewis has further stated: “For some time now, it has come to be generally accepted by Muslims that Jerusalem is a holy city; indeed, most rank it third after Mecca and Medina. This was, however, by no means always accepted by Muslims, and in earlier times there was strong resistance among theologians and jurists who regarded this notion as a Judaizing error—as one more among many attempts by Jewish converts to infiltrate Jewish ideas or practices into Islam” [4].

David’s ability as a warrior and commander of Israel’s armies was spectacular

as he conquered Jordan and important parts of Syria including Damascus and pushed Israel's border up to the Euphrates River. His son, Solomon, brought peace for a number of years and built the Temple, although he appears to have neglected foreign affairs. Animosities furthermore developed against Solomon and his dynasty, that were to come to the surface after his death, as the Land of Israel split in two: Judah in the south with Jerusalem as its capital and Israel the larger and stronger part in the north, with Samaria as its capital. Even beyond the division of the Land of Israel into two countries overall decline appeared to set in. Some of their neighbours easily dominated Israel and Judah. Previously when united, the country often had received tribute from its neighbours; now weakened it was Judah and Israel's turn to pay precious metals as tribute. Sometimes the two countries were attacked and robbed by foreign kings.

Some of the neighbouring countries became powerful, and more powerful than any other was Assyria, which in 721 defeated in war the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel and carried away many of its people into exile. In 586, Judah was defeated by Babylonia and its splendid capital, Jerusalem was destroyed. Once again, many Jews were sent off into exile. From this era onward, the Diaspora was always to outnumber the Jews remaining in the Land of Israel. The Jews who lived abroad knew that there was no chance of them defeating powerful countries like Assyria and Babylonia. Religious leaders told the faithful to worship the Lord and to be Jews in their hearts and that this too is honourable even though they are to be cut off from the Land. The Jewish people withstood the test and remained Jews despite this separation from the Land of Israel. However, there was much nostalgia for David's monarchy and glory and the messianic hope was deeply embedded in Jewish minds of the time.

One of the more amazing figures of the era, Cyrus the Great of Persia, defeated Babylonia in 539. Instead of interweaving together all the conquered peoples of his domains and hoping that they would coalesce into one nation, Cyrus was to let each people return to its original country. As for the Jews, only a part of them went back to the Land of Israel. The Diaspora remained massive in size. This nevertheless was a supposed good era for the Jews, as they appear to have lived well under Persian rule both in the Diaspora as well as in the Land of Israel, where they had the opportunity of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.