

Roots and Responses to Literary and Literal Antisemitism
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Consider the following selections from Medieval and Early Modern Literature...

1. From Thomas of Monmouth's *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* (1173)

[Editor's Note: Medieval Christians (and some modern ones, too) believed that Christian children were seized and tortured to death by the Jews during the Passover season. This myth appears in a complete form for the first time in The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich, a Latin work written about 1173 by Thomas of Monmouth, a contemporary of the events which he relates. The story of the ritual murder of the boy William in 1144 is virtually the first of a long series of such accusations, a series that has not yet come to an end. The significance of these accusations is that by such descriptions of the Jew they have served throughout the ages to create an anti-Jewish mentality. Generations have believed that no Christian child was safe in Jewish hands. Hundreds of Jews have been imprisoned, killed, or burnt alive on this charge. The Papacy has frequently denounced this charge, yet it is equally true that in numerous instances the accusation of ritual murder was not made except with the vigorous support of the local Church authorities.]

When therefore he was flourishing in this blessed boyhood of his, and had attained to his eighth year [about 1140], he was entrusted to the skimmers [furriers] to be taught their craft... [and] was occupied in the city and sedulously gave himself to the practice of his craft, and thus reached his twelfth year [1144].

Now, while he was staying in Norwich, the Jews who were settled there and required their cloaks or their robes or other garments (whether pledged to them, or their own property) to be repaired, preferred him before all other skimmers. For they esteemed him to be especially fit for their work, either because they had learnt that he was guileless and skillful, or, because attracted to him by their avarice, they thought they could bargain with him for a lower price, Or, as I rather believe, because by the ordering of divine providence he had been predestined to martyrdom from the beginning of time, and gradually step by step was drawn on, and chosen to be made a mock of and to be put to death by the Jews, in scorn of the Lord's Passion, as one of little foresight, and so the more fit for them. [William is to be put to death to mock the crucifixion.]

For I have learnt from certain Jews, who were afterwards converted to the Christian faith, how that at that time they had planned to do this very thing with some Christian, and in order to carry out their malignant purpose, at the beginning of Lent they had made; choice of the boy William, being twelve years of age and a boy of unusual innocence.

So it came to pass that when the holy boy, ignorant of the treachery that had been planned, had frequent dealings with the Jews... he was prohibited from going in and out among them any more. But the Jews, annoyed at the thwarting of their designs, tried with all their might to patch up a new scheme of wickedness, and all the more vehemently as the day for carrying out the crime they had determined upon drew near; and the victim, which they had thought they had already secured, had slipped out of their wicked hands.

Accordingly, collecting all the cunning of their crafty plots, they found-I am not sure whether he was a Christian or a Jew-a man who was a most treacherous fellow and just the fitting person for carrying out their execrable crime, and with all haste-for their Passover was coming on in three days-they sent him to find out and bring back with him the victim which, as I said before, had slipped out of their hands.

At the dawn of day, on the Monday [March 20, 1144] after Palm Sunday, that detestable messenger of the Jews set out to execute the business that was committed to him, and at last the boy William, after being searched for with very great care, was found. When he was found, he got round him with cunning wordy tricks, and so deceived him with his lying promises....

Then the boy, like an innocent lamb, was led to the slaughter. He was treated kindly by the Jews at first, and, ignorant of what was being prepared for him, he was kept till the morrow. But on the next day [Tuesday, March 21], which in that year was the Passover for them, after the singing of the hymns appointed for the day in the synagogue, the chiefs of the Jews.... suddenly seized hold of the boy William as he was having his dinner and in no fear of any treachery, and ill-treated him in various horrible ways. For while some of them held him behind, others opened his mouth and introduced an instrument of torture which is called a teazle [a wooden gag] and, fixing it by straps through both jaws to the back of his neck, they fastened it with a knot as tightly as it could be drawn... the two ends of the rope being most tightly stretched at the back of his head and fastened in a very tight knot. The ends of the rope were then passed round his neck and carried round his throat under his chin, and there they finished off this dreadful engine of torture in a fifth knot.

But not even yet could the cruelty of the torturers be satisfied without adding even more severe pains. Having shaved his head, they stabbed it with countless thorn-points, and made the blood come horribly from the wounds they made. [Jesus had worn a crown of thorns before his death.] And so cruel were they and so eager to inflict pain that it was difficult to say whether they were more cruel or more ingenious in their tortures...

And thus, while these enemies of the Christian name were rioting in the spirit of malignity around the boy, some of those present adjudged him to be fixed to a cross in mockery of the Lord's Passion, as though they would say: "liven as we condemned the Christ to a shameful death, so let us also condemn the Christian, so that, uniting the lord and his servant in a like punishment, we may retort upon themselves the pain of that reproach which they impute to us."

Conspiring, therefore, to accomplish the crime of this great and detestable malice, they next laid their blood-stained hands upon the innocent victim, and having lifted him from the ground and fastened him upon the cross, they vied with one another in their efforts to make an end of him...

But while in doing these things they were adding pang to pang and wound to wound, and yet were not able to satisfy their heartless cruelty and their inborn hatred of the Christian name, lo! after all these many and great tortures, they inflicted a frightful wound in his left side, reaching even to his inmost heart, and, as though to make an end of all, they extinguished his mortal life so far as it was in their power. [Jesus was similarly pierced by a lance while nailed to the cross. The chronicler here imitates the Apostle John's narrative.] And since many streams of blood were running down from all parts of his body, then, to stop the blood and to wash and close the wounds, they poured boiling water over him.

Thus then the glorious boy and martyr of Christ, William, dying the death of time in reproach of the Lord's death, but crowned with the blood of a glorious martyrdom, entered into the kingdom of glory on high to live for ever.

As a proof of the truth and credibility of the matter we now adduce something which we have heard from the lips of Theobald, who was once a Jew, and afterwards a monk. He verily told us that in the ancient writings of his fathers it was written that the Jews, without the shedding of human blood, could neither obtain their freedom, nor could they ever return to their fatherland. Hence it was laid down by them in ancient times that every year they must sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in

scorn and contempt of Christ, that so they might avenge their sufferings on Him; inasmuch as it was because of Christ's death that they had been shut out from their own country, and were in exile as slaves in a foreign land. Wherefore the chief men and Rabbis of the Jews who dwell in Spain assemble together at Narbonne, where the Royal seed [resides], and where they are held in the highest estimation, and they cast lots for all the countries which the Jews inhabit; and whatever country the lot falls upon, its metropolis has to carry out the same method with the other towns and cities, and the place whose lot is drawn has to fulfill the duty imposed by authority.

2. From Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

Here beginneth the Prioress' Tale.

In a great city of Asia amongst the Christian folk there was a Jewry, sustained by a lord of that land for foul usury and villainous lucre, hateful to Christ and his followers; and men might ride or walk through the street, for it was free and open at both ends. Down at the farther limit there was a little school of Christian folk, in which there were a throng of children of Christian blood, that learned year by year in that school such lore as was wonted in that place, that is to say, to read and sing, as small children do in their childhood.

Among these children there was a widow's son, a little chorister-boy seven years of age, that day by day went to school, and eke as he had been taught it was his wont, where he saw the image of Christ's mother as he went by the way, to kneel down and say his Ave Marie. So hath this widow taught her little son to honour aye our blessed lady, Christ's mother dear, and he forgot it in no wise, for a good child will alway learn soon; and ever, when I have this thing in remembrance, Saint Nicholas standeth aye before me, because he did reverence to Christ so young. This little child, as he sat in the school, learning his little primer, heard sung Alma redemptoris, as the children learned their anthem-book, and as he durst, he drew nearer and nearer and hearkened ever the words and the note till he knew the first verse all by heart. He wist not at all what this Latin meant, for he was so young and tender in years; but one day he prayed his fellow to expound him this song in his own language, or to tell him why this song was in use. This he prayed him to construe and explain full oft a time upon his bare knees.

His fellow, that was older than he, answered him thus: "I have heard tell that this song was made to salute our noble blessed lady, and eke for to pray her to be our succour and help when we die. I can expound no more thereof; I learn singing; I know but small grammar."

"And is this song made in reverence of Christ's mother?" said this innocent, "now certes I will do my best to know it all, ere Christmas is gone; though I shall be scolded for my primer and be beaten thrice in an hour, I will know it to honour our lady."

His fellow taught him in secret from day to day on the way home, till he knew it by heart, and then he sung it boldly and well from word to word in accord with the tune; twice a day it passed through his throat, when he went schoolward and homeward; his mind was set on Christ's mother. As I have said, this little child, as he came to and fro through the Jewry, would sing full merrily, and cry evermore O alma redemptoris; the sweetness of Christ's mother hath so pierced his heart, that in prayer to her, he cannot stint singing by the way.

Our first foe, the serpent Sathanas, that in a Jew's heart hath his wasp's nest, up-swelled and said: "O Hebrew people is this, alas! a thing seemly to you, that such a boy shall walk as he list in your despite and sing of such a theme, which is against the reverence of your

law?" From thenceforth the Jews have conspired to hunt this innocent out of this world. Thereto they have paid an homicide that had a privy dwelling in an alley; and as the child gan pass by, this cursed Jew seized him and held him fast, and cut his throat and flung him into a pit.

O cursed folk of new Herods, what may your evil mind avail you? Murder will out; verily it must; and chiefly where the honour of God is pledged, the blood crieth out on your cursed act. O martyr, confirmed to virginity, now mayst thou sing, following ever and ever the white lamb celestial, of which the great evangelist wrote, Saint John in Pathmos, who saith that they that go before this lamb and sing a fresh song, never carnally know women.

All that night this poor widow awaiteth her little child, but he came not; for which, as soon as it was day, with face pale for dread and anxious disquietude, she hath sought him at school and elsewhere, till finally she espied thus far that he was last seen in the Jewry. With mother's pity pent in her breast, she goeth as it were half out of her mind to every place where by likelihood she hath supposed her little child might be, and ever she cried on Christ's mother meek and kind, and at last she came to seek him among the cursed Jews.

She asketh and prayeth piteously of every Jew that dwelt there to tell her if her child had passed by. They said "Nay;" but after a little while, Jesu of his grace put it in her thought to call aloud for her son in that place where he was cast beside the way into a pit. O great God, that performeth thy praise by the mouths of innocents, lo Thy power! This gem of chastity, this emerald and eke this bright ruby of martyrdom, where he lay prone with slashed throat, began to sing Alma redemptoris so loud that all the place rang. The Christian folk that passed through the street came in to wonder upon this thing, and sent forthwith for the provost, who cometh anon without delay and praiseth Christ that is king of heaven and eke the glory of mankind, his mother, and after that he causeth the Jews to be bound.

With piteous lament, this child was taken up, alway singing his song, and with honours of a great procession they carried him unto the nearest abbey. His mother lay swooning by the bier; so that scarce could the people draw this new Rachel from his corse.

This provost causeth these Jews that wist of his murder to be slain, and that anon, with torment and shameful death; he would suffer no such cursedness. Evil shall have what evil deserveth, therefore he let them be drawn with wild horses and after that he hanged them by law. Aye upon his bier lieth this innocent before the chief altar while mass was singing, and after, the abbot and his monks sped them to bury him, and when they cast holy water on him yet spake this child and sang — "O alma redemptoris mater!"

This abbot, that was an holy man, as monks be, or else ought to be, begun to conjure this young child and said, "O dear child, in virtue of the holy Trinity, I supplicate thee tell what is thy reason for singing, sith to my seeming thy neck is cut?" "My throat is cut to my neck-bone," said this child, "and by way of nature, I should have died, yea, long time ago, but as ye may learn in books, Jesu Christ willeth that his glory last and be kept in mind, so for the worship of his sweet mother, I may still sing 'O alma' clear and loud. This well of mercy, Christ's dear mother, I loved alway according to my knowledge and when I was to lose my life she came to me and bade me to sing this anthem even in my death as ye have heard, and while I was singing, methought she laid a grain on my tongue. Wherefore I sing, and needs I must sing in honour of that blessed and noble maiden, till the grain is taken from off my tongue; and afterward she said to me thus: 'My little child, I will fetch thee when the grain is taken from thy tongue; be not aghast, I will not forsake thee.' "

This holy monk, this abbot I mean, caught out the child's tongue, and took off the grain, and full softly he gave up the ghost. And when this abbot had beheld this wonder, his salt tears trickled down like rain and prone he fell all flat on the pavement, and lay still as he had been bound.

The abbey-monks eke lay on the pavement weeping, and praised Christ's dear mother, and after that they rise and be gone forth and take this martyr from his bier and in a tomb of fair marble-stones they enclose his little sweet body. Where he is now God grant us that we may come.

O young Hugh of Lincoln, slain eke by cursed Jews, as is well known, for it was but a little while ago, pray also for us, unstable, sinful folk, that of his mercy God who is so pitiful may multiply his great mercies upon us, for reverence of his mother Mary. Amen.

Here is ended the Prioress' Tale.

3. From Martin Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543)

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing and blasphemy. Thus, we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert 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. For whatever we tolerated in the past unknowingly - and I myself was unaware of it - will be pardoned by God. But if we, now that we are informed, were to protect and shield such a house for the Jews, existing right before our very nose, in which they lie about, blaspheme, curse, vilify, and defame Christ and us (as was heard above), it would be the same as if we were doing all this and even worse ourselves, as we very well know.

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

Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. For they have justly forfeited the right to such an office by holding the poor Jews captive with the saying of Moses (Deuteronomy 17 [:10 ff.]) in which he commands them to obey their teachers on penalty of death, although Moses clearly adds: "what they teach you in accord with the law of the Lord." Those villains ignore that. They wantonly employ the poor people's obedience contrary to the law of the Lord and infuse them with this poison, cursing, and blasphemy. In the same way the pope also held us captive with the declaration in Matthew 16 [:18], "You are Peter," etc., inducing us to believe all the lies

and deceptions that issued from his devilish mind. He did not teach in accord with the word of God, and therefore he forfeited the right to teach.

Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside, since they are not lords, officials, tradesmen, or the like. Let them stay at home. (...remainder omitted).

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. The reason for such a measure is that, as said above, they have no other means of earning a livelihood than usury, and by it they have stolen and robbed from us all they possess. 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. For such evil gains are cursed if they are not put to use with God's blessing in a good and worthy cause.

Seventh, I commend 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.

4. From Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589/90)

BARABAS (the Jew of Malta). Now let me know thy name, and therewithal
Thy birth, condition, and profession.

ITHAMORE. Faith, sir, my birth is but mean; my name's Ithamore; my profession what
you please.

BARABAS. Hast thou no trade? then listen to my words,
And I will teach [thee] that shall stick by thee:
First, be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.

ITHAMORE. O, brave, master! I worship your nose for this.

BARABAS. As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights,
And kill sick people groaning under walls:
Sometimes I go about and poison wells;
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns,
That I may, walking in my gallery,
See 'em go pinion'd along by my door.
Being young, I studied physic, and began
To practice first upon the Italian;
There I enrich'd the priests with burials,

And always kept the sexton's arms in ure [use]
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells:
And, after that, was I an engineer,
And in the wars 'twixt France and Germany,
Under pretence of helping Charles the Fifth,
Slew friend and enemy with my stratagems:
Then, after that, was I an usurer,
And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
And tricks belonging unto brokery,
I fill'd the gaols with bankrupts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals;
And every moon made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Pinning upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him.
But mark how I am blest for plaguing them;—
I have as much coin as will buy the town.
But tell me now, how hast thou spent thy time?

ITHAMORE. Faith, master,
In setting Christian villages on fire,
Chaining of eunuchs, binding galley-slaves.
One time I was an hostler in an inn,
And in the night-time secretly would I steal
To travellers' chambers, and there cut their throats:
Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneel'd,
I strewed powder on the marble stones,
And therewithal their knees would rankle so,
That I have laugh'd a-good [in earnest] to see the cripples
Go limping home to Christendom on stilts.

BARABAS. Why, this is something: make account of me
As of thy fellow; we are villains both;
Both circumcised; we hate Christians both:
Be true and secret; thou shalt want no gold.

5. From William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (1600)



SHYLOCK I say, my daughter is my flesh and blood.

SALARINO There is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than there is between red wine and rhenish. But tell us, do you hear whether Antonio have had any loss at sea or no?

SHYLOCK There I have another bad match: a bankrupt, a prodigal, who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto; a beggar, that was used to come so smug upon the mart; let him look to his bond: he was wont to call me usurer; let him look to his bond: he was wont to lend money for a Christian courtesy; let him look to his bond.

SALARINO Why, I am sure, if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh: what's that good for?

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject

to the same diseases, healed by the same means,
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?
if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison
us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not
revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will
resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian
wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by
Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you
teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I
will better the instruction.

For Discussion:

What do all of these representations of Jews have in common?
Any consistent traits, features, or linguistic consistency?

Let's consider motivation. How do the narrators/characters justify Jewish violence and cruelty?
What reasons or causes are offered for Jews' conduct toward Christians?

Do any of these arguments seem familiar or consistent with contemporary anti-Jewish hate
speech and Antisemitism you've encountered in your own life or in the media?

We'll come back to this last one, but for now, do you think these texts are harmful?
Should these writers continue to be read/taught today?

Flipping the Script

Consider this account of the wicked oppressors of Israel...

Tehillim 10

Why standest Thou afar off, O L-rd? Why hidest
Thou Thyself in times of trouble?

לָמָּה הִתְעַמַּד בְּרָחוֹק תַּעֲלִים לַעֲתוֹת בְּצָרָה:

בְּגִאֲוֹת רָשָׁע יִדְלַק עֵינַי תִּפְשׁוּ בְּמִזְמוֹת זֶה הִשְׁבּוּ:

Through the pride of the wicked the poor is hotly
pursued, They are taken in the devices that they
have imagined.

כִּי־הִלֵּל רָשָׁע עַל־תַּאֲוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ וּבִצְעַ בְּרַף נֶאֱזַן הִ:

For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, And
the covetous vaunteth himself, though he contemn
the L-rd.

רָשָׁע כְּגִבּוֹה אָפוּ בְּלִי־דָרֶשׁ אֵין אֱלֹהִים כֹּל־מִזְמוֹתָיו:

The wicked, in the pride of his countenance [saith]:
'He will not require!'; All his thoughts are: 'There is
no G-d.'

יִחִלוּ דְרָכָו בְּכֹל־עֵת מָרוֹם מִשְׁפָּטָיָהּ מִנְּגִדוֹ כֹּל־צוֹרְרָיו
יִפִּיחַ בָּהֶם:

His ways prosper at all times; Thy judgments are far above out of his sight; As for all his adversaries, he puffeth at them.

He saith in his heart: 'I shall not be moved, I who to all generations shall not be in adversity.'

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression; Under his tongue is mischief and iniquity.

He sitteth in the lurking-places of the villages; In secret places doth he slay the innocent; His eyes are on the watch for the helpless.

He lieth in wait in a secret place as a lion in his lair, He lieth in wait to catch the poor; He doth catch the poor, when he draweth him up in his net.

He croucheth, he boweth down, And the helpless fall into his mighty claws.

He hath said in his heart: 'God hath forgotten; He hideth His face; He will never see.'

Arise, O L-rd; O God, lift up Thy hand; Forget not the humble.

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn G-d, And say in his heart: 'Thou wilt not require'?

Thou hast seen; for Thou beholdest trouble and vexation, to requite them with Thy hand; Unto Thee the helpless committeth himself; Thou hast been the helper of the fatherless.

Break Thou the arm of the wicked; And as for the evil man, search out his wickedness, till none be found.

The L-rd is King for ever and ever; The nations are perished out of His land.

L-rd, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble: Thou wilt direct their heart, Thou wilt cause Thine ear to attend;

To right the fatherless and the oppressed, That man who is of the earth may be terrible no more.

אמר בלבו בלאמוט לזר ודר אשר לא ברע:

אלה פיהו מלא ומרמות ותה תחת לשונו עמל נאון:

ישב במארב וצרים במסתרים יהרג נקי עיניו לחלכה יצפנו:

יארב במסתר פאריה בסכה יארב לחטוף עני יחטף עני במשכו ברשתו:

(ודכה) [ידכה] ישח ונפל בעצומיו (חלכאים) תל פאים]:

אמר בלבו ישכח אל הסתיר פניו בלראה לנצח:

קומה ה אל נשא ידה אל-תשכח (עניים) [ענויים]:

עלמה נאץ רשע אלקים אמר בלבו לא תדרש:

ראתה פיאתה עמל וכעס מביט לתת בידך עליך יעזב חלכה יתום אמה היית עוזר:

שבר זרוע רשע ורע תדרוש-רשעו בל-תמצא:

ה מלך עולם ועד אבדו גוים מארצו:

תאות ענוים שמעת יהנה תכין לבם מקשיב אזנה:

לשפט יתום ודה בל-יוסוף עוד לערץ אנוש מוהארץ: {פ}

For Discussion:

How does this *perek* describe the experience of the oppressor?
What does it feel like to be the persecutor (vs. persecuted)?

How does the *perek* suggest Israel respond? What can be done to stop hate and cruelty?

Defining and Responding to Literary and Literal Antisemitism

1. "If you cannot define something, you cannot address it or fight it." Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (Schocken, 2019, 15).
2. "A certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities." International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
3. "A persisting latent structure of hostile belief towards Jews as a collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is deigned to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews." Helen Fein, *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism* (Current Research on Antisemitism, Vol 1) (Walter De Gruyter: 1987)
4. From Rene Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1972)

A primitive society, a society that lacks a legal system, is exposed to the sudden escalation of violence. Such a society is compelled to adopt attitudes we may well find incomprehensible. Our incomprehension seems to stem from two main factors. In the first place, we know absolutely nothing about the contagion of violence, not even whether it actually exists. In the second place, the primitive people themselves recognize this violence only in an almost entirely dehumanized form; that is, under the deceptive guise of the sacred. Considered all together, the ritual precautions against violence are firmly rooted in reality, absurd though some of them may appear to our own eyes. If the sacrificial catharsis actually succeeds in preventing the unlimited propagation of violence, a sort of infection is in fact being checked.

From the outset of this study, after all, I have regarded violence as something eminently communicable. The tendency of violence to hurl itself on a surrogate if deprived of its original object can surely be described as a contaminating process. Violence too long held in check will overflow its bounds – and woe to those who happen to be nearby. Ritual precautions are intended both to prevent this flooding and to offer protection, insofar as it is possible, to those who find themselves in the path of ritual impurity – that is, caught in the floodtide of violence. The slightest outbreak of violence can bring about a catastrophic escalation. Though we may tend to lose sight of this fact in our own daily lives, we are intellectually aware of its validity, and are often reminded that there is something infectious about the spectacle of violence. Indeed, at times it is impossible to stay immune from the infection. Where violence is concerned, intolerance can prove as fatal an attitude as tolerance, for when it breaks out it can happen that those who oppose its progress do more

to assure its triumph than those who endorse it. There is no universal rule for quelling violence, no principle of guaranteed effectiveness. At times all the remedies, harsh as well as gentle, seem efficacious; at other times, every measure seems to heighten the fever it is striving to abate. Inevitably the moment comes when violence can only be countered by more violence. Whether we fail or succeed in our effort to subdue it, the real victor is always violence itself. The mimetic attributes of violence are extraordinary – sometimes direct and positive, at other times indirect and negative. The more men strive to curb their violent impulses, the more these impulses seem to prosper. The very weapons used to combat violence are turned against their users. Violence is like a raging fire that feeds on the very objects intended to smother its flames.

The metaphor of fire could well give way to metaphors of tempest, flood, earthquake. Like the plague, the resemblance violence bears to these natural cataclysms is not limited to the realm of poetic imagery. In acknowledging that fact, however, we do not mean to endorse the theory that sees in the sacred a simple transfiguration of natural phenomena.

The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them. Tempests, forest fires, and plagues, among other phenomena, may be classified as sacred. Far outranking these, however, though in a far less obvious manner, stands human violence – violence seen as something exterior to man and henceforth as a part of all the other outside forces that threaten mankind. Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred.

We have yet to learn how man succeeds in positing his own violence as an independent being. Once he has accomplished this feat, however, the sacred presence invades his universe, mysteriously infects, without participating in it, and buffets him about rather in the manner of a plague or other natural disaster. Once all this has occurred, man is confronted with a group of phenomena that, despite their heterogeneous appearance, exhibit remarkable similarities.

As a general practice, it is wise to avoid contact with the sick if one wishes to stay healthy. Similarly, it is wise to steer clear of homicides if one is eager not to be killed

5. From "[The Mutating Virus: Understanding Antisemitism](#)," Rabbi Sacks' keynote speech in the European Parliament (September 22, 2016)

The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. That is what I want us to understand today. It wasn't Jews alone who suffered under Hitler. It wasn't Jews alone who suffered under Stalin. It isn't Jews alone who suffer under ISIS or Al Qaeda or Islamic Jihad. We make a great mistake if we think antisemitism is a threat only to Jews. It is a threat, first and foremost, to Europe and to the freedoms it took centuries to achieve.

Antisemitism is not about Jews. It is about anti-Semites. It is about people who cannot accept responsibility for their own failures and have instead to blame someone else. Historically, if you were a Christian at the time of the Crusades, or a German after the First World War, and saw that the world hadn't turned out the way you believed it would, you blamed the Jews. That is what is happening today. And I cannot begin to say how dangerous it is. Not just to Jews but to everyone who values freedom, compassion and humanity.

The appearance of antisemitism in a culture is the first symptom of a disease, the early warning sign of collective breakdown. If Europe allows antisemitism to flourish, that will be the beginning of the end of Europe. And what I want to do in these brief remarks is simply to analyse a phenomenon full of vagueness and ambiguity, because we need precision and understanding to know what antisemitism is, why it happens, why antisemites are convinced that they are not antisemitic.

First let me define antisemitism. Not liking Jews is not antisemitism. We all have people we don't like. That's OK; that's human; it isn't dangerous. Second, criticising Israel is not antisemitism. I was recently talking to some schoolchildren and they asked me: is criticising Israel antisemitism? I said "No" and I explained the difference. I asked them, "Do you believe you have a right to criticise the British government?" They all put up their hands. Then I asked, "Which of you believes that Britain has no right to exist?" No one put up their hands. "Now you know the difference," I said, and they all did.

Antisemitism means denying the right of Jews to exist collectively as Jews with the same rights as everyone else. It takes different forms in different ages. In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, the state of Israel. It takes different forms but it remains the same thing: the view that Jews have no right to exist as free and equal human beings.

If there is one thing I and my contemporaries did not expect, it was that antisemitism would reappear in Europe within living memory of the Holocaust. The reason we did not expect it was that Europe had undertaken the greatest collective effort in all of history to ensure that the virus of antisemitism would never again infect the body politic. It was a magnificent effort of antiracist legislation, Holocaust education and interfaith dialogue. Yet antisemitism has returned despite everything.

On 27 January 2000, representatives of 46 governments from around the world gathered in Stockholm to issue a collective declaration of Holocaust remembrance and the continuing fight against antisemitism, racism and prejudice. Then came 9/11, and within days conspiracy theories were flooding the internet claiming it was the work of Israel and its secret service, the Mossad. In April 2002, on Passover, I was in Florence with a Jewish couple from Paris when they received a phone call from their son, saying, "Mum, Dad, it's time to leave France. It's not safe for us here anymore."

In May 2007, in a private meeting here in Brussels, I told the three leaders of Europe at the time, Angela Merkel, President of the European Council, Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament, that the Jews of Europe were beginning to ask whether there was a future for Jews in Europe.

That was more than nine years ago. Since then, things have become worse. Already in 2013, before some of the worst incidents, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that almost a third of Europe's Jews were considering emigrating because of antisemitism. In France the figure was 46 percent; in Hungary 48 percent.

Let me ask you this. Whether you are Jewish or Christian, Muslim: would you stay in a country where you need armed police to guard you while you prayed? Where your children need armed guards to protect them at school? Where, if you wear a sign of your faith in public, you risk being abused or attacked? Where, when your children go to university, they are insulted and intimidated because of what is happening in some other part of the world? Where, when they present their own view of the situation they are howled down and silenced?

This is happening to Jews throughout Europe. In every single country of Europe, without exception, Jews are fearful for their or their children's future. If this continues, Jews will continue to leave Europe, until, barring the frail and the elderly, Europe will finally have become Judenrein.

How did this happen? It happened the way viruses always defeat the human immune system, namely, by mutating. The new antisemitism is different from the old antisemitism, in three ways. I've already mentioned one. Once Jews were hated because of their religion. Then they were hated because of their race. Now they are hated because of their nation

state. The second difference is that the epicentre of the old antisemitism was Europe. Today it's the Middle East and it is communicated globally by the new electronic media.

The third is particularly disturbing. Let me explain. It is easy to hate, but difficult publicly to justify hate. Throughout history, when people have sought to justify antisemitism, they have done so by recourse to the highest source of authority available within the culture. In the Middle Ages, it was religion. So we had religious anti-Judaism. In post-Enlightenment Europe it was science. So we had the twin foundations of Nazi ideology, Social Darwinism and the so-called Scientific Study of Race. Today the highest source of authority worldwide is human rights. That is why Israel – the only fully functioning democracy in the Middle East with a free press and independent judiciary – is regularly accused of the five cardinal sins against human rights: racism, apartheid, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide.

The new antisemitism has mutated so that any practitioner of it can deny that he or she is an antisemite. After all, they'll say, I'm not a racist. I have no problem with Jews or Judaism. I only have a problem with the State of Israel. But in a world of 56 Muslim nations and 103 Christian ones, there is only one Jewish state, Israel, which constitutes one-quarter of one per cent of the land mass of the Middle East. Israel is the only one of the 193 member nations of the United Nations that has its right to exist regularly challenged, with one state, Iran, and many, many other groups, committed to its destruction.

Antisemitism means denying the right of Jews to exist as Jews with the same rights as everyone else. The form this takes today is anti-Zionism. Of course, there is a difference between Zionism and Judaism, and between Jews and Israelis, but this difference does not exist for the new antisemites themselves. It was Jews not Israelis who were murdered in terrorist attacks in Toulouse, Paris, Brussels and Copenhagen. Anti-Zionism is the antisemitism of our time.

In the Middle Ages Jews were accused of poisoning wells, spreading the plague, and killing Christian children to use their blood. In Nazi Germany they were accused of controlling both capitalist America and communist Russia. Today they are accused of running ISIS as well as America. All the old myths have been recycled, from the Blood Libel to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The cartoons that flood the Middle East are clones of those published in *Der Stürmer* one of the primary vehicles of Nazi propaganda between 1923 and 1945.

The ultimate weapon of the new antisemitism is dazzling in its simplicity. It goes like this. The Holocaust must never happen again. But Israelis are the new Nazis; the Palestinians are the new Jews; all Jews are Zionists. Therefore the real antisemites of our time are none other than the Jews themselves. And these are not marginal views. They are widespread throughout the Muslim world, including communities in Europe, and they are slowly infecting the far left, the far right, academic circles, unions, and even some churches. Having cured itself of the virus of antisemitism, Europe is being reinfected by parts of the world that never went through the self-reckoning that Europe undertook once the facts of the Holocaust became known.

How do such absurdities come to be believed? This is a vast and complex subject, and I have written a book about it, but the simplest explanation is this. When bad things happen to a group, its members can ask one of two questions: "What did we do wrong?" or "Who did this to us?" The entire fate of the group will depend on which it chooses.

If it asks, "What did we do wrong?" it has begun the self-criticism essential to a free society. If it asks, "Who did this to us?" it has defined itself as a victim. It will then seek a scapegoat to blame for all its problems. Classically this has been the Jews.

Antisemitism is a form of cognitive failure, and it happens when groups feel that their world is spinning out of control. It began in the Middle Ages, when Christians saw that

Islam had defeated them in places they regarded as their own, especially Jerusalem. That was when, in 1096, on their way to the Holy Land, the Crusaders stopped first to massacre Jewish communities in Northern Europe. It was born in the Middle East in the 1920s with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Antisemitism re-emerged in Europe in the 1870s during a period of economic recession and resurgent nationalism. And it is re-appearing in Europe now for the same reasons: recession, nationalism, and a backlash against immigrants and other minorities. Antisemitism happens when the politics of hope gives way to the politics of fear, which quickly becomes the politics of hate.

This then reduces complex problems to simplicities. It divides the world into black and white, seeing all the fault on one side and all the victimhood on the other. It singles out one group among a hundred offenders for the blame. The argument is always the same. We are innocent; they are guilty. It follows that if we are to be free, they, the Jews or the state of Israel, must be destroyed. That is how the great crimes begin.

Jews were hated because they were different. They were the most conspicuous non-Christian minority in a Christian Europe. Today they are the most conspicuous non-Muslim presence in an Islamic Middle East. Antisemitism has always been about the inability of a group to make space for difference. No group that adopts it will ever, can ever, create a free society.

So I end where I began. The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. Antisemitism is only secondarily about Jews. Primarily it is about the failure of groups to accept responsibility for their own failures, and to build their own future by their own endeavours. No society that has fostered antisemitism has ever sustained liberty or human rights or religious freedom. Every society driven by hate begins by seeking to destroy its enemies, but ends by destroying itself.

Europe today is not fundamentally antisemitic. But it has allowed antisemitism to enter via the new electronic media. It has failed to recognise that the new antisemitism is different from the old. We are not today back in the 1930s. But we are coming close to 1879, when Wilhelm Marr founded the League of Anti-Semites in Germany; to 1886 when Édouard Drumont published *La France Juive*; and 1897 when Karl Lueger became Mayor of Vienna. These were key moments in the spread of antisemitism, and all we have to do today is to remember that what was said then about Jews is being said today about the Jewish state.

The history of Jews in Europe has not always been a happy one. Europe's treatment of the Jews added certain words to the human vocabulary: disputation, forced conversion, inquisition, expulsion, auto da fe, ghetto, pogrom and Holocaust, words written in Jewish tears and Jewish blood. Yet for all that, Jews loved Europe and contributed to it some of its greatest scientists, writers, academics, musicians, shapers of the modern mind.

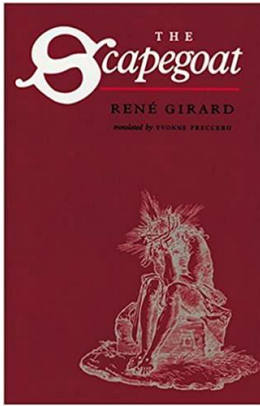
If Europe lets itself be dragged down that road again, this will be the story told in times to come. First they came for the Jews. Then for the Christians. Then for the gays. Then for the atheists. Until there was nothing left of Europe's soul but a distant, fading memory.

Today I have tried to give voice to those who have no voice. I have spoken on behalf of the murdered Roma, Sinti, gays, dissidents, the mentally and physically handicapped, and a million and a half Jewish children murdered because of their grandparents' religion. In their name, I say to you: You know where the road ends. Don't go down there again.

You are the leaders of Europe. Its future is in your hands. If you do nothing, Jews will leave, European liberty will die, and there will be a moral stain on Europe's name that all eternity will not erase.

Stop it now, while there is still time.

6. From Rene Girard's *Scapegoat* (1986)



My readers will have already observed that in speaking as I do I contradict certain principles that numerous critics hold as sacrosanct. I am always told one must never do violence to the text. Faced with Guillaume de Machaut the choice is clear: one must either do violence to the text or let the text forever do violence to innocent victims. Certain principles universally held to be valid in our day, because they seem to guard against the excesses of certain interpretations, can bring about disastrous consequences never anticipated by those who, thinking they have foreseen everything, consider the principles inviolable. Everyone believes that the first duty of the critic is to respect the meaning of texts. Can this principle be sustained in the face of Guillaume de Machaut's work?

7. From Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' *Not in God's Name* (2015)

Never say, I hate, I kill, because my religion says so... As a general rule, though, the application of every ancient text to another age involves an act of interpretation, and there is nothing inherently religious about this. It is a central problem in secular law and jurisprudence, deliberated over in every Supreme Court. How is a law enacted then to be understood now? It is a problem every theatrical director faces in deciding how, for example, to stage *The Merchant of Venice* for a contemporary audience. In each case, the issue is how to apply the-word-then to the-world-now, bridging the hermeneutical abyss of time and change. Religions develop rules of interpretation and structures of authority. Without these, as we see today, any group can do almost anything in the name of religion, selecting texts, taking them out of context, reading them literally and ignoring the rest. Without rules, principles and authority, sacred texts provide the charisma of seemingly divine authority for purposes that are all too human. As Shakespeare said, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.¹

For Discussion:

Based on our readings and discussion, do you think texts that include violent/cruel caricatures of Jews are harmful? Should these writers continue to be read and taught today?

If not, why not? If yes, how?

If you do encounter such texts in a college classroom or another environment, how do you think you would/should respond? What do you think educators can do to equip students for encounters with negative portrayals of Jews in popular culture of the past and present?