

## **Session 3: The Growth of Anti-Judaism (150 CE – 1789 CE)** **“What is this that you have done?”(Genesis 3:13)**

### **I. The Early Church Fathers and the Jews**

**Key concept:** As the new religion evolved, many thinkers began to show hostility to Judaism. Several factors led to this anti-Judaism: the role in Jesus’ death ascribed to the Jews by the New Testament; the refusal by Jews to convert; resentment against those Jewish converts who continued to observe Jewish rituals; and reaction to anti-Christian polemics delivered by the Jewish establishment. What made Christian anti-Judaism particularly ominous was the effort of several theologians to demonize the Jewish people – to make Jews a cursed nation, children of the devil, whose suffering was intended by God.

1. Christianity’s **normative theological position** in regard to Judaism and Jews has been called *theologia gloriae*, the theology of glory, or triumphalism. It holds that:
  - The Christian Church, the new Israel – “ordained and sanctioned by God himself” – has succeeded the cursed and rejected old Israel morally, historically and metaphorically.
  - The Jews denied the true messiah, the Christ, and murdered him, for which all Jews are forever collectively guilty and must forever suffer.
  - The Jews were evil-doers even before their atrocious act of decide.

The major source of this anti-Jewish theology is the writings of the Church Fathers, who in turn exploited and elaborated the negative themes contained in scripture.

2. **Functions of the Jews for the Fathers.** Judaism served five functions for the Church Fathers:
  - a. The Judaism of the past was used by the Church Fathers to supply Christianity with an unimpeachable history and with a prestige the new church otherwise would not have possessed. The Church Fathers claimed all the Jewish Scriptures as their own birthright.
  - b. In order to keep the faithful from being attracted to Judaism, the Christian theologians attempted to induce hate toward the Jews. They announced that the Jews are, and always have been, and will always be evil. Whatever good the ancient Jews did was in reality Christian; their evil deeds were quintessentially Jewish. The Jews were pictured as not longer a chosen, holy people, heroes of holiness and moral living: they were instead the very model of radical evil.
  - c. Anti-Semitism in the form of a powerful, pervasive anti-Jewish theology has supplied Christianity with a crucial aspect of self-identity.

### **II. Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages**

**Key concept:** the history of Jewish and Christian relations in the Middle Ages has traditionally been seen as one of the gradual erosion of Jewish liberty and independence and the segregation and submission of the Jews. From a state of acceptance and integration during the early Middle Ages, the Jews were ultimately forced onto the margins of society, where they were often harassed and intimidated by the Christian rulers of church and state. The progressive disenfranchisement of the Jews and the diminution of their social status was accompanied by the changing theological and anthropological understanding of the Jews. This process yielded the topos of the Jew as something less than human, marked by distinct physical characteristics, and at its worst, as the minion of the devil. By the end of the Middle Ages, many of the stereotypes of the Jews that would become the commonplaces of modern anti-Semitism were already in place, as was the tradition of segregating Jews from Christian society.

**1. Early Middle Ages.** The status of the Jews and Christian attitudes toward them did not demonstrate the animosity they would in the later Middle Ages. Due in part to the prevailing theological understanding of the Jews as providing witness to the truth of Christianity, the Jews stood in relatively good position and found themselves a full part of society. Early medieval

attitudes were also influenced by the legacy of antiquity and the tradition of Roman law, which afforded the Jews special protections that secured Jewish religious and cultural identity. Although imperial legislation imposed increasing restrictions on the Jews after the conversion of Constantine in the early 4th Century, as did ecclesiastical decrees, the Jews continued to enjoy relative peace and prosperity in European society.

**2. Carolingian Good Relations.** Good relations between Christians and Jews continued throughout the Carolingian age and are most notably revealed in the favorable treatment accorded the Jews by Louis the Pious (814-840). Even before his reign, Carolingian rulers treated the Jews of their realm well.

**3. 11<sup>th</sup> Century – a turning point.** The beginning of the medieval anti-Semitic tradition, however, occurred at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, and the crusader violence against the Jews in the Rhineland is the signal of the imminent deterioration of Jewish and Christian relations and the place of the Jew in European society. Although incidents of persecution and hostility to the Jews may have taken place before 1096, it was from the late 11<sup>th</sup> Century that an ongoing tradition of hatred of the Jews began to develop. Indeed, at the very moment that medieval society began a period of political and economic expansion and cultural rebirth, the place of the Jew became increasingly circumscribed, and the Jews faced ever greater animosity. Legal restrictions on the Jews were increased, and regulations concerning dress, movement and work were imposed. Social and political repression reached an extreme when the Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and from France in 1306. Intense and institutionalized hostility toward the Jews led to a hardening of attitudes against all marginal groups.

**4. 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries.** The Jews evolved in this period from being seen as simply blind to the truth of Christ to being understood as violent and deserving of punishment not only for killing Christ, but also because they murdered Christian boys. The hardening of attitudes in England can also be seen in the open violence against them and the growing animosity toward the Jews shared by all levels of society. As a result of Jewish wealth, Christian devotion to Jesus and other religious concerns the English during the reign of Henry II (1154 – 1189) -developed an increasingly hostile attitude toward the Jews, which exploded in persecutions of the Jews following Henry's death.

**5. Later Middle Ages.** By the end of the Middle Ages a distinctly anti-Judaic, even anti-Semitic, perspective came to dominate Christian thinking toward the Jews. In both theological and popular religious treatises, the Jews were denigrated and demonized. In the works of John Duns Scotus (1265-1308) animosity toward the Jews is especially prevalent. Although Scotus revered the Law of the Hebrew Scriptures and recognized the validity of circumcision in the Law, he denounced biblical Jews as violent and guilty of deicide. He advocated the forced conversion of Jewish adults and children and declared that a small number of Jews should be placed on an island so that they could practice their faith until the Last Judgment but that all the others should be forced to convert. Other medieval writers from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century very clearly voiced a persistent and vehement opposition to the Jews and the Jewish faith that has been understood both to foreshadow modern anti-Semitism and to reveal the interconnection of violence and tolerance in the Middle Ages. At the same time other writers revealed a more open and positive understanding of Jews and Judaism.

### III. Medieval Christian Myths against Jews

**Key concept:** Through the Middle Ages five significant myths were generated and popularized about the Jews within Christian circles:

**1. Blood libel** In 1144 CE, an unfounded rumor began in eastern England, that Jews had kidnapped a Christian child, tied him to a cross, stabbed his head to simulate Jesus' crown of thorns, killed him, drained his body completely of blood, and mixed the blood into matzos (unleavened bread) at time of Passover. The rumor was started by a former Jew, Theobald, who

had become a Christian monk. He said that Jewish representatives gathered each year in Narbonne, France. They decided in which city a Christian child would be sacrificed.

The boy involved in the year 1144 hoax became known as St. William of Norwich. Many people made pilgrimages to his tomb and claimed that miracles had resulted from appeals to St. William. The myth shows a complete lack of understanding of Judaism. Aside from the prohibition of killing innocent persons, the Torah specifically forbids the drinking or eating of any form of blood in any quantity. This rumor lasted for many centuries.

Pope Innocent IV ordered a study in 1247 CE. His investigators found that the myth was a Christian invention used to justify persecution of the Jews. At least 4 other popes subsequently vindicated the Jews. However, the accusations, trials and executions continued. In 1817, Czar Alexander I of Russia declared that the blood libel was a myth. Even that did not stop the accusations against Jews in that country.

There are 150 recorded cases of the charge of ritual murder, and many led to massacres of the Jews of the place. Some of the incidents were:

- **1144 CE:** Jews in Norwich, England were accused of the ritual murder. This is believed to be the first recorded case of the "*blood libel*" myth. Jewish leaders in the area were executed.
- **1171:** Jews in Blois, France were accused of ritual murder. All of the Jews in that town (34 men, 16 or 17 women) were "*dragged to a wooden tower where they were given the option of baptism or death. None chose the former.*" They were burned alive.
- **1263:** A Dominican monk published a theory that God had inflicted Jews with a terrible disease because they had murdered Jesus. He reasoned that the only cure was to kill an innocent Christian child and consume its blood.
- **1451:** Pope Nicholas V appointed John of Capistrano to organize the Inquisition of the Jews. John repeated the old charges of ritual murder and host desecration.
- **1475:** A few days before Easter, Samuel, a Jew in Trent, Italy, found the body of a Christian infant named Simon. He had apparently drowned in a nearby river. A number of Jews were arrested and tortured. All confessed to murdering the infant. They were burned at the stake. Stories spread of miraculous cures which were believed to have been caused by contacting Simon's bones. Simon was canonized as a holy martyr by Pope Gregory XIII. Simon's beatification was reversed in 1965

**2. Host desecration** The host is a wafer used during the Roman Catholic mass. At a certain point during the ritual, the church teaches that it is converted into the actual body of Jesus Christ, just as the wine becomes Jesus' actual blood. These elements of the Mass are then eaten by the believers. This belief is not shared by all Protestants, many of whom believe that the bread and wine symbolize -- but do not become -- Jesus' body and blood.

A variation of the blood libel myth developed in Europe early in the 11th century. Instead of accusing the Jews of killing an innocent child, they were accused of desecrating the host. Sometimes they were accused stabbing pins into the host, or of stepping on it. Other times, they were accused of stabbing the host with a knife until Jesus' blood leaked out. Sometimes, they were accused of nailing the host, in a symbolic replay of the crucifixion.

Like the blood libel myth, host desecration makes no logical sense. Being Jews, they would not believe in the Christian doctrine of transubstantiation - that the host during mass becomes the actual body of Jesus. To them, the host is just a simple wafer with no religious significance.

**1021:** Rome suffered through both an earthquake and hurricane on Good Friday of that year. Some Jews were charged with having caused the disaster driving a nail through a stolen host. They were tortured until they confessed; they were then burned alive.

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**1370:** Jews in Brabant, Belgium, were accused of defiling the host and were burned alive.

**1389:** Jews in Prague were accused of attacking a monk carrying a wafer. All of the Jews in the city were offered the choice of conversion to Christianity or death. They were all killed.

**1399:** A rabbi and 13 elders in Posen, Poland, were charged with stabbing the host and tossing it into a pit. They were slowly roasted to death. Some townspeople believed that the host had bled.

**3. Black Death.** As the Black Death epidemics devastated Europe in the mid-14th century, annihilating more than a half of the population, Jews were taken as scapegoats. Rumors spread that they caused the disease by deliberately poisoning wells. Hundreds of Jewish communities were destroyed by violence, in particular in the Iberian peninsula and in the Germanic Empire. In Provence, 40 Jews were burnt in Toulon as soon as April 1348. "Never mind that Jews were not immune from the ravages of the plague; they were tortured until they "confessed" to crimes that they could not possibly have committed. In one such case, a man named Agimet was ... coerced to say that Rabbi Peyret of Chambery (near Geneva) had ordered him to poison the wells in Venice, Toulouse, and elsewhere. In the aftermath of Agimet's "confession," the Jews of Strasbourg were burned alive on February 14, 1349.

Although the Pope Clement VI tried to protect them by the July 6, 1348 papal bull and another 1348 bull, several months later, 900 Jews were burnt in Strasbourg, where the plague hadn't yet affected the city. Clement VI condemned the violence and said those who blamed the plague on the Jews (among whom were the flagellants) had been "seduced by that liar, the Devil."

**4. Well-poisoning** The existence of viruses and bacteria was unknown in medieval times, and the eruption of epidemics could not be explained. Any sudden deterioration of health was blamed on poisoning. Europe was hit by several waves of Black Death (often identified as bubonic plague) throughout the late Middle Ages. Crowded cities were especially hard hit by the disease, with death tolls as high as 50% of the population. In their distress, emotionally distraught survivors searched for something, or someone, to blame.

The city-dwelling Jews of the Middle Ages, forced to live in walled-up, segregated ghetto districts, proved to be convenient scapegoats. As mortality was significantly lower among the Jews, medieval Christians in Europe theorized that the Jews, who had their own wells in the ghetto, had poisoned the city wells in order to kill Christians, just as they had killed Christ. An outbreak of plague thus became the trigger for pogroms, with hundreds of Jews burned at the stake, or rounded up in synagogues and private houses that were then set aflame.

With the decline of plague in Europe, these accusations lessened, but the term "well-poisoning" remains a loaded one that continues to crop up even today among anti-Semites around the world.

**5. Deicide** In the Middle Ages Anti-Semitism in Europe was religious. Though not part of Roman Catholic dogma, many Christians, including members of the clergy, have held the Jewish people collectively responsible for killing Jesus, a practice originated by Melito of Sardis.

As stated in the Boston College Guide to Passion Plays, "Over the course of time, Christians began to accept... that the Jewish people as a whole were responsible for killing Jesus. According to this interpretation, both the Jews present at Jesus' death and the Jewish people collectively and for all time, have committed the sin of deicide, or God-killing. For 1900 years of Christian-Jewish history, the charge of deicide has led to hatred, violence against and murder of Jews in Europe and America." This accusation was repudiated in 1964, when the Catholic Church under Pope Paul VI issued the document *Nostra Aetate* as a part of Vatican II.

## IV. Spanish Inquisition

### Key concepts:

1. The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478 by Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella to maintain Catholic orthodoxy in their kingdoms and was under the direct control of the Spanish monarchy. It was not definitively abolished until 1834, during the reign of Isabel II. The Inquisition, as an ecclesiastical tribunal, had jurisdiction only over baptized Christians. However, since Jews (in 1492) and Muslim Moors (in 1502) had been banished from Spain, jurisdiction of the Inquisition during a large part of its history extended in practice to all royal subjects. The Inquisition worked in large part to ensure the orthodoxy of recent converts
2. In the 15th century, as the kingdoms of Castille and Aragon united under the Catholic monarchs and concluded the Reconquista with the conquest of Granada, anxiety about the cultural unity of the country grew. Suspicions were especially raised against Jews who had recently converted to Christianity, called Conversos or derogatively Marranos, as many doubted the sincerity of these conversions. Indeed, many Jews had been baptized to escape violent anti-Jewish outbursts around 1400. In 1492, the Alhambra Decree ordered all remaining Jews to leave the kingdoms, causing more Jews to convert to Christianity rather than leave Spain.
3. Possible motives for instituting the Spanish Inquisition
  - a. **To establish political and religious homogeneity.** The Inquisition allowed the monarchy to intervene actively in religious affairs, without the interference of the Pope. Ferdinand and Isabella's objective was to achieve religious unity to promote more centralized political authority.
  - b. **To weaken local political opposition to the Catholic monarchs.** Strengthening centralized political authority also entailed weakening local political opposition.
  - c. **Out of fear.** The Encyclopaedia Judaica of 1991 (Vol XI, p.485) states that, "It remains a fact that the Jews, either directly or through their coreligionists in Africa, encouraged the Mohammedans to conquer Spain." Whether real or imagined there was a great fear among 15th Century Spaniards that they had a Fifth Column living among them.
  - d. **To do away with the powerful Conversos minority.** Many members of influential families such as the Santa Fés, the Santangels, the Caballerias and the Sanchezes, were prosecuted in the Kingdom of Aragon. However the King of Aragon, Ferdinand, continued to employ many conversos in his administration.
  - e. **Profit.** The property of people found guilty by the Inquisition was confiscated. Sixtus IV openly accused the monarchs of this sin.

## V. Jewish Ghettos

### Key concepts:

1. Jewish ghettos in Europe existed because Jews were viewed as cultural minorities due to their non-Christian beliefs in a Renaissance Christian environment; Jews were placed under strict regulations throughout many European cities.
2. The character of ghettos has varied through times. In some cases, the ghetto was a Jewish quarter with a relatively affluent population (e.g. Jewish ghetto in Venice). In other cases, ghettos were places of terrible poverty and during periods of population growth, ghettos had narrow streets and tall, crowded houses. Residents had their own justice system. Around the ghetto stood walls that, during pogroms, were closed from inside to protect the community, but from without during Christmas, Pesach, and Easter Week to prevent the Jews from leaving during those times.

3. During the Reformation, in 1555, Pope Paul IV decreed that all Jews must be segregated into their own quarters (ghettos), and they were forbidden to leave their home during the night, were banned from all but the most strenuous occupations and had to wear a distinctive badge — a yellow hat. More than 4,700 Jews lived in the seven-acre Roman Jewish ghetto that was built in the Trastevere section of the city (which still remains a Jewish neighborhood to this day) If any Jews wanted to rent houses or businesses outside the ghetto boundaries, permission was needed from the Cardinal Vicar.
4. Jews could not own any property outside the ghetto. They were not allowed to study in higher education institutions or become lawyers, pharmacists, painters, politicians, notaries or architects. Jewish doctors were only allowed to treat Jewish patients. Jews were forced to pay an annual stipend to pay the salaries of the Catholic officials who supervised the Ghetto Finance Administration and the Jewish Community Organization; a stipend to pay for Christian missionaries who proselytized to the Jews and a yearly sum to the Cloister of the Converted. In return, the state helped with welfare work, but gave no money toward education or caring for the sick.
5. These anti-Jewish laws were similar to those imposed by Nazi Germany on the Jews during World War II. In the 19th century, Jewish ghettos were progressively abolished, and their walls demolished, following the ideals of the French Revolution. The Nazis re-instituted Jewish ghettos before and during World War II in Eastern Europe.

## **VI. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and the Jews**

### **Key concepts:**

1. Luther was an advocate for the Jews e.g. the 1523 sermons, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*
2. Luther believed that the Reformation meant that Christianity had returned to its Jewish roots. The Jews really had no reason to convert to Christianity
3. Luther expected that the Jews would take on a new and positive attitude toward Jesus
4. Luther felt that Christians should teach the Jews about Christ
5. For Luther, however, the Jews had lost the Temple, priesthood, liturgy and the land 1500 years earlier. If Jews wanted to practice the Mosaic Law, they should found a new state of Israel. (1538 letter *Against the Sabbatarians*)
6. In his old age Luther became an advocate for using force against the Jews. Three years before his death, depressed that the Reformation's results were ambivalent and seeing an increase of conversions to Judaism, He wrote his passionately anti-Jewish work, *On the Jews and their Lies*(1543)
7. In spite of his own avoiding the Inquisition himself, Luther now demands the wholesale burning of synagogues, the banning of Jewish worship , confiscation of Jewish money and banishment of all Jews

In 1543 Luther published an anti-Semitic text, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Hitler himself would appeal to its anti-Jewish slanders that began with the reformer himself

The tragic character of Luther's impact on the fate of Jews in Germany is only fully apparent when *On the Jews and Their Lies* is read against an earlier treatise, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, written twenty years earlier in 1523. During those twenty years Luther had been seated in the fires of ferocious Catholic rejection. His bitterness poisoned much that began as good, including his attitude toward Jews. Luther denounced the blood libel and the idea that all Jews were serfs of the emperor. He actually showed a remarkable sympathy for the Jews and resisted Roman Catholic attempts to convert them. Luther hoped that Jews would come to see in his reformed Christianity the true faith of their fathers. Luther, however, became a Conversionist. He preached on the Pentateuch, expecting that Jesus, seen fully as a Jew, could finally be embraced by Jews as the Messiah.

Martin Luther's religious vocation began in the terror Luther experienced during a storm, when fear of death prompted his youthful vow to become a monk. One way to understand him is the embodiment of a death-obsessed Christian. The publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies* came within months of the death of his beloved daughter, Magdalena, who died in his arms. His grief was intense and he spoke feelingly of the terror before death while affirming his trust in Christ. This combination of woes may have caused him to lash out at someone, and the Jews were there, testifying to his worst fear, that Jesus had not risen from the dead, and that Christians would enjoy no victory over the grave. Jews denied not just an abstract set of Christian claims, but the hope this man had. Luther's sense of doom was not theological, but intensely personal.

The Jews were at the center of Luther's perception because they contradicted the one thing that kept him from going mad. This was true because of what the Jews denied about the Christian faith (resurrection). Living Jews had refused Christendom's every effort to convert them. The Jews, therefore, were heretics.

Luther also feared anarchy. The peasant up risings of 1524-25 prompted Luther to throw in with the German princes against the peasants who were inspired by Luther's own attacks on authority especially papal governance. Luther's religious purposes meshed with the political aims of the barons. This was very well symbolized in Luther's translation of the Bible into German. That text, a rallying point against the papists, helped to birth the German national consciousness. The Jews were seen not only as heretics but anarchists.

*"Know, my dear Christian, and do not doubt that next to the devil you have no enemy more cruel, more venomous and virulent, than a true Jew."* Martin Luther, 1543.

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