

CHAPTER SIX

Post-Medieval Anti-Semitism in France, England and Germany

Although the Jewish community was expelled from France in the fourteenth century, negative images of Jews continued to play a role in French culture. Catechisms, lives of Jesus, and canticles portrayed the Jewish people as tools of Satan. In addition, tracts abounded which denounced the Jews in terms reminiscent of the Middle Ages. In England, Jews were similarly vilified even though the Jewish nation was expelled in 1290. German Jews were also detested – such hostility was most powerfully expressed in Martin Luther's *Against the Jews and Their Lies*. Such publications were followed by a wide range of tracts which denigrated Judaism and the Jewish people. Thus despite the existence of powerful court Jews throughout Germany, the Jewish masses lived simple lives and endured considerable hardship during this period.

French Jewry in the Post-Medieval Period

The expulsions from France in the fourteenth century evicted Jews from most of the territories of France until the eighteenth century. None the less, at the beginning of the sixteenth century colonies of Marranos existed in Bayonne, Rouen, Nantes and Bordeaux. These former Jews professed Christianity and had generally lost an identification with their former faith. Yet despite the disappearance of practising Jews from French life, the Jewish problem continued as a persistent factor in society. Stereotypes of Jews occupied the imagination. Jews were viewed as usurers, seeking to gain money by sharp dealings, and Judas was associated in the public mind with a traitor and betrayer.

No doubt, as Christians grew up they learned to distinguish between

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good and evil and were informed of the strange people in their midst who were guilty of the greatest crime against humanity: the death of Christ. At parish schools the catechism was taught in which Jews were presented as villainous figures. Thus the catechism of Abbé Fleury asked:

Did Jesus have enemies? – Yes, the carnal Jews. – To what point did the hatred of Jesus' enemies go? – To the point of causing his death. – Who was it who promised to hand him over? – Judas Iscariot. – Why was this city (Jerusalem) treated in this way? – For having caused the death of Jesus. – What became of the Jews? – They were reduced to servitude and scattered throughout the world. – What has become of them since? – They are still in the same state. – For how long? – For seventeen hundred years.

Judas and the Jews were seen as interchangeable, and the Jewish people were presented as the tools of Satan. In the lives of Jesus and the saints, as well as in the accounts of pilgrimages, the Jewish population was presented in the most horrific fashion. Thus in a fifteenth-century life of Jesus, his suffering is portrayed as the result of Jewish animosity:

Some insulted him; others, with the backs of their hands, struck his noble and gentle mouth; others spit into his face (for it was the custom of the Jews to spit in the faces of those whom they cast out from among themselves); others tore out his beard or pulled at his hair, and thus trampled under their accursed feet the Lord of the angels . . . And still spitting into his noble countenance, they struck his head with a stick, so that the thorns of his crown sank into his forehead . . . Pilate commanded that in this shameful and inhuman state he be led before all the Jewish people, who had remained outside in order not to sully themselves on the day of the Sabbath. But these accursed sons of the Devil all cried out with one voice: "Take him away, take him away, crucify him."

Stories about the desecration of the Host and ritual murder were also current during this period, and in some texts the Jewish people were vilified because of their inhuman character: "a monstrous people, having neither hearth nor home, without a country and of all countries; once the most fortunate in the world; now the evil spirit and the detestation of the world: wretched, scorned by all, having become,

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in their wretchedness, by a curse, the mockery of even the most moderate."

Some writers stressed that the Jews are to be punished for their iniquity: "Death in sin, death with sin, death even, as it often happens, by sin – that, my dear listeners, is what frightens me and what must frighten you even as it does me. That is God's most terrible weapon in the arsenal of his wrath; that is what the Son of God threatens the Jews with today." Such hatred of the Jews was inflamed by canicles, such as that composed in the seventeenth century by Grignon de Montfort, which was based on a medieval mystery of the Passion. Its bloody imagery inevitably evoked bitter animosity toward the race that in Christian eyes tortured and killed the Saviour of humanity.

Jesus Flagellated

Jesus sees a dreadful death
Coming upon him threateningly:
To be victorious
He must as well be omnipotent

(Refrain)

I am the guilty one
but Jesus is innocent.
Ah! Wretched am I –
I say it moaning.
The furious executioners
Like ravening wolves
Bruise his face,
Tear his garments.

(Refrain)

He is covered with wounds,
His blood flows in rivulets.
Overwhelmed with bruises,
His flesh falls in strips.

(Refrain)

Jesus Crowned with thorns
Into his sacred hands are put
For sceptre, a frail reed.

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Everyone mocks him
Saying: Ha! How fine!
It is for us, O sinners.
That he endures these pains.
He is crowned with thorns.
With blows of a stick;
Everyone makes faces at him
Shreking like a demon.

(Refrain)

This cruel crown
Pierces his skull.
The brain oozes out
With blood and sweat.

(Refrain)

Jesus Crucified
This insolent rabble
Again tears everything from him;
His poor blood robe
Sticks everywhere to his skin.
It is for us, O sinners,
That he endures these pains.
While the fiercest
Prepare everything for his death
Some of the greediest
Draw lots for his clothes.

(Refrain)

O cruel savagery! His limbs are broken,
His flesh is all bruised,
His nerves laid bare.

(Refrain)

Jesus Dead and Buried
O abominable sinners,
It is done, Jesus is dead.
We are all guilty.
What is our fate to be?
It is for us, O sinners,
That he died in such pain.

The French Vilification of the Jews

Despite such anti-Jewish propaganda, there was no French anti-Jewish upheaval during the period of the Reformation. This was due in part to the fact that the Protestants became the target of Catholic contempt and hostility. Nevertheless, in the seventeenth century, an incident connected with the Guild of Fripiers (old clothes dealers) gave rise to an intense anti-Semitic outburst. When the Guild was on guard duty, they passed near the Church of St Eustache. A young bystander, John Bourgeois, mockingly cried out: "There go the gentlemen from the synagogue." In response the men of the Guild attacked him. Subsequently, a complaint was lodged against the Fripiers. One of the Guild was arrested, and in reaction the young man was set upon by the Fripiers, tormented, and killed.

For several years political pamphlets discussed this incident, believing the Fripiers to be of Jewish descent. Initially, prose tracts were published, such as *A monitor letter published by all the parishes of the City of Paris against the Jews of the Synagogue: A simple and true account of the cruel murder and horrible massacre committed on 26 August 1652: and A scrutiny of the life of the Jews, of their religion, trade and associations*. One tract decreed that "there is no one who does not know that the Jews are the opprobrium of all nations and have been so for sixteen hundred years and more . . . Their customs show their malediction no less than their bondage. There is no one who does not know that they have no other profession in life than usury, and that their false witnesses and their infamous practices have sown corruption the world over."

Other tracts contained denunciations of the Jews in verse:

Infamous murders,
Detestable nation,
Abhorred by men,
Everywhere rejected,
Must you today
Renew the effort
Of your horrid cruelties
Which put to death
The God by whom we live?

In another tract the Jews were presented as detested and accursed villains:

Demons escaped from hell,
Race of the Jews, detestable men,
More accursed than Lucifer
And more wicked than all the devils.
Cruel tigers, begone,
Unworthy as you are to live among us.
When you thirst so for blood
You must fear the punishment
With which the Holy Inquisition
Will chastise your paricides.
Unite the hands and feet
Of a citizen put to the torture.
Would you make of him
The image of an *Eccae Homo*
Subject to insult and outrage?

Other verses suggest remedies for the Jewish problem – Jews should be expelled or identified by wearing a specific insignia:

Cast out from our walls
People of such evil ways.
Or, by the king's command,
Make them wear a sign
That distinguishes them from Christians
And sets them among the dogs.

Another text proposes that they should be hung:

Let them be seen, hands and feet
Bound, those of their horde
Following the footsteps closely
Of him whom they laid low
By a death all too cruel.
Let them be seen on the scaffold
With no favour, grace or pardon.

Another alternative is that the Jews should be castrated so that the nation cease to continue:

I believe it is more fitting
That the steel arrange matters differently.

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And that there be removed from them entirely
That member which in them is already imperfect.
In order that in punishment of their vice
They may survive their torment
And that according to our just desires
Their name here on earth perish with them.

Such texts illustrate the intense antipathy against the Jews. Even though a number of French humanists of this period advocated a more tolerant policy, prejudice was rampant and anti-Jewish sentiment incorporated previous Christian stereotypes of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Agitation against the Jews in England and Germany

In 1290 the Jewish community was expelled from England; none the less, there is evidence that non-baptized Jews entered London illegally in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1498 Henry VII took a solemn oath not to allow Jews into his dominions – this was later observed by his successors. In 1540 a Marrano colony existed in London, but it was dispersed two years later. In the sixteenth century Henry VIII consulted Italian rabbis when he wished to divorce Catherine of Aragon who had previously married his elder brother, the Prince of Wales. The king hoped that scriptural teaching concerning Levirate marriage might allow him to obtain a divorce. This episode led to an interest in Hebrew studies in England, and several Jewish converts from the continent served as teachers of Christians.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a number of Puritans converted to Judaism: others insisted that Jews be allowed to settle again in England. After the monarchy was overthrown and Oliver Cromwell acceded to power the issue became more pressing, particularly since a small ex-Marrano colony had been established in London. Anxious that the Jews be permitted to resettle in England, a Dutch rabbi, Manessah ben Israel, undertook a mission to Cromwell. A special commission consisting of clerics and representatives of the City of London was appointed to study the proposal. Although Cromwell was well-disposed to the idea, there was great consternation and alarm. Thus the propagandist William Pryme wrote:

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As I kept on my way . . . in Lincolns Inne Fields, passing by seven or eight maimed Soldiers on Stills, who begged me: I heard them say aloud one to another, "We must now all turn Jews, and there will be nothing left for the poor." And not far from them another company of poor people, just at Lincolns Inne back gate, cried aloud to each other: "They are all turned Devils already, and now we must all turn Jews." Which unexpected concurrent providences and Speeches, made such an impression on my Spirit, that before I could take my rest that night, I perused most of the passages in our *English Histories* concerning the Jews' carriage in England, with some of their misdemeanours in other parts, to refresh my memory.

After considerable agitation, Cromwell closed the debate and the situation remained as before: Jews were not officially permitted to resettle. None the less, the Marrano colony in London was allowed to increase its numbers and construct a synagogue.

As in England, Jews in post-medieval Germany were detested and vilified. In 1477 a burgher, Peter Schwartz, explained why they were persecuted throughout the land:

The Jews have been punished severely from time to time. But they do not suffer innocently; they suffer because of their wickedness, because they cheat people and ruin whole countries by their usury and secret murders, as everyone knows. That is why they are so persecuted, and not innocently. There is no people more wicked, more cunning, more avaricious, more impudent, more troublesome, more venomous, more wrathful, more deceptive, and more ignominious.

The scholar Johann Reuchlin offered a more traditional explanation: "Every day, they outrage, blaspheme, and sully God, in the person of his Son, the true Messiah Jesus Christ. They call him a sinner, a sorcerer, a criminal. They treat the sainted Virgin Mary as a witch and a fury. They call the apostles and disciples heretics. They regard us Christians as stupid pagans."

In 1516 a converted Jew, Johannes Pfefferkorn, published a pamphlet, *Der Judenthümel*, which denounced the Talmud. Advocating the suppression of Jewish books, he obtained from Emperor Maximilian the consent to seize and destroy all copies of the Talmud. In response, Reuchlin defended Jewish sources, and attempted to demonstrate that the Talmud and kabbalistic sources confirm the

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truths of Christianity. This conflict erupted into a widespread debate between Christian humanists and others, and all European men of letters sided with Reuchlin. Yet paradoxically their condemnation of Pfefferkorn was couched in anti-Semitic terms. Thus one of Reuchlin's supporters, Ulrich von Hutten, declared that "Germany could not have produced such a monster (Pfefferkorn). His parents are Jews, and he remains such, even if he has plunged his unworthy body into the baptism of Christ." Again, Erasmus wrote: "Pfefferkorn is revealed to be a true Jew . . . He appears quite typical of his race. His ancestors attacked Christ only, whereas he has attacked many worthy and eminent men. He could render no better service to his co-religionists than by betraying Christendom, hypocritically claiming to have become a Christian . . . This half-Jew has done more harm to Christendom than all the Jews together."

Martin Luther's Diatribe

Initially, Martin Luther condemned the persecution of the Jews and advocated a tolerant policy towards them. Concerning the controversy between Reuchlin and Pfefferkorn, he criticized the confiscation of the Talmud and rabbinic literature. In his pamphlet, *That Christ was Born a Jew*, he adopted a sympathetic stance toward the Jewish faith. Yet when his early missionary efforts failed to win the Jewish people to Christ, he grew hostile and in 1542 he published his pamphlet *Against the Jews and their Lies*. In this work Luther attacked both Judaism and the Jewish people. "The Jews", he wrote, "being foreigners should possess nothing, and what they do possess should be ours. For they do not work, and we do not give them presents. None the less, they keep our money and our goods and have become our masters in our own country and in the Dispersion. When a thief steals ten guilders, he is hanged; but when a Jew steals ten barrels of gold through his usury, he is prouder than the Lord himself!"

According to Luther, the Jews are an unwanted pestilence, repeatedly expelled by those among whom they live:

No one wants them. The countryside and the roads are open to them; they may return to their country when they wish; we shall gladly give them presents to get rid of them, for they are a heavy burden on us, a

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scourge, a pestilence and misfortune for our country. This is proved by the fact that they have often been expelled by force: from France, where they had a downy nest; recently from Spain, their chosen roost; and even this year from Bohemia, where in Prague they had another cherished nest; finally, in my own lifetime, from Ratisbon, Magdeburg, and from many other places.

Repeating the charges of previous centuries, he portrayed the Jewish people as demonic in nature:

Know, O adored Christ, and make no mistake, that aside from the Devil, you have no enemy more venomous, more desperate, more bitter, than a true Jew who truly seeks to be a Jew. Now whoever wishes to accept venomous serpents, desperate enemies of the Lord, and to honour them to let himself be robbed, pillaged, corrupted, and cursed by them, need only turn to the Jews.

What is to be done with this foreign element? Luther proposed a number of remedies:

First, their synagogues should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honour of God and of Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians, and that we have not wittingly tolerated or approved of such public lying, cursing and blaspheming of his Son and his Christians. . . . Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. For they perpetrate the same things there that they do in their synagogues. . . . Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayerbooks and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught. Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more. . . . Fifthly, passport and travelling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews. . . . Sixthly, they ought to be stopped from usury. . . . Seventhly, let the young and strong Jews and Jewesses be given the flail, the axe, the hoe, the spade, the distaff, and spindle, and let them earn their bread by the sweat of their noses. . . . To sum up, dear princes and nobles who have Jews in your domains, if this advice of mine does not suit you, then find a better one so that you may all be free of this insufferable devilish burden — the Jews.

In a pamphlet published several months later, *Schem Hamphoras*, Luther attacked the Jews for their unwillingness to convert to the true faith. "It is as easy to convert a Jew as to convert the Devil," he wrote. "A Jew, a Jewish heart, are hard as stone, as iron, as the Devil himself. In short, they are children of the Devil, condemned to the flames of Hell." Luther insisted that his vituperation against this despicable nation was justified:

Perhaps some merciful and holy soul among us Christians will be of the opinion that I am too rough with these poor and pitiable Jews, mocking and deriding them. O Lord, I am much too feeble to mock such Devils. I would do so, but they are much stronger than I am in railleury, and they have a God who is a past master in this art; he is called the Devil and the wicked spirit.

Speculating why Jews are so skilful, Luther mockingly declared:

I cannot understand how they manage to be so skilful, unless I think that when Judas Iscariot hanged himself, his guts burst and emptied. Perhaps the Jews sent their servants with plates of silver and pots of gold to gather up Judas' piss with the other treasures, and then they ate and drank his offal, and thereby acquired eyes so piercing that they discover in the Scriptures commentaries that neither Matthew nor Isaiah himself found there, not to mention the rest of us cursed goyim.

More seriously, he argued that the Jews are in league with the Devil:

I cannot understand it except by admitting that they have transformed God into the Devil, or rather into a servant of the Devil, accomplishing all the evil the Devil desires, corrupting unhappy souls, and raging against himself. In short, the Jews are worse than the devils. O God, my beloved father and creator, have pity on me who, in self-defence, must speak so scandalously of thy divine and eternal Majesty, against thy wicked enemies, the devils and the Jews.

Such savage sentiments were rooted in centuries of Christian anti-Semitism; four centuries after Luther they were invoked by those who endorsed Hitler's final solution to the Jewish problem.

After Luther

In the face of anti-Jewish sentiment in the sixteenth century Yosel of Rosheim attempted to protect the rights of his co-religionists and intercede with the government. He was successful in blocking the expulsion of Jewry from Hungary and Bohemia and convened a rabbinical synod which adopted a code of commercial ethics. With regard to this policy, he declared: "I shall cause this programme to be observed if the authorities do what is necessary to let us live in peace; to put an end to the expulsions, to permit us to move about, and to curtail their bloody accusations. For we, too, are human beings, created by almighty God to live beside you on the earth."

In the seventeenth century, German Jewish communities pursued a traditional way of life, yet during this period the court Jew came to play a crucial role in state affairs. Each royal or princely court had its own Jewish auxiliary. Emperor Leopold, for example, summoned a Heidelberg Jew, Samuel Oppenheimer, to his court and assigned him the responsibility of provisioning his armies. A letter written by Oppenheimer to a dignitary of the court illustrates the range of his activities: "As long as I lived in Vienna," he wrote, "I provisioned almost every year, the two armies engaged against the French and the Turks, supplying flour, oats, horses, and money for recruits, as well as munitions, powder, lead, cannon, artillery, wagons, horses, and oxen." Throughout the country these court Jews administered finances, provisioned armies, raised money, provided textiles and precious stones to the court, began new industries, and initiated manufacturing enterprises.

In return for these services, royalty and nobles maintained social contact with those who regulated their affairs. In her memoirs, Gluckel von Hameln described such social intercourse. At a marriage of court Jews with royalty in attendance she wrote:

When the couple was standing under the canopy it appeared that, in the confusion, someone had forgotten to write the *ketubah*. What was to be done? All the nobles and the young princes were already there and ready to watch the ceremony. The rabbi then said that the groom must furnish a surety and promise to write the *ketubah* immediately after the marriage. And he read aloud the *ketubah* from a book. After the nuptial blessing, the nobles were led into the festive hall of Elias Cleve, hung with gilded leather. There was a great table in the centre, covered with the choicest delicacies. Thus the nobles were treated according to their rank.

Such court Jews stood at the pinnacle of the social scale, forming an elite class. Yet the vast majority of Jews continued to live simple lives and frequently endured considerable discrimination. In the municipality of Frankfurt, for example, Jews were forced to wear a distinctive insignia and were forbidden to linger in the streets, walk in pairs, use certain streets, or appear during Christian festivals. The city of Hamburg limited the number of guests that could attend a wedding banquet, the types of presents given, and the kinds of food served. In 1726 the Court of Vienna decreed that only the eldest son of a Jewish family could marry within the law – the other sons were to remain bachelors. This proscription was applied to Bohemia and Moravia, and later was adopted in Prussia, the Palatinate, and Alsace.

During this period the invention of printing made it possible to popularize numerous works on Judaism which denigrated Judaism and the Jewish nation. By the eighteenth century nearly a thousand texts were produced, including missionary tracts intended to convert the Jewish population, studies of Jewish customs, treatises dealing with the Jewish problem – some of which sounded anti-Jewish to Jewish readers. There were also polemical works such as *The Enemy of the Jews*; *The Scourge of the Jews*; *Jewish Practices, a Study of their Impious Life*; *A Brief Catalogue of the Horrible Jewish Blasphemies*; *The Inflamed Poison of the Dragons and the Furious Bile of the Serpents*; and *The Jewish Baths, in which is publicly shown the secret practices and Jewish knavishness, how they drink the blood of Christians, as well as their bitter sweat*. These works echo the Christian anti-Semitic attitudes prevalent in the Middle Ages.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Christian myth of the wandering Jew became prevalent – in 1602 *The Brief Account and Description of a Jew Named Ahasuerus* was published and translated into numerous European languages. According to this work, the wandering Jew witnessed the Crucifixion and was condemned by Jesus to wander until the time of the Last Judgement. In addition, a number of studies were produced which sought to illustrate anti-Christian blasphemies within Jewish sources. I. A. Eisenmenger's *Judaism Unmasked, a True and Accurate Report*, for example, maligned the Jews. After its publication the intervention of the Jewish community brought about its withdrawal, but a second edition was published in 1711. Yet despite such hostility, German Jewry was not subjected to any violent onslaught until modern times when the methodical elimination of the Jewish people became a central policy of the Third Reich.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Spanish Persecution and the Inquisition

Although Spanish Jewry flourished in the Middle Ages, by the fourteenth century Jews came to be regarded with suspicion and hostility. Measures were taken against the Jewish community, and in consequence many Jews embraced the Christian faith to escape attack. Such apostasy as well as the Christian onslaught on Jewry, led to the decline of the *aljamas* (Jewish communities), a trend which was resisted by Jewish leaders. During the fifteenth century the Church initiated a new form of persecution. Under Ferdinand and Isabella the Inquisition was established to purge *conversos* or New Christians – Jewish converts to Christianity as opposed to Old Christians of pure blood – who were suspected of practising Jewish customs. Tribunals were established throughout Spain which applied torture to extract confessions from the guilty – those who refused to confess were cast to the flames. Finally, at the end of the century, an Edict of Expulsion was enacted to rid the country of the Jewish race who had polluted the Christian population.

Jewish Persecution in Spain

Despite the fact that the Jewish community flourished in medieval Spain, by the fourteenth century anti-Jewish hostility spread across the Iberian Peninsula, leading to massacres in most Spanish villages. In 1321 the Jewish population was decimated by the Shepherds' Crusade, and two decades later Jews were accused of bringing about the Black Death. From 1355 to 1366, civil war was waged in Castile between the legitimate King Pedro the Cruel and his bastard brother Henry of Trastamara. The majority of Castilian Jews remained faithful to the legitimate king; in response Henry referred to his adversary as the "Judaized king" who was dominated by the Jews. In time it was