

Survival of Anti-Semitism in the Modern World

The sociological literature is replete with attempts to understand the insufferable propensity for anti-Semitism to survive the ages, whether the enlightenment or modern times. Anti-Semitism has not been confined simply to the west but has manifested in Islamic culture as well. Anti-Semitism resembles a tide, it may rise or fall, but it inexorably manifests itself through the cycles of human existence.

The purpose of this exposition is to examine not necessarily the history of anti-Semitism or even its specific roots, but rather persistent themes that keep the disease current.

To break this article down into Western (re-Christian) anti-Semitism as well as the Muslim variety. The historical narrative does not necessarily mean that all of these current forms of anti-Semitism are extent today in every denomination. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that what is past is prologue¹ and the present cannot be understood without an examination of the historical narrative.

Anti-Semitism as manifested by anti-Israel bias accouched in the nomenclature of Middle Eastern politics is peculating throughout colleges, the media and political institutions. There is an odd unholy alliance between traditional anti-Semitism of the Western variety and attempts to portray Israel as an illegitimate repressive regime. This paper will explore some of the themes which enabled the transformation of traditional anti-Semitism into the anti-Israel variety.

I. The Jewish Boogeyman throughout History

The Jew has served, and continues to serve, the role of embodiment of the deepest fears and hatreds of gentile civilization – as a means of defining its core values by projecting the perceived greatest threat to those values onto an external group. The need of all civilizations to constantly reinforce their values by detesting and rejecting an imagined collective enemy of them explains the endurance of anti-Semitism throughout the ages, and the transformation in the civilizational values, the zeitgeist, across time.

In the premodern era, during the centuries when Europe was devoutly Christian, and religious devotion – specifically, to the story of Jesus as god and redeemer – was the defining feature of Western civilization, the greatest crime imaginable was deicide. The guilt for this ultimate evil – the negation of the sacred theme of the era – was duly laid up the Jews, who were despised as “Christ-killers.”

¹ Shakespeare, The Tempest Act 2, Scene 1.

In the contemporary era, religious devotion has lost its importance to Western life to the point that most of Europe is effectively post-Christian. The new prevailing ideology (whose inferiority to Christian religious devotion is perhaps best evidenced by the fact that it has already weakened and decayed after much less time than its religious predecessor) is secular post-enlightenment humanism. In this value system, man stands as heroic, self-justifying center of an (implicitly or explicitly) godless world, and in such a world, the most abominable crime imaginable accordingly shifts from deicide to genocide. Ergo: the contemporary Jew is accused of conducting a “genocide” of the Palestinians.

Interestingly, while the value system and the specific accusation shift, it is not only the underlying theme of viewing the Jews as the archetypal violator which remains unchanged. Much of the imagery and propaganda associated with this historical libel also remains essentially the same. Hence, the image of the martyr Jesus, the gentle lamb sadistically crucified at the behest of the bloodthirsty Jews, is perpetuated in the medieval blood libels with their lurid stories of innocent children slaughtered and boiled, and now in the contemporary blood libels of Palestinian children massacred by the merciless Jew. Even a few of the iconic images from anti-Semitic reporting (e.g. the teddy bear on a heap of rubble from a bombed-out Palestinian house, the father clutching his son as he crouches to avoid gunfire) have been exposed as being false just like the bloodied corpse of “little St. Simon” the murdered Christian boy.

It is not difficult to see the psychological significance behind the continuing use of such motifs of lamb-like innocence and martyrdom contrasted with bestial savagery – this is classic and perhaps eternal drama which humans replay to reaffirm the goodness of their own values and the wickedness of threats to them. What changes are the values themselves, and thus what the gentile and Jew are seen to represent – but the basic duality and its associated imagery has remained largely unchanged through the march of history.

As a supplementary point: we also see an ironic continuity in the use of the word “Palestine” as a slur from when it was first invented by the emperor Hadrian as the new name of Judea, to the present day. In both the ancient and modern eras, it is a name based on a consciously fraudulent invocation of a non-existent ethnic group that is intended to maliciously deny the Jewish connection to the land as a punishment for attempts by the Jews to assert their right of self-determination (all the way from the Bar Kokhba Revolt to Israel’s wars of the 20th Century). Just as Hadrian neither knew nor cared about the Philistines for whom he remained the land “Palestine” – all that mattered was that they were the enemies of the Jews – so too do modern progressives neither know nor care about the Arabs currently living in Eretz Yisrael. Rather, their sole function in progressive ideology and polemics is to serve as a means of denying the right of Jews to self-determination in their land, and as a malicious negation of Jewish history.

II. Original Sin, “Privilege” and their Absolution.

The concept of original sin – of a fundamental wickedness or brokenness that taints all of human existence – runs deep in Western thought and civilization. Augustine's *Confessions* may be considered an early expression of this concept, to which the great theologians of the Protestant Reformation (Luther, Calvin, etc.) added new power. In the Christian conception, original sin referred to the fact that all humans ever born are inherently shared and deformed by the consequence of the Fall of Man. While the Catholics and Protestants differ in their view of how, exactly, man must face original sin (salvation through Grace and works, for the former, or through Grace alone, for the latter), they of course are united on a few key points: 1) original sin is a universal human problem; 2) God alone, through the sacrifice of Jesus, offers means for man to overcome original sin and gain salvation. Prayer, introspection, confession, are critical components of man's acceptance of God's saving power.

In the contemporary era, we find the concept of original sin recycled in secular post-enlightenment form. Since our era is no longer defined by Christian (or any sort of traditional universalist) faith, but is increasingly being Balkanized into groups defined by narrow identity politics, original sin no longer presents itself as a universal problem but rather as a racial and class problem. Its new name is "privilege," and it asserts itself in the same terms as original sin, but attaches itself to people more selectively – Whites, men, cisgendered, wealthy, etc. Just as one might protest against the notion of original sin by saying "I may be a descendant of Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit, but I myself have committed no sin – I have harmed no one nor disobeyed God – why am I guilty?", one might protest against the notion of "privilege" by saying "I may be White, I may be a cis-hetero man, but I have not discriminated against anyone, or held anyone in contempt for their background, or used my position to abuse the less fortunate – in fact, I myself have had to overcome such-and-such obstacles and have hardly had an easy or privileged life – why am I guilty" In both cases, the answer emphasizes that the taint of original sin/privilege has nothing to do with the individual's condition or merits, and cannot be escaped or denied because it is intrinsic to life. Attempting to deny or minimize the guilt, in fact, is itself seen as a grave sin and reflection of insufficient piety (or "wokeness" as we would now call it).

Premodern men, confronted with the burden of original sin, would have gone to church to pray to God for mercy; would have confessed their own personal sins (a reflection of their taintedness by the original sin) to the parish priest; would have joined in public rituals of atonement. What about contemporary man, who lives in a secular civilization? We have our own churches and expiatory chants and rituals – the meetings and discussion circles where company or organization or political leaders confess their role in perpetuating "unsafe environments," the ritual, Red Guard-style denunciations of campus administrators (like when the Dean of Harvard Law attended a meeting of the black students association, her head bowed, as the students forced her to confess her role in perpetuating "white supremacy"), the public confession from Beto O'Rourke that he carries white privilege, and implicit attempt to gain absolution, not from God (since privilege unlike original sin, no longer reflects the God-man relationship, but rather the relationship between different groups of men in a godless

world), but from the racial constituencies whose forgiveness and acceptance now replaces that of God.

The requirement in some colleges about having a group of Freshman read from a prepared script with respect to “privilege” is a perfect example of the new liturgical forms that this contemporary religion takes – our new prayers and rituals of collective confession and absolution. Additional anecdotal evidence concerns those who have been pressured to attend a “town hall meeting” (latter-day *auto da fe*) where the leadership stood before the congregation of employees, confessed that they were mired in sins of privilege and insensitivity to race, and then listened to a ritualized, frenzied denunciation of employees in the crowd. This represents yet another pathetic and pernicious attempt of a godless civilization to grapple with the enduring concepts of sin and expiation even as it formally rejects and scorns such “outdated” ideas.

The unique sinister feature of privilege, of course, is that it no longer relates to the human race at large, which is mired in sin and needs salvation, and to a universal God who offers it, but rather, in our human-centered world, to relations between human groups (the guilty/privileged ones who need salvation and the guiltless/unprivileged ones who grant it), we end up with no real path to absolution, since the sort of absolution we instinctively crave is not human-based but transcendent. We still desire to face our sense of existential unease and guilt, yet we no longer believe in the sort of transcendent reality that could offer us an answer. Instead, we end up fanning ugly racial divisions and resentments which can be much more easily harnessed to serve specific, prepackaged political ends than can universalist religious doctrines. Think of the 2008 election, where an inexperienced Senator with nothing but gratingly superficial oratorical gravitas and a package of common platitudes managed to generate unprecedentedly passionate and messianist electoral fervor – in part because so many affluent Whites (the most piously privilege-conscious demographic) saw voting for him as a long-desired means of expiating their original racial sin.

III. Climate Change and Armageddon

The notion of a final judgment and cataclysmic end of the world, a last reckoning, a desperate acceleration towards the End of Days, is of course a cornerstone of Christian theology, through it has its roots in the dire, poetic warnings of the great Jewish prophets like Jeremiah that the sins of the people would bring catastrophe upon the world. However, our era no longer believes in God who judges the sins of man and directs the course of history and human affairs, having rejected theological concepts in favor of scientism. Thus, the enduring, deep-seated attachment to the concept of Armageddon, and to the need for a final reckoning where man faces the full consequences of his sin, is now expressed in the shrill hyperbole and dire warnings about “climate change.” Even the very notion of the planet getting progressively hotter until life cannot be sustained is a thinly-veiled repackaging of the obsession with the fires of Hell in which sinners will burn. Of course, in the traditional theological view, this heat and hire was punishment for sins against God. Now that we do not believe in God and are uncomfortable even using the word “sin,” we have simply transferred that

concept to the more acceptable humanist/scientist notion of carbon emissions, which have become man's universal crime that will bring about the new Final Judgment – Armageddon for the post-enlightenment secular bourgeoisie.

This also ties into the enduring concept of an intrinsic filthiness and shame in the human condition, an extension of original sin, with which Protestant theologians in particular were obsessed (for a later popular reference to this theological trope, think of the use of “wretch” in *Amazing Grace*). We humans are mired in sin and are disgusting merely by existing, and even in our most mundane activities – to an Augustine or a Luther or a Calvin, that might be understood in terms of our sexual desires, our excretion of waste (Luther was obsessed with that especially), our propensity for deceit and faithlessness, our indolence, greed, etc. – the sins which propel us towards Divine judgment and doom. To a contemporary viewer, this miring in sin is reflected in the fact that we release carbon and inflate the global population figures – sins which propel us towards Planetary (Gaia?) judgment and doom.

The logical extension of this deep sense of intrinsic guilt can be seen in the statement by AOC that she would not want to have children in light of how humans are destroying the planet, or Bernie Sanders' call for mass abortions to stop overpopulation. Such hysterical denunciations of humanity itself are not so unlike the fatalist calls of the Cathars for everyone to stop procreating, since the birth of a new generation merely perpetuated the evil of the human race. Polls have shown that a significant proportion of Western youth are deeply anxious about their role in climate change and the prospects for the planet. We are seeing a new form of Catharism sweep our civilization as it swept 13th Century France, for the psychological undercurrents of such movements are not nearly as ephemeral as their specific religious/political manifestations.

Consider, too, that “climate change denial” has become the “ultimate” charge leveled in the same righteous horror with which a premodern Christian might accuse someone of atheism.

The author is a strong proponent of environmental protection. However, one need not believe in imminent global climate cataclysm to oppose the dumping of industrial waste into our water, the darkening of our air with smog, the poisoning of our soil, the wastefulness and dangers of mass consumption of low-quality meat pumped with superbug-promoting antibiotics, etc. The fact that any discussion of environmental protection in our era invariably ignores these practical bread-and-butter issues in favor of Jeremiah-style bombast about planetary doom and collective human guilt which will incur a terrible punishment – this itself reveals that environmentalism is really just the new, convenient façade or packaging for a theological and collective-psychological theme which has found continuity and new power in our era even as its premodern form and context has vanished.

IV. Traditional, Theological Islamic Anti-Judaism

Islam essentially accepted the traditional Catholic doctrine of supersessionism (i.e. that the coming of Jesus and founding of the Church meant that Judaism had been completed, and that those who remained Jews were clinging to an obsolete, null-and-void covenant), and simply applied the same notion to Christianity itself, holding that while Christianity had been the most authentic (albeit still very corrupted) form of Divine worship for its first six centuries of existence, Muhammad's final revelations, and the religion of Islam, superseded it.

The Islamic notion of supersessionism is, in fact, even harsher than the Christian analog, for while the Christians viewed pre-Christian Jews as faithful to a perfect covenant (one that was simply awaiting completion in Jesus), Islam views both the Tanakh and the Christian bible, and the faiths they inspired, as intrinsically corrupted due to deliberate tampering by their adherents. Thus, Islam claims not only to be the final revelation, but the only one ever observed in pure, unadulterated form. This uniquely venomous Islamic theological tenet was recognized by the Chazal, as well, who, though they of course despised Christian trinitarianism while admiring Islam's strict monotheism, nonetheless forbade Jews from studying Torah with Muslims while permitting it with Christians – the reasoning being that the latter accept that the Torah was a legitimate Word of God, while the former do not, instead holding it to be a bastardized version of Divine revelation. Islamic contempt for its traditional arch-rival, Christianity, is evident throughout Islamic history – from the most civilized periods through the most degraded. Islamic scholars generally show little interest in understanding its details and internal divisions, and content themselves with a supreme confidence that it is a doomed and superseded faith. This leaves Judaism in an even more unfavorable position in Islamic thought – it has the double stigma of being a corrupted faith superseded by another corrupted faith which was itself finally superseded by the one true faith. The Islamic slander of its predecessor faiths thus laid the foundation for a tradition of Islamic anti-Judaism.

V. The Diffusion of Modern European Racialized Anti-Semitism and Fascism to the Islamic World

As in premodern Europe, traditional Islamic anti-Judaism was not primarily racial but rather theological. This changed when 19th and 20th Century European racialism and fascism diffused to the Islamic world. Fascism broadly appealed (and still does appeal) to Islamic peoples, especially Arabs of the era, who yearned to cast off the humiliation of their centuries-long subjection to foreign powers (Ottoman and Western colonial) and regain the national unity and global prestige and vast territory they once ruled in the days of the Umayyads and Abbassids. The German unification, ending centuries of fragmentation and weakness under Bismarck's iron will, and the subsequent resurgence of Germany under fascist rule after the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, thus resonated powerfully with the Arabs, as did the scapegoating of the Jewish race as a source of their troubles. The Nazis devoted considerable resources to propaganda efforts in the Arab world, hoping both to weaken Franco-British rule and to affect a slaughter of the local Jews. Through they failed on both counts, the legacy of both direct and indirect fascist influence on the Arab world is

profound. Apart from the pogroms unleashed on the local Jewish communities by fascist-inspired Arab regimes (e.g. the Farhud in Iraq under the brief anti-British rebellion, the 1945 Tripoli pogrom, etc.), looking in the Levant alone, we see the stamp of Hitlerism on the entire “Palestinian” movement, whose ideological and political founder, Amin al-Husseini, had multiple audiences with Hitler and other senior Nazis, visited extermination camps, and openly attempted to implement the Final Solution in British Palestine under a fascist irredentist banner of “Greater Syria.” Al-Husseini’s nephew was none other than Yasser Arafat, and from there we can trace the entire form of the “Palestinian” project as nothing more than a neo-Hitlerist war on the Jews. Beyond the borders of Israel, the effects of Nazi ideology can be seen everywhere from the Ba’ath regimes of Syria and formerly Iraq and Lebanon (all modeled on the ‘national socialist’ system of Germany), as well as the profoundly influential thought of Sayyid Qutb, the godfather of contemporary Islamism, who wrote about Jews in Hitlerist terms which have been faithfully reproduced by so many subsequent Arab regimes (including that of the neo-fascist Nasser, who had Qutb hanged as a threat to his own secular power base). This Nazi-inspired race-hatred of the Jewish people, as well as the older form of Islamic contempt for the Jewish religion were intensified by a contemporaneous development, namely:

VI. The Modern Zionist Movement and the Success of the Jewish State

As noted above, integral to Islamic theology is a deep contempt for Judaism, because it is seen both as a corrupted, falsified religion in and of itself, and as a doubly superseded religion. This smug contempt turns very readily to burning hatred, however, when the followers of such a despised faith prove able not only to survive for millennia after their “replacement” by the “final revelation,” but to return to their ancestral land – long since incorporated into Dar al-Islam – and found there, against all odds and after vanquishing half a dozen much larger Arab armies – a state which goes on to become by far the most prosperous and powerful in the region. To a smugly confident, boundlessly arrogant religion like Islam, such an occurrence is an absolute indescribable humiliation, and a threat to Islam’s own claimed finality and supremacy.

Traditional Christian anti-Semitism was, too, an expression of deep insecurity and embarrassment at the persistence of a religion that was to have been superseded. Given the even more grandiose theological claims of Islam as compared with Christianity, combined with a resurgence of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael far more dramatic and decisive than anything we achieved in Christendom, the resulting intensification of Islamic anti-Semitism was much more pronounced. Combine this with the flood of national-irredentist-racial notions entering the Islamic consciousness from Europe and you end up with a psychotic cocktail of humiliation, rage and lust for vengeance.

One implication of this, I would argue, is the tragic error we see played out not only in Israel but throughout the West, in thinking that we can assuage Islamic fury by being kinder, more sensitive, by emphasizing democracy and due process, by going out of our way to avoid offending Muslims, by offering every Muslim butcher in Jerusalem

and new York and Paris and London a fair trial, by denouncing “Islamophobia” in the same breath as we denounce Islamic crimes, by allowing openly Islamist-supremacist parties to operate in the Knesset, etc. We like to pretend that this is all a sign of our “strength” and refusal to be “brought down to their level” by the terrorists.

We do not uniformly appreciate the depth of Muslim humiliation and rage, not to mention contempt for Western civilization. This attitude does not placate Muslims, but rather emboldens the radicals. “Look at these contemptable kafirs!” they say. “They have all this money and technology and power – they could wipe us off the face of the earth in fifteen minutes if they really wanted to. But instead, we can butcher their soldiers, their women and children on the streets, in the subways, in their homes and synagogues and churches and publishing houses and markets and schools, we can spit on them, insult them, republish Nazi cartoons of them, call their ‘Trinity’ paganism and say that their rabbis each children’s blood, and not only do they not take revenge – they go on their hands and knees and apologize for offending us! Truly, Allah has implanted in them the most servile, sheep-like souls to remind His faithful Muslims that these kafirs are weak and doomed.”

If I were Muslim, I think I might have a hard time accepting the need for Islam to reform if I looked at the West and saw such weakness and decadence. So, the irony is that Islam may remain trapped in its mold of contempt and hatred for Jews and for the West writ large precisely because of our persistence in the “virtues” of tolerance and forbearance.

VII. Precis

The substitution of “the eternal Jew” for demonic figures in Christianity and Islam may help explain why there is less anti-Semitism in the Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto and Confucian tradition. Without expanding into a new realm of investigation, the Eastern concept is based less on the Zoroastrian battle between lightness and darkness and more on the nature of what Judaism understands as “enlightenment.” When Moses on Mount Sinai asked to see God, he hears the thirteen attributes of kindness and love rather than being exposed to any war between demons and gods. When Moses comes down from his forty days on Mount Sinai, the people seek *karen orr*, rays of enlightenment. The perfection of the soul in Judaism and the Eastern traditions is more about an individual’s internal struggle and less about the identification of evil forces.

Hopefully this essay will be a starting point for a discussion concerning how Israel has become a substitute for traditional anti-Semitism.

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