

JEWISH LITERACY

Michael Lotker

20th Century (Zionism, the State of Israel, Antisemitism & the Holocaust)

OVERVIEW OF HISTORY

- 1) People Israel, Land of Israel and State of Israel
 - a) People vs. religion
- 2) Jews have always lived in Israel
 - a) God's first words to the first Jew "Go to the land that I will show you."
- 3) Modern Zionism starts in the late 1800s
 - a) Response to antisemitism and the Russian pogroms
- 4) Theodor Herzl (1860-1904)
 - a) Turned Zionism into an international movement
 - b) Influenced by the Dreyfus Affair
 - c) Convened 1st Zionist Congress in 1897
 - i) 204 delegates from 19 countries
 - d) Zionist Congresses would adopt what will become the Israeli flag, the Hebrew language, etc.
 - e) Uganda proposed by British, rejected by 1903 Zionist Congress
- 5) Balfour Declaration 1917
 - a) Undone by "White Paper" in 5/17/39
 - i) Limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over 5 years
- 6) Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922)
 - a) *Meshugga le-davar* – obsessed with an idea
 - b) Allowed only Hebrew to be spoken in his home in Palestine
 - c) His son becomes the first native Hebrew speaker in 2000 years.
- 7) UN vote for partition in 1947
- 8) Israeli Independence Day, 5 Iyar/May 14 1948
- 9) Wars
 - a) Independence 48-49
 - b) Suez 1956
 - c) 6 day 1967: capture of major amounts of land (Suez, West bank, Gaza, Golan)
 - d) Yom Kippur 1973
 - e) Lebanon 1982-2000
- 10) Peace with Egypt (1978) and Jordan
- 11) State of Israel as contrasted with *Am Yisrael* (people Israel) or *Eretz Yisrael* (Land of Israel)
 - The Law of Return
 - The Israeli Political System
 - Religious Pluralism in Israel
 - Peace with the Palestinians
 - Intifada
 - Oslo & the Road Map
 - Withdrawal from Gaza

FOCUS ON ANTISEMITISM [see Lotker, Chapter 6]

1. What are the reasons for Antisemitism?

- Usual excuses: scapegoats, ethnic hatred, xenophobia, resentment of affluence, professional success, and religious bigotry.
- The reason is Judaism
 1. Jew's allegiance to God, Torah, and Israel
 2. Reason for Existence: to change the world for the better
 3. Jewish Chosenness
 4. Better quality of life as a result of Judaism
- As a result, Jews could escape by converting (except for the Nazis): Thus, Antisemitism is unlike other forms of racial or ethnic prejudice.

2. Jew hatred is unique:

- Jews have been expelled from nearly every country in which they have lived.
- Horror is nothing new, Chmelnitzky massacres in Eastern Europe 1648-49 targeted all Jews including infants and the general (non-Jewish) population nearly always joined in. (see Attachment A)
- Depth and permanence, all of history's great powers with any sizable Jewish populations have viewed Jews as a threat: Egypt, Roman Empire, Christian World, Muslims/Arabs, Nazis, Soviet Union.

3. God Torah & Israel

- God: Jews first to be intolerant of other Gods - Greek, Roman, Christian, Muslim or Human (the Nazi or Communist State)
- Torah: Jews must proclaim belief in God and denial of other Gods. Kosher laws. Sabbath. But Jews do not live apart like the Amish.
- Israel: Jews are both a nation and a religion. Since 1948 Israel is both a nation and a state.

4. Chosenness

- God chose the Jews to be His messengers on earth.
- Meaning: "spread ethical monotheism to the world and to be a light to the nations" ALL OTHER MEANINGS ARE NON-JEWISH
- Confers neither privilege nor superiority, only obligation & suffering.
- Not racial since anyone can become a Jew, anyone can become chosen.
- See Attachment B.

5. Antisemitism in the ancient world

- Jews denied the Gods of their neighbors.
- 3rd century BCE, Greeks.
- Maccabee revolt in 167 BCE.
- Rome: Jews denied Roman gods, Roman values (such as killing handicapped newborn infants). Jews rebelled twice and lost their land in 135 until 1948.

6. Christian Antisemitism

- Jesus came to preach to the Jews. By rejecting the messiahship and divinity of Jesus, the very existence of the Jews was an affront to Christian legitimacy.
- The Christian reaction was to deny the legitimacy of the Jews. The Church was now Israel. The authors of the New Testament had to discredit Judaism, with whom they were competing. This is the origin of the Antisemitism in the Christian Scripture.
 - That the Jews (all Jews: Mt. 27:25 “let his blood be on our heads and the heads of our children”) murdered Jesus.
 - Jews were incarnation of the Devil. (John 8:43, 44, 47)
- Church Fathers. St. John Chrysostom -- theological justification for violence against Jews (see Attachment C).
- Crusades; Mission to recapture holy land from Muslims. When found, Jews were offered either conversion or death.
- Three Medieval Libels
 - 1. Ritual Murder:** Jews accused of murder to recreate Easter. Leads to 150 trials of Jews and often entire Jewish communities tried and put to death. Became associated with Passover using Christian blood to make matzos (ironic since any blood is unkosher!). Nazis devoted 5/1/34 issue of *Der Sturmer* to ritual murder including illustrations of rabbis sucking the blood of Christian children. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia continued to tell newspaper interviewers that Jews celebrate Passover with Christian blood.
 - 2. Plots to Poison Christians:** Lots of examples but most significant associated with Black Death of 1348-49. Plague killed 1/3 of Europe’s population including Jews. Jews tortured into confessing in a trial in Switzerland and the verdict had all Jews above the age of 7 put to death and those below 7 baptized.
 - 3. Desecration of the Host:** In 1243 (28 years after 4th Lateran Council accepted dogma of transubstantiation), all of Berltitz’s Jews were burned alive for allegedly torturing a wafer. In Prague in 1389, 3,000 Jews murdered; Berlin 1510, 26 Jews burned and 2 beheaded.
- Christian Roots of the Holocaust: Nazism was anti-Christian but Christian Antisemitism made the Holocaust possible. Nazi anti-Jewish laws used medieval Church law as a model (see Attachment D).
- Martin Luther was initially critical of Church’s anti-Jewish policies because he believed they prevented Jews from converting. When Jews didn’t convert to Protestantism, his rhetoric became so venomous that Nazis used it as a defense at the Nuremberg trials. The first Nazi pogrom was held in honor of Luther’s birthday. A selection of Luther’s writings about the Jews is presented in Attachment E.
- Christians must accept the reality of their Antisemitism -- most have (see Pope John 23’s prayer – Attachment F). Jews must recognize Christianity has changed.

7. Islamic Antisemitism

- Jews historically treated better by Muslims than Christians.
- In early years Mohammed related well to Jews.
- When Jews rejected Islam, he condemned them.
- Jews and Christians afforded better treatment than pagans but still must be humiliated as *dhimmis*.
- Most Christian communities under Islam disappeared, Jews survived and often thrived.
- Judaism as a religion is not a threat to Islam, but the Jews refusal to be subordinated is. The State of Israel is since it's inconsistent with the view of Jews as humiliated or wretched.

8. Enlightenment Antisemitism (Voltaire was an Antisemite) and leftist Antisemitism beyond the scope of this lecture.

9. Nazi Antisemitism

- Only Antisemitism that did not provide for conversion.
- Claimed to be racial.
- Robbed war effort to continue murdering Jews (see Attachment G).
- Christian response – Attachment H.
- European Antisemitism aided the Nazis:
 - Whenever the local population refused to cooperate, many Jews were saved.
 - Denmark hid virtually all of its Jews and secretly ferried them to Sweden. Of the 400 Jews sent to Theresienstadt, “only” 51 died of natural causes due to the Danes’ interest in saving their lives. At the war’s end, Denmark’s Jews could reclaim their property.
 - Finland simply refused to deport its Jews; no Finnish Jews were murdered.
 - Bulgaria, with the support of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church saved 50,000 of its 64,000 Jews
 - The opposite is true
 - In Poland, where Jews were 10% of population, 3 million (of 3.3 million) Jews murdered. Every major Nazi death camp was in Poland.
- What happened
 - IN WW2, 55 million people died.
 - 6 million Jews (including more than 1 million children) equal to 1/3 of world’s Jews murdered.
 - 70% of Europe’s Jews.
 - 80% of Rabbis and students -- huge impact on Judaism.
 - Nov. 9, 1938 “*Kristalnach*” the night of the broken glass:
 - Synagogues burnt, homes and businesses vandalized, thousands of Jews beaten, many to death. Jews fined for the damage, Jewish property handed to Germans.

- Held in honor of Martin Luther's birthday.
 - After this, virtually all remaining Jews (earlier, "the pessimists went into exile, the optimists went to the gas chambers") tried to leave. But virtually every country refused admission to large numbers of Jews (including the British who controlled Palestine) THIS IS WHY JEWS NEED ISRAEL!
 - Voyage of the St. Louis to North America: In May, 1939, 937 Jews had passage and visas to Cuba; the Cuban government changed its mind and wouldn't admit them. Pleas to the US and other countries were to no avail as the ship went up and down the east coast of the US. Hitler was ecstatic. Finally some European (England, Belgium, Holland and France) countries agreed to admit them. Only those fortunate enough to have been selected by England survived. FDR, other American leaders, were largely indifferent to the plight of the Jews.
 - Refusal to bomb rail lines, concentration camps. The town of Auschwitz was bombed but only at its synthetic oil factory. Despite pleas from Jewish organizations, neither the rail lines, or the gas chambers nor the crematoria were bombed.
 - Jews in many communities (esp. Poland) herded into Ghettos.
 - Early murders (1 to 1.5 million) were by Einsatzgruppen. Jews of a town dug their own mass graves and were then shot. Leaders of these units were disproportionately highly educated men.
 - Murder squads followed German troops into Russia. At Babi Yar, 30,000 Jews were shot -- the guns fired nonstop for 3 days.
 - Death Camps: in 1942 it was judged that the machine gun (or CO poisoning) was too slow, costly, and bad for morale. It was calculated that using gas would cost about 2/3 of a penny to take a life. Later the amount of gas was halved to save costs even though it greatly increased suffering. Babies were sometimes burned alive to save gas (see Attachment I).
 - In Treblinka, of the 870,000 Jews sent, 70 survived.
 - In some camps, decent food was served only on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, Jewish fast days.
- Some stories
 - Reaction of Church:
 - Pope & Catholic Church silent through most of the war. Despite many requests, there was no public condemnation, threat of excommunication, etc. even when Rome's Jews were sent to the camps. We should understand that the Church may have been afraid of losing Catholic allegiance, of the problem of a war in which Catholic fought Catholic and of a possible Catholic holocaust.
 - Nazism not Christian, but most Nazis were Christian (see Attachments J&K).

- Many Protestant churches in Germany supported the Nazis.
- But Christianity has responded to the Holocaust (see Attachment L).
- The Vatican only recognized Israel at the end of 1993.
- The story of Concentration Camp Jews meeting to try God for crimes against humanity, convicting Him then praying the afternoon service.
- Rescuers:
 - Wallenberg - gave out more than 20,000 Swedish passports & and credited with saving up to 100,000 Jews - arrested by Russian as a Nazi collaborator - never heard from again.
 - Many religious Christians did save Jews -- one was Martin Niemoeller, pastor of a German Protestant Church -- arrested and sent to death camps he survived. His quote: "First they came for the Jews. I was silent. I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists. I was silent. I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists. I was silent. I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me. There was no one left to speak for me."
- Could it happen today -- the Milgram Experiment (see Attachment M).

10. Bottom Lines

- Understand why Jews are so sensitive about Antisemitism -- why we react so strongly to even the slightest suggestion.
- Understand why some Jews react so negatively to Christianity -- especially where conversion is suggested.
- Remember the Jew hatred never stops at Jews.

11. Further Reading

- Dennis Prager & Joseph Telushkin, Why the Jews? Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, 1983.
- H.J.Cargas, Shadows of Auschwitz, A Christian Response to the Holocaust, Crossroad, 1992