

Christian Anti-Semitism

by Rita Varga Nagy

Almost 2000 years ago, Christianity helped give birth to modern, racial, anti-Semitism. How can a religion that teaches love be the source of such hate? Perhaps we can answer this question if we consider the history of the Christian Church and the teachings of the New Testament separately.

How did the history of hate begin? The first victim of anti-Jewish sentiment and policy was Isaac, whom the neighbouring king hated and exiled. Later, the Egyptians said, 'Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply . . . get them up out of the land.' (Exodus 1.10)

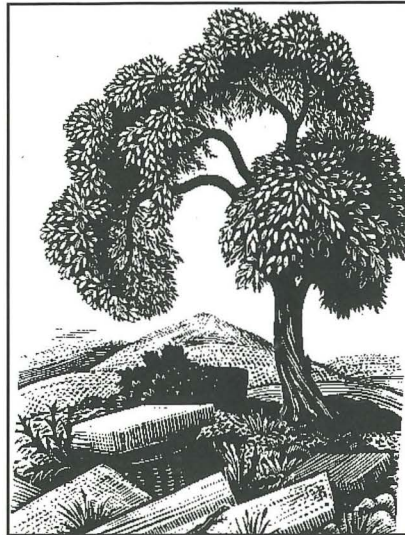
Unlike other peoples Jews refrained from taking part in the their neighbours' religious ceremonies; and they were the only people in the ancient world who upheld the idea of the unity of God. Their exclusiveness engendered animosity in the pagan world against Judaism and the nation of Israel.

Greeks accused Jews of being 'atheists' because Jews would not worship their gods. The other, fundamental, accusation, was that Jews were misanthropes. The first blood-libel charge against Jews was made by Apion, who claimed that every year Jews kidnapped a foreigner and killed him. The first official attempt to exterminate Jews was made by Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC).

Christian anti-Semitic tendencies appeared after the second century AD, when Church fathers began to spread distrust of their Jewish 'adversaries'. Taking passages out of context, or misinterpreting them, they interpreted the Bible 'spiritually', that is, to mean that God had rejected the Jews and that Christians were the chosen people. Jews were Christ-killers. The Church fathers tried to justify their theological arguments not only by reference to the Bible but also to historical events, such as

the destruction of the Temple.

If the Bible is taken as a whole, however (and particular care paid to the New Testament, often said to be the source of Christian anti-Semitism), using the original texts, and considered separately from the history and theology of the Catholic Church, one finds it is not an anti-Judaic work. Moreover, the religiosity of Jesus and his disciples was deeply Judaic: they



described themselves as Jews and relied heavily on long-established Judaic symbols and beliefs to establish their own sense of identity. Their teachings concerned spiritual, transcendental and religious phenomena - salvation by grace rather than by Old Testament Law, for example - and their hostility was directed at the hypocrisy of *some* Jewish leaders, not at the Jewish *people*. From these criticisms, however, Christian anti-Semites deduced that *all* Jews had certain characteristics: for instance, that they were wicked and accursed because they lived by Old Testament Law.

There are many statements in the Bible which refute the anti-Semites' charges. In Acts, for example, the view of the ancient Church of the 'conscious crucifixion' is expressed thus: 'I know you did in ignorance, so also did your rulers.' (Acts 3.17).

In the fourth century Christianity became a state religion strongly linked with political authority. The Catholic Church mixed its identity, culture and tradition with antique, pagan

culture, rather than with the Jewish tradition. Ancient anti-Semitism reappeared and united with the anti-Semitic teachings of the Church. This amalgam, over the centuries, spread throughout Christian Europe, and the popular conceptions of Jews it fostered became deeply rooted in the European collective mind and unconscious.

In the Middle Ages, crusaders killed Jews in the name of God, accusing them of well-poisoning, ritually murdering Christian children, and of hatching secret conspiracies. The Catholic Church was violently anti-Judaic. There were many pogroms against Jews; laws prohibited them from enjoying equal membership in society; and the Church - with legal backing - burnt the Talmud, forced Jews into ghettos, and even expelled them abroad. The Inquisition 'purity of blood' law required those who aspired to public office to prove that they had no Jewish ancestry.

With the rise of secularism, old Christian prejudices did not disappear but were transferred into a new 'religion'; this culminated in fascism, which was based on racial conceptions of human nature. There are similarities between Hitler's anti-Semitic legislation and the anti-Judaic legislation promoted by the medieval Catholic Church: the prohibition of intermarriage; the compulsory wearing of yellow badges; the exclusion of Jews from certain professions; and so on. Catholicism fixed the Jews in the role of scapegoat, as outsiders, as the Devil. For Hitler Jews were also diabolical - the opposite of Aryan purity - and they were also linked by blood ties, that is, they could never change. Nothing prevented Hitler from expressing his hatred by exterminating Jews. After the persecution of Jews by Christian nations, secular totalitarianism made an attempt to 'cleanse' Europe with a 'final solution'.

Rita Varga Nagy is a PhD student at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and a Visiting Research Associate at CSD.

Political Asylum and Refugee Law

by Satvinder Juss

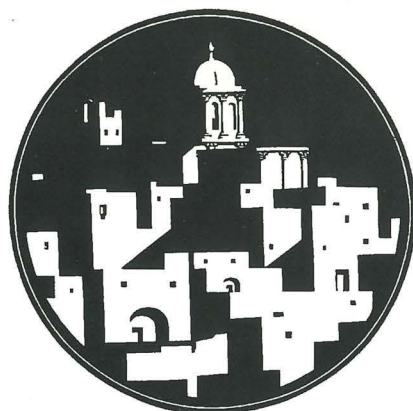
'It is all very well for the Right Honourable Gentleman safe in the Sylvan seclusion of the Forest of Dean to philosophise on the traditions of England, and extol the beauties of free and unrestricted asylum to all and sundry. . . . Sir, the open door is a very fine thing as long as it is someone else's.'

Thus Sir William Evans in the debate on the Aliens Bill of 1905, which ended Britain's open door policy, attacked the influx of Jewish immigrants who were fleeing the pogroms in Russia, and ushered in the era of immigration controls. Sixty years later, the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968 were passed, to restrict New Commonwealth immigration from the colonies. Now, nearly one hundred years after immigration controls were first put in place, problems in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa have produced the third phase of large-scale immigration and the spectre of further controls. But is control necessary? And, if so, what form should it take?

Little has been learnt in these past hundred years about the proper role of social and legal policy in this area. The government has allowed itself to be side-tracked into populist and jingoistic behaviour. Not that there is no problem. In fact, the movement of people across the world is expanding apace. In 1984 there were 10.5 million refugees world-wide. Today, there are more than 23 million. Ten years ago the UK had 4,170 asylum applications from refugees. Today, it is faced with nearly forty thousand. Yet all the evidence shows that if principle is sacrificed pragmatism also suffers.

Only three years ago, the government passed the Immigration and Asylum Appeals Act 1993, which dramatically reduced the number of refugees

entering this country. Before the passage of the 1993 Act only 16 per cent of asylum seekers were refused entry; after its passage a staggering 76 per cent were turned away. Yet now, in 1996, a new Asylum and Immigration Bill is being considered by Parliament. This will also reduce numbers, but already there is concern about its other effects. An independent panel, headed by the former Court of Appeal judge Sir Ian Glidewell, concluded that the Bill was doomed to failure and could



increase racial discrimination. The panel also found that increased regulation meant that - contrary to the government's contention - the Bill would *slow down* the applications and appeals procedure.

It is time now for Britain to consider seriously embracing an open-door policy. All vibrant and dynamic economies facilitate easy access. Britain's immigration control this century has been *ad hoc* and reactive, not planned and pro-active. Control has not been based on any *a priori* determination of the needs in housing, education, public health and employment, which alone can decide a country's capacity for social absorption. No one has ever worked out what the optimal level of population is in Britain. The result has been that Britain has an exclusion rather than an immigration policy. A proper immigration policy would work out and identify the rationally assessable harms that might result from increased immigration. Britain (like the EU) has seen immigration as a mere policing matter.

The declining birth rate throughout Europe means that industrialised economies will have to attract more labour. The French National Institute of Democratic Studies has reported that, because of this decline, by the end of the 1990s France will need over 100,000 immigrant workers a year. In Britain, a report prepared for the Carnegie Inquiry states that policy-makers - government, employers and trade unions - should look beyond the recession to the time when 'Third Agers' - people between 50 and 74 - will withdraw from the workforce and yet remain healthy. Because the number of younger people in the workforce will also have fallen by then and those remaining will be unable to sustain those out of work, the 'Third Agers' will burden the economy and hinder the chances of a long-term recovery. The answer to this problem is to have more workers, not fewer.

An open-door policy does not mean that non-citizens can do what they want once admitted, nor that they cannot be expelled. Citizenship may be denied them, or it may be carefully regulated; and their economic activities may be circumscribed.

However, once they want to become fully contributing members of society they should be permitted to do so. Citizenship - in the sense of having the right to a passport - is now an out-dated idea in modern democracies. It is the modern equivalent of feudal privilege. It is not even based on fealty and allegiance, but is an inherited status. It is incompatible with the values of Western liberal democracies, which subscribe to the idea that all individuals are of equal moral worth.

Citizenship must cease to be a means used to exclude people. In a borderless world it should not be an integral element of the sovereignty of a state. Instead, like the right to work, it should be viewed as a fundamental human right.

Satvinder Juss is Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Westminster. This is an edited version of a paper he gave to the CSD Seminar in March 1996.