

The story of Jewish-Gentile relations is a long and involved history with all the passions, nobleness, tragedy and humanity that is possible in the gamut of human emotions. In a short address such as this, it is impossible to explore in depth the relationship between Jew and Gentile, and my aim is only to throw some light on the main features of this relationship during the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, in other words the period from roughly 1300 to 1600. There three hundred years witnessed the decline of the medieval world, the rise of the Renaissance in Italy, and later north of the Alps and the break within the Christian Church, or the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

^{A number of}~~the~~ questions arises; How did all this affect the position of Jews in Western Europe during the 300 years under discussion?, Did the declining feudal system bring some relief to the Jews?, Was the urbanity, humanism and general optimism of the Renaissance reflected in a more humane relation between Jews and Christians?, And finally, Did the breakup of the monolithic Christian world into segments have a positive or negative impact on the position of Jews in European society? We will try to answer some of these questions and attempt ^{to draw} some conclusions ~~from this~~.

A brief look into European history prior to 1300 reveals the roots of the problems of distrust and hatred which will be so often evident in the 14, 15, 16th centuries. The reason for this is quite simple: we have before us basically two separate and often antagonistic societies living in close proximity with each other, both convinced that they are correct in their ways of thinking and ~~that~~

the other is in dark error. This kind of attitude usually leads to collision, persecution, forced conversion and hatred.

In a cursory examination of Early Medieval history we find that on the whole the relations between the Germanic successor states of the Roman Empire and the Jewish inhabitants of Western Europe ^{were on the whole} lived in ~~relative~~ peaceful. The major ~~exc~~ception was the treatment of the Jews in Visigothic Spain, particularly in the 7th and early 8th century. Relief, however, came in 717 when the Moslems crossed the Straights of Hercules and subjugated Christian Spain. They were welcomed by the oppressed Jewish population and enjoyed far greater freedom and opportunities than they had ever enjoyed under Christian rule. Spain became a center of Jewish scholarship for centuries to come and produced great men of letters, as well as profound philosophers. The intellectual brilliance of these Sephardim communities does not diminish until the tragic expulsion of Jews from Spain in the sixteenth century, one of the darkest pages in the relation of Christians and Jews. The loss of lives, the degradation and the thousands of instances of personal tragedy would furnish material for ^{number of} a separate talk.

The Jewish communities in France and in Germany during the 9th to 11th century lived in relative prosperity, particularly in the cities of the Rhineland. These Ashkenazi Jews found protection and were granted permission to settle by kings and local rulers. Although Royal statutes and local bishops warned the Christian communities from having social intercourse with the Jews in their midst, the period does not seem to be characterized by religious excesses. The period between the ninth and eleventh centuries is comparatively lenient in applying rules of segregation between

Jews and Christians, and social intercourse seems to have been fairly common at that time. Neighborly and even friendly relations between individual Jews and Christians occurred not infrequently, despite oppressive rules and different ideologies on both sides (Katz, Exclusiveness and tolerance,9). This period of relative harmony was broken toward the end of the eleventh century by the Crusades. The Crusading movement had as its ~~goal~~ goal the conquest of the Holy Land and is a manifestation of a new, aggressive and expansionist ^{Christian} Europe. There was also a new, militant religious feeling among many of the Christians and this brought disaster to many Jewish communities.

When the Crusades were first preached in the last decade of the 11th century by an itinerant religious fanatic by the name of Peter the Hermit, the feudal nobility began its slow preparation for a Crusade. Peter the Hermit's words, however, had a much more immediate reception among the lower classes, often not the most desirable elements of society. These undisciplined mobs of runaway peasants and urban proletariat, many indebted to Jews, were willing and ready to listen to fanatical preachers who, under the guise of religion, agitated against the Jewish communities.

In December, 1095, Jewish groups in Northern France wrote their brethren in Germany, warning them that the Crusading movement would bring them troubles. There were reports of Jewish massacres in Rouen. Peter the Hermit began to blackmail the French Jews, hinting to them that if they did not come up with certain sums of money, he would have difficulty controlling his unruly "Crusaders". A number of German communities, Mainz and Cologne, made voluntary contributions of 500 pieces of silver to the crusading movement. This, however, did not prevent the

outbreak of violence. One of Peter the Hermit's followers, a certain ~~Enrich~~ and his mob began their Crusade in May of 1096 by an attack of the Jewish community of Spier. The bishop came to the rescue of the Jews, (after a handsome present) and placed the Children of Israel under his protection. Twelve unfortunate men did fall into Crusader hands and were killed when they refused baptism. A Jewish girl committed suicide to preserve her virtue. The bishop saved the rest, arrested the murderers and had their hands cut off. This was only the beginning. ~~Enrich~~ and his mob moved to Worms. Their arrival was preceded by stories about poisoning wells and drowning of Christians. The Jewish quarter of Worms was attacked and many were killed. As in Spier, the bishop sought to protect the Jews and opened his palace to them, but the angry and undisciplined mob broke down the gates and despite the protests of the bishop, slaughtered the unfortunate refugees, probably around 500 in number (Runciman, 138).

The "Crusading army" rolled on to Mainz. The Archbishop closed the city gates before the bloodthirsty mob. Anti-Jewish riots broke out within the city, and the gates were opened to the Crusaders. The Jewish community placed themselves under the protection of the archbishop and the lay lord of the city and tried to buy their safety. The Jews crowded into the archbishop's residence, but when the mob showed its ugly mood, the archbishop fled and the Jews were massacred. The killing lasted for two days. There was also mass suicide on the part of the desperate members of the Mainz community. To save their synagogue from further desecration, they burned it themselves. It is estimated that about 1000 people perished in Mainz at this time.

The Crusaders continued on toward Cologne where the Jewish community heard the previous events with terror. Many fled the city, others were hidden by their neighbors and sought the protection of the ^{arch}bishop. The synagogue was burned and a man and woman were slain for not accepting conversion, but here at least no major massacre took place. Some of the "Crusaders" now headed toward the Holy Land, through Bohemia and Hungary; another group proceeded to "cleanse" the Moselle Valley of Jews. Again we hear of mass suicide and murder. Thus the efforts to free Jerusalem from the Moslems leads to Jewish massacres in the Rhineland. The last picture in this act is no better! After the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099, the Jews of the city fled in a body to the main synagogue. The victorious Crusaders set the building on fire and all were burned within. This even horrified some more sensitive Christians! The eleventh century ends on this bloody note and the subsequent years were not much better. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witness periodic outbreaks of violence often fanned ^{by} itinerant preachers and religious zealots. In 1215, the Fourth Council of Lateran set down the law that all Jews must wear a distinctive badge to set them apart from the Christian community. This same Council also decreed that all Jews were doomed to perpetual servitude because they had crucified Jesus. It is interesting to note, however, that the same pope who presided over this Council spoke up against forced conversion of Jews to Christianity. Innocent III said that "No Christian shall do the Jews ~~and~~ personal injury...or deprive them of their possessions...or disturb them during their religious celebrations". All historians, Jewish as well as Gentile agree that most of the

popes showed far greater toleration than lay rulers and above all, were more humane than the ordinary layman.

Anti-Jewish campaigns show up at regular intervals and almost always involved the three popular legends of 1. ritual murder, 2. desecration of the Host of 3. poisoning of wells. In 1235, an unsolved murder at Baden was laid to the Jews and resulted in Massacre. Eight years later the entire population of Belitz (near Berlin) was burned because of accusation of desecrated Host. In 1283, the charge of ritual murder was raised against the Jews of Mainz. Two years later, under the same circumstances, 180 Jews were burned in their synagogue in Munich. Similar pogroms occurred in 1286 at Oberwesel, in 1298 at Röttingen, Würzburg, Nürnberg. In the last decades of the 13th century, a large number of Jews from Mainz, Worms, Speir and other towns left for Palestine, while others sought refuge in Poland. In England and France, the story was similar. Massacre of Jews took place in England under the reign of Richard the Lionhearted. In York alone, 350 Jews perished. In 1211, 300 rabbis left England and France for Palestine. King Henry III began enforcing the law requiring Jews to wear a badge, resulting in further emigrations. In 1255, a ritual murder rumor in Lincoln reoccured. A boy, Hugh, was supposed to have been lured into the Jewish quarter, scourged, crucified and pierced by a lance in the fashion of Jesus. A fanatical crowd attacked the Jews, captured the rabbi, tied him to a horse's tail and dragged him through the city, and then hanged him. Mass arrests followed and 18 were executed. Many members of the Jewish Community were saved by the intercession of Dominican Friars. The boy Hugh was proclaimed a saint. Pogroms in the second half of the 13th cent.

almost completely wiped out the communities of London, Canterbury, Winchester, Worcester, Lincoln and Cambridge. In 1290, Edward I ordered all Jews to Leave England by November 1, forcing them to abandon all their property. In France, massacres took place in Anjou, Poitou and near Bordeaux where 3000 Jews were trampled to death by horses, ^{when they refused to} ~~instead of~~ becoming converts. Louis the IX (St. Louis) banished the Jews from France in 1254, confiscated their property and synagogues. Later he let them back. After they regained some of their prosperity, they were again persecuted and expelled by Philip the Fair in 1306. They could take only one day's food, and the clothing on their back. About 100,000 left under these conditions, leaving their wealth to a money-hungry king.

In Italy, the position of Jews was generally far better than in the countries North of the Alps.

A few words must be said to explain the intense feeling of distrust between Jews and Gentiles in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period.

We must be very careful in our judgement of past historical periods and avoid using modern basis of reference in order to understand the behavior of our ancestors. We live in a secular-oriented society where religious differences do not play a decisive role and our prejudices are now based on other, non-religious foundations, (race, color, nationality).

If we want to understand our medieval ancestors, it must be kept in mind that their Weltanschauung was very much oriented by their religious background. Both Gentiles and Jews lived in a religion-centered society and this greatly influenced their actions. The Church and the Synagogue had a greater impact on all of their

actions and attitudes than we can ever imagine. To us, doctrinal differences no longer seem to be matters of life or death; to our ancestors, their belief was of paramount importance. *Many even sought martyrdom.*

Thus the doctrinal difference between Jew and Christian was a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in their relations with each other. The members of the Jewish congregations felt that their faith was the only true belief, that God had spoken to them directly, made his covenant with them, and no one else, and that Christians are polytheistic blasphemers who might trace their religious heritage back to Biblical times, but in reality follow the teachings of a rebel Jew. The Children of Israel were the only true believers, their neighbors were primitive, blundering idolaters.

The other side was just as vehement in its righteousness. To them, Jesus was the promised redeemer, and not to accept Him was the greatest of sins. Christians looked upon the Jews as obstinate and blind people who do not perceive that the Messiah has come, who cling to their imperfect faith and strange customs.

At a time when both Jews and Christians placed far greater emphasis on the welfare of their immortal souls, how one achieved this salvation was of paramount importance. We have before us two groups, both convinced of the correctness of their position and the error of the other group. This certainty on both sides inevitably led to the tragic confrontation between the two groups.

Doctrinal differences were also augmented by social and religious segregation. Both the admonitions of the Church as well as Talmudic law, as interpreted by medieval halakhist, discouraged social intercourse between the two groups. Jewish law born under the conditions of the Exile emphasised the uniqueness of the Jew, tried to prevent his assimilation. The situation in which the

Ashkenazim found themselves were not very different. The Jews were a minority in a society which had aggressive proselytizing tendencies and a society which would have absorbed them if given a chance. Again we, with an integrationalist frame of mind, find this hard to understand. Many of the halakhist and learned rabbis insisted on maintaining a separate Jewish existence, attempted to cut down on the chances which might lead to apostasy. The Christian Churches, for their own reason also discourages social and religious intercourse. The fact that Jews followed their own laws in their communities, cling to their dietary restrictions, all added to the immense wall which separated the two factions.

What changes, if any, occurred between 1300 and 1600? Renaissance Italy was, on the whole, tolerant toward the Jews, as it was toward almost everything, including papal children. The Jews of Rome prospered under cultured and often indifferent popes. There was no ghetto in Rome and synagogues rose next to Christian churches. The popes even tried to legislate a more tolerant attitude toward the Jews. Martin V, in 1419, proclaimed:

"Whereas the Jews are made in the image of God, and ~~a remnant~~ will one day be saved, and whereas they have besought our protection: following in the footsteps of our predecessors, we command that they be not molested in their synagogues; that their laws, rights, and customs be not assailed; that they be not baptized by force, constrained to observe Christian festivals, nor to wear new badges, and that they be not hindered in their business relations with Christians."

The great Jewish historian Graetz remarked: "among the masters of Italy, the popes were most friendly to the Jews." Many, among them Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X had Jewish physicians. Most of the cultured, humanistically-oriented popes gave wide tolerance to Jews and the agnostics. Most of the Italian princes, the Medici, the d'Este and Gonzaga followed this pattern."

The cultural currents of the Renaissance did not leave the Jews outside the mainstream. Although the Mosaic laws against pictures and statues prevented Jews from becoming great painters or sculptors, still they excelled in other fields.

Probably most famous was Immanuel ben Solomon Haromi, a friend of Dante. Like so many others, he was a physician, but also gained a reputation as a Biblical scholar, grammarian, scientist and poet.

He writes beautiful sonnets in Hebrew and also composed some obscene songs. He shows the same wit and satire evident in the literature of the age. He wrote an imitation of the Divine Comedy called Heaven and Paradise. He comes to the same conclusion as G.B. Shaw in Don Juan in Hell, that heaven is a dull place because all the virtuous people are bland personalities. All interesting and beautiful people are in Hell; only ugly women are virtuous.

The Learned Elijah Levita, a German rabbi, was invited in 1509 to Rome, took up his residence at the palace of Cardinal Aegidio of Viterbo. The cardinal learned Hebrew from the Jewish scholar who enjoyed his 13-year stay in the capital of Christendom.

The Renaissance also witnessed a new interest in Hebrew studies on an institutionalized basis. Chairs of Hebrew were established at several Italian universities and Jewish scholars taught the courses. Most notable was Elijah del Medigo, who held the chair of Hebrew studies at the University of Padua. Unlike northern universities, *Hebrew students were enrolled at Italian institutions of learning.*

As the Renaissance gained followers North of the Alps, the interest in Hebrew studies continued, in fact grew. The most important figure in Hebraic studies was Johannes Reuchlin, who in 1506 published an important book, The Rudiments of Hebrew Grammar. This is the first major book by a Gentile intended for Gentile use. A few years later, Reuchlin got himself involved in a major theological controversy with an apostate Jew, Johannes Pfefferkorn, concerning Jewish books. This episode is called the "Battle of the Books" and revolves around the efforts of Pfefferkorn and the Dominicans of the University of Cologne to burn Jewish books. Reuchlin and other Humanists come to the defense of Jewish scholarship and literature. ^{Letters of Obscure men -} The "Battle of the Books" is just an outward manifestation of the continued ill feeling toward the Jews outside of Italy.

In France the Jews are recalled and expelled repeatedly, always accompanied by confiscation of property. In the Holy Roman Empire, periodic pogroms continue, often led by friars. The most serious persecutions occur in conjunction with the Black Death which swept Europe in 1348 and in subsequent years, killing about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total population. As so often before, the Jews were blamed for this disaster and were accused of poisoning the wells of Europe in order to kill off the Christian population. According to a much repeated story, Jews from Toledo carried a terrible poison in little boxes to all parts of Europe, poisoning the wells as they went from country to country, killing Christians by the thousands.

It apparently never dawned on the Christians that Jews were also dying from this same Plague, and that the Black Death at least did not discriminate. Again the papacy tried to halt the senseless slaughter by issuing two commands to the Christian world exonerating

the Jews from any kind of guilt in the matter. It had little effect. It is interesting to note that there is evidence that the mortality rate among the Jews was probably lower, percentage-wise, than among the rest of the population. This can be mainly attributed to better hygienic conditions in Jewish communities. As the Black Death swept over Europe, pogroms followed and so did the exodus of Jews, mainly to Poland.

Next to Italy, ^{medieval} Poland was the most liberal country in its treatment of Jews. Since the Crusades of the eleventh century, there was a steady stream of immigrants from Western Europe to Poland, where they were welcomed by the rulers. Both Casimir the Great (1333-70) and the Grand Duke of Lithuania extended privileges to them. Even here, however, persecutions take place. In 1407, the rumor spread that the Jews had killed a boy to use his blood in the Passover services. A massacre followed. Further pogroms followed in 1463 and 1494. Yet on the whole, the Polish lands became a haven for Ashkenazim Jews into the centuries to come.

The Reformation did not bring any visible improvement in the fate of the Jews. Luther, whose actions precipitated the break of Christian unity was an ardent anti-Jewish propagandist. Among his works is a pamphlet entitled "Concerning the Jews and their Lies" which enumerates all the major accusations leveled against Jews in Medieval Europe-the fact that they rejected Jesus as God, that they were cursed by God for their sins of non-belief. Luther calls them intruders into the Christian community of nations, accuses them of deception and robbery and levels the age-old ~~story~~ story of poisoning wells, ritual murder of Christian Children and desecration of vessels of worship. He urged the population to burn down the houses

and Synagogues, conscript all able-bodied men and women to hard labor, and insisted that Jews should be given a choice between Christianity or having their tongues torn out. Carried away by his hatred, he declared:

"If they could kill us all, they would gladly do so. In fact they often do it, especially those who profess to be physicians. They can give poison to a man of which he will die in an hour, or in ten or twenty years. They thoroughly understand this art."

From Luther's statements to the words of an Austrian corporal ^{not} is such a great distance!

Calvinism, although more Old Testament oriented than Catholicism or even Lutheranism, did not produce a radical change either. Although the Calvinist celebrated the Sabbath instead of Sunday, although they used Biblical names instead of the names of the saints, the immediate result was nil for the Jews.

In the long run, however, the Reformation did produce an improvement. The fragmentation of Christianity resulting from the Reformation did eventually lead to a greater degree of toleration. When Christian society had to accept the fact that there were a variety of Christian sects living in a given social structure, it also led to the realization that the Jews were also part of the social fabric. Even more important, the age of Enlightenment, the increasing secularization of society, will ultimately lead to the toleration of differences. Unfortunately, our age has found new walls to build between Gentile and Jew, walls which were not based on doctrinal differences, but something called "race and nationalism" and the results are too well known to this audience.

Today, hopefully, we can return to the precept of the great medieval philosopher Moses Maimonides and echo his words:

"The righteous of all peoples have a part in the world to come".

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