

“The Blood Libel and relentless anti-Semitism”

By Jeffrey M Cohen

Debate not the merits
Of this case.
There *are* no merits
When men debase
Their soul’s inclination
To pursue truth;
In justice’s cause,
To become a sleuth;
Ferretting out the generational lies -
Bandied about at local assize;
Testified to in diocesan trial,
At episcopal courts,
With gall and guile;
Affirmed by Papal See, no less,
To Infallible truth,
With free access -
That Jews, accursed
One hundred-fold,
For Deicide and crimes untold,
Need Christian blood
As propitiation,
And to call down grace
Upon their nation.

Down the ages, this false allegation
Has reared its ugly head:
That matzah required

Christian children’s blood,
Extracted from the dead,
For the ritual of Passover,
And to desecrate the Host,
Symbol of Jesus’ body –
Among mortal sins,
Foremost.

To associate that libellous claim
With Passover’s celebration
Is monstrous, given that Torah provides
The clearest explanation:
That matzah recalls Israel’s flight
In haste from Egypt’s land,
When they took with them
The quickest-made fare –
Those wafers,
Baked by hand.

Not even a hint of theology there;
No anti-Christian smears;
For matzah pre-dates the Christian Host
By thirteen hundred years!

And, as for the ‘truth’
Of that Christian blood
That matzah’s alleged to contain:
No greater folly could be adduced,
No trumped-up charge more plain.

For Jews are bound, by biblical law,

From all blood, to abstain;
And, from all meat,
Before it's cooked,
All trace of blood,
To drain.
Hence, for an hour,
Their meat is left,
Covered in coarse salt grains;
The effect of which is to draw out all blood,
Till not a drop remains.

And, to this day, if a body is found
Lying slain on the ground,
Every trace of blood,
On clothes or earth,
We collect from all around;
To be interred respectfully,
As God's gift of life, returned;
For, no blessing that He
Has bestowed on man,
Do we allow to be spurned.

It is more than preposterous, then,
That among the allegations,
Concocted, down the centuries,
By monks and nuns and sages,
Was that Christian blood was a remedy
For the wound of circumcision,
Or an effective aphrodisiac –
Go, ask any physician!

Another medieval canard
Concerned menstrual emission
Which they alleged was, equally,
A Jewish male condition,
Relieved by a draught of Christian blood
As a dietary addition.

A further libel,
That was widely disseminated,
In European countries
Where Jews were execrated,
Was the commitment of world Jewry
To a secret obligation
To offer the blood of a Christian child
As a daily libation,
And as a sacrifice to the Lord
In commemoration
Of those offered in Temple times,
With priestly participation.

And if you want to know which community
Led that rite in any year,
Just check where most Christians
Were known to die or disappear.
Hence, in 1235,
In Fulda, Germany,
The deaths of five Christian boys
Was alleged by the clergy
To have been the work of the Christ-killers,
A sweet savour to their Lord,
To please Him and to use the blood

As their well-deserved reward.

A most popular explanation
Of a young Christian child's death
Was that Jews enact the Passion
And Jesus' final breath,
By torturing innocents
And glorying in their cries;
'An eye for an eye',
A revenge most sweet -
A tissue of medieval lies.

To strengthen the charge that murder-lust
Lay at world Jewry's door,
Jews were dubbed the devil,
And every Jewess, its whore.
Their bodies were not human –
So the common myth ran –
And only the blood
Of Christian youth,
Could transmute them
Into man.

Every vile trait imaginable
Was attributed to the Jew,
And promoted in sermons
To the gullible in the pew.
All society's ills
Were laid at his door;
All pent-up frustrations,
With hatred at their core;

History's scapegoat -
Natural to abhor!

When the Black Death took its toll,
Who was to blame?
The Jews, of course,
Must have poisoned the wells;
No one else was in the frame!
They befriended the lepers,
And took them all food,
Then pushed them into the water,
For the poison,
Their bodies exude.

Lies breed exponentially,
And others
Entered the mix:
Usury, extortion,
And mocking the Crucifix.

Libels in Norwich;
In Blois, central France;
Saragossa and Lincoln –
The Jews just stood no chance.
Massacres, Exiles;
In ghettos, confined;
Forced baptism, pogroms;
As lower than dirt, defined;
Jew-badges, Jew-clothes,
Pointed hats, to wear;
Inviting the yokels

To stare and to swear.

The Christian liturgy enshrined
That image of the Jew;
Eternal guilt for the saviour's death
Attached to the Hebrew.
The ages would not dim the crime
Nor offer reconciliation;
Piety, it was affirmed,
Lay in recrimination.

Pro perfidis Judaeis -

'For the deceit of the Jew' -
Was the prayer recited fervently,
By clergy and by pew.

Witness the preposterous claim
Of their theology;
A misappropriation,
With no apology:
That the words of Judaism's prophets,
In Holy Writ,
Preserved,
Referred to their messiah;
For their faith alone,
Reserved.

Christian art also played its part
In the Jew's demonization:
With attributes that elicited
Feelings of detestation.

Above all, an ugliness,
Of feature and of gait;
Of action, inclination;
Of the wish to dominate.

The church artists' exaggeration
Overstepped all bounds:
Avaricious money-lenders,
With their bulging bags of pounds;
Bearing beast-like features,
A bulbous, hooked nose;
Horns and tail and goatees –
Bearing all the world's woes.

Other paintings placed the Jew
Within the depths of hell;
A demon on his shoulder;
Draped around his lapel,
A serpent, the symbol
Of Satan's cartel.

In depicting church and synagogue,
The former was represented
As a dazzling, upright figure,
With the latter as tormented;
Church, triumphantly,
Endowed with power and grace;
Synagogue cowed and humbled;
An object of disgrace.

Medieval drama played its part -

In a truly dramatic way –
In the spread of anti-Semitism,
Via the Mystery, or Miracle, Play,
Wherein all the stereotypical
Characteristics of the Jew
Were amplified and falsified -
With never a missed cue.

The bible stories were re-written,
Showing Jews in a terrible light;
Jesus' trial and death embellished,
To rouse the mob to incite
Further hatred and violence
Against their local Jews;
And the turning of days
Into nights
Of distorted
'Good News',
Wherein Pontius became the good guy,
Helpless to protect
Jesus from the Jewish mob's
Antipathy toward his sect.

And Judas, the betrayer,
Became the typical Jew,
Who, for thirty silver shekels,
His own Lord,
Would pursue.

Thus was born a tradition,
In literature and life,

Of the Jew as an arch villain,
Ever fomenting strife;
To be spread by countless agents,
With preachers to the fore;
Engrained in imagination;
Enshrined in rich folklore.

To Shakespeare,
Some credit,
For stepping into the breach;
Though presenting his Shylock
As a money-grabbing leech,
Yet placing boldly in his mouth
This well-known (paraphrased) speech:

*Has not a Jew a pair of eyes;
Does he not use two hands?
Has he no organs, passions, pride;
No taste for similar brands?
Does he not also hurt and bleed,
When stabbed by a knife?
Won't he endure the same disease,
Or, when poisoned, lose his life?
Does he not share the same sun's warmth,
And under the same moon, sleep?
When he mourns and suffers loss,
Will he not also weep?
When threatened, will he not fight back,
With his very last breath?
When facing forced apostasy,
Will he not opt for death?*

There followed the publication
Of anti-Semitic tracts,
Written by 'experts',
Who clearly knew 'the facts'
Relating to the blood
For which Jews thirst;
And the witchcraft
Into which
They were wholly immersed.

In English, German and Russian,
They rolled off the press,
A 19th and 20th century
Avalanche of excess;
In brainwashing the masses,
An absolute success.

So, when a 12-year- old Christian boy,
Was discovered, mutilated,
In a cave outside Kiev,
Evidence was fabricated,
To ensure that Mendel Beilis,
The Jew, was incriminated.

The crime occurred
At Passover time,
In 1913;
So the assumption
Of Jewish guilt
Was predictably routine.

The Beilis case attracted
World-wide attention;
Jews felt their faith
Was placed on trial;
Subject to close inspection.

A Lithuanian priest, Pranaitis -
Clearly on a mission -
Cited sources from the Talmud
To buttress his submission
That Beilis was following
A ritual, prescribed,
And was guilty of a heinous crime,
To which Jews, worldwide, subscribed.

When that 'expert' in Talmud,
Under cross-examination,
Was given some simple Aramaic words,
To provide a translation,
He ashamedly admitted
That his quotes were plagiarised
From earlier propaganda,
Wherein Jews were demonised.

When the Jewish experts took the stand,
Their knowledge was shown to be sound;
Their rebuttals ensured that the Beilis case
Soon fell to the ground.

But, alas, that didn't spell the end
Of European demonization;

For tolerance of Jews
Had ever enjoyed
Scant approbation.
Instead, a myopia
Distorted vision,
As the Jew transmogrified into
A fearful apparition.

That monstrous libel,
May now be understood
As a prime motivation
For shedding Jewish blood.
Down the ages it justified
The worst atrocities,
Securing Jewish banishment
From Europe's main cities.

Hitler's theory of 'the big lie',
Was accepted as true;
He used it to brain-wash Germany
Into blaming the Jew
For all the country's ills
And the First World War's defeat,
Through their global conspiracy
To bring Germany to its feet -
A fact, he reiterated,
They were desperate to repeat.

Jewry's war against them,
He claimed had now begun;
A struggle, he assured them all,

That could not be won
Until every minute trace of them
Was detoxified,
And of their odious presence,
The globe was purified;
For which reason, the master race
Was wholly justified
In promoting the Fuhrer's plan
For their genocide.

One ancient accusation -
That should have been assigned
To the naïve malevolence
Of some psychotic mind -
Mutated like a cancer,
To metastasize
Into a malignancy
That none could cauterize.

Alas, the global body
Is still being invaded
By racist tumours
That multiply unaided.
We delude ourselves with slogans
And legislation, fine;
Political correctness,
We toast as with wine.

But anti-Jewish feeling
Is still an opiate,
With many addicts feeding

On the modern Jewish State.
In countless Arab countries,
With vigour it's still aired,
In interviews with clerics,
That are globally shared.

*"For evil to flourish
It only requires
Good men to do nothing" –
But to watch what transpires!*

Enlightenment, modernity –
You're empty attributes,
As long as nations lust after
Racism's rotten fruits.

© Jeffrey M Cohen
January 2017

QUESTIONS & POINTS FOR FURTHER STUDY

(Note that the answers will not necessarily be found in chronological order within the poem, and some answers may require the use of the internet.)

1. Why was the blood libel such an obvious lie when applied to Jews?
2. With which particular festival was the libel associated?
3. What do you understand by the term 'Deicide'?
4. Name three benefits that the Anti-Semites alleged the Jews believed they could gain from use of Christian blood?
5. What arguments does the poet use to counter the myth the Jews drink Christian blood?
6. How do Jews remove blood from raw meat?
7. How does the Bible explain the significance of matzah?
8. What is the meaning of the allegations made against Jews that they 'enacted the Passion'?
9. What is the meaning of the term 'Host' in the Christian religion?
10. Name two cities in England where such blood libels were widely publicised?
11. Name two cities, one in France and one in Spain, where such a libel was similarly publicised?

12. What other wicked allegations were made against medieval Jews?
13. The poet asserts that Jews are caricatured in Christian art as 'avaricious money-lenders'. Is it true that that was a popular profession for Jews in the medieval period, and, if so, why?
14. How do you understand the description of Jews as 'history's scapegoat'?
15. Give an example of how Jews were de-humanised.
16. Describe, in no more than six sentences, the circumstances attending 'The Black Death'.
17. Which particular plague did it describe?
18. What was the title of the anti-Jewish Latin prayer that was incorporated into the medieval liturgy?
19. Explain the allusion to 'Judas the betrayer'.
20. What is the meaning of 'forced apostasy'?
21. How did Hitler justify his determination to exterminate the Jews?
22. What did he mean by 'the Big lie'?
23. What did the poet mean by describing the addicts of 'anti-Jewish feeling' as 'feeding on the modern Jewish State'?
24. How would you define racism?
25. To what extent do you think that it still exists in today's Britain?
26. Do you think the poet makes a persuasive case for the rejection of the Blood Libel?
27. Do you think that non-Jews today would believe the Blood libel allegation?
28. The poet refers to 'ghettoes'. Name two of the main ones.
29. Define a 'pogrom'.
30. What distinctive clothing did medieval Jews have to wear?
31. Explain the reference to 'an eye for an eye'.
32. Which crime 'would the ages not dim or offer reconciliation'?
33. When depicting Jews, what form did 'the church artists' exaggeration' take?
34. How was the superiority of the Church over the Synagogue depicted in medieval religious art?
35. Describe the image of the Jew in the medieval Mystery or Miracle plays.
36. How did those plays treat the Biblical stories?
37. Are such Miracle Plays still staged today? Give details.
38. Who was Pontius?

39. The poet paraphrases a well-known speech, beginning with the words, 'Has not a Jew a pair of eyes; Does he not use two hands?' Which famous English playwright wrote the original version, and in which of his plays does it appear?
40. Who was guilty of an act of betrayal in exchange for 'thirty silver shekels'?
41. To what does Christian theology apply the term 'The Good News'?
42. To which courts were the medieval blood libel allegations referred?
43. What was the name of the Jewish victim of the 1913 blood libel?
44. Why did the case against him collapse?
45. To what illness does the poet compare the spread of anti-Semitism?
46. The final stanza of the poem contains a quotation from Edmund Burke (18TH cent.). Do you detect any paradox in the notion of good men doing nothing in the face of evil? Can they really be described then as 'good men'?
47. Does social media offer the opportunity for the spread of hate and racism?
48. Does it make it more likely that the younger generation will become infected by intolerance and racism?
49. What steps should be taken to diminish racism in homes, schools, universities and in the workplace?
50. What would you do if you became the victim of racial abuse?
-