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The Jewish Question in Europe Redux

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Biography

Dr. Edward Rettig served for many years representing a major American Jewish organization in Israel. He is now an independent researcher and consultant.

Introduction

The headlines frighten. On January 26, 2014 a group of far-right demonstrators marched in Paris in a self-styled *Jour de colère* (“Day of Rage).” Both Left and Right responded. The New York-based left-leaning Jewish newspaper the *Forward*, “Why All of France Should Shiver When Demonstrators Shout: ‘Jews Out.’”¹ The right-wing *Algemeiner*, also an American publication, announced, “Hate-Filled Protest in France Attracts Thousands; Crowd Chants ‘Jew, France Is Not For You!’” and published a link to a disturbing video. This may have been the first time a version of “*Juden raus*” had been heard on the streets of Paris since the end of the Nazi occupation.

It was small comfort that the demonstration was not exclusively aimed against Jews. The *British Independent* reported, “France’s politics of hatred: Move towards traditional family values risks being hijacked by anti-Semites (*sic*) and homophobic nationalists. The *Algemeiner* noted that, “Besides Jews, the chanting also focused on homosexuals — “Gays out, dogs are welcome,” was one refrain reported...”²

In October 2013, the *New York Times* published an article on the phenomenon of growing anti-Jewish activity. Marianne Szegedy-Maszak asserted, “The hardy perennial of anti-Semitism has made a dramatic comeback in Central Europe. Germany has recently reiterated its friendship with Israel, in response to recent anti-Jewish activity. Far-right political parties in France and Austria have gained force. In Hungary, a virulently anti-Semitic party, *Jobbik*, is now the third-largest in Parliament. One party official has called for a list of all Jewish legislators, to assess their loyalty — a move that even the right-wing government condemned. (Though subsequently the government pledged, in the face of global criticism, to crack down on anti-Semitism).³

Anxiety is evident across the board. The European Union expresses concerns over manifestations of antisemitism in its constituent countries. The Fundamental Rights Agency published a disturbing finding in autumn, 2013 following a survey of Jews living in the EU, “... two thirds of the almost 6,000 survey respondents consider antisemitism to be a problem in the EU Member State where they live; three quarters believe that antisemitism has increased in that country over the past five years. Close to half of the respondents worry about being verbally insulted or harassed in a public

place because they are Jewish, while another third worry about being physical attacked in the country where they live for the same reason. Over half of the respondents heard or saw someone claim that the Holocaust was a myth or that it had been exaggerated. Three-quarters of respondents consider antisemitism online a problem, with the same proportion believing antisemitism online has increased over the last five years.”⁴

This impression of a widespread resurgence of antisemitic violence in Europe is balanced by more benign signs. Within a week of the French *Jour de colère*, the Community Security Trust, an organ of the Jewish community in Great Britain, announced that the number of antisemitic incidents in that country had dropped by 18% in 2013, constituting an eight-year low.⁵ Regarding France itself, Daniel Birnbaum, writing as a respondent in the Comments section of *Algemeiner* asserted, “... According to the Pew Research Institute of Washington, 86% of the French have esteem for Jews, as against only 77% of Americans. Other surveys (e.g. by Sofres-Taylor) have shown that 95% of the French would consult a Jewish doctor, 92% would work for a Jewish boss, and 87% would welcome a Jewish son or daughter-in-law. A two-year study of anti-Semitism by 12 researchers working under a French-Jewish sociologist has shown that anti-Semitism in France is “fragmented” and “shallow”. The last three presidents of the French-Jewish community have all asserted that “France is not an anti-Semitic country.”⁶

Speaking on Israel’s news i24 website, Professor Eli Barnavi, a former Israeli ambassador to France, echoes that analysis. He writes, “Has France become anti-Semitic (*sic*)? Certainly not. A country is anti-Semitic when its political class, its elites and its press are infected with the gangrene of anti-Semitism and when the hatred of the Jews is a political and cultural force. This is obviously not the case in France. The Catholic fundamentalists, fascists and Islamists who formed the bulk of the crowd on the "Day of Rage," and whose "demands" stir the pot in such a way that only the most clever can see the ingredients, is not even close to taking power. However, it is clear that in such a deleterious social climate, inhibitions were cast aside and Judeophobic sentiment was unleashed. Thus old miasmas, which were

thought to be buried forever, rose again to the surface from the depths of the national unconscious.”

Thus, it seems overly pessimistic suggest that Europe in general, or France in particular, is on the cusp of a massive outbreak of antisemitism. We see, however, that the “Jewish Question” is alive and well in contemporary Europe. But what precisely is the Jewish Question that Europe and its Jews are called upon to answer?

Historic Baggage

The term is weighted with historic baggage. The Jewish Question arose in the public clamor in England following the passage of the so-called “Jew Bill” of 1753 that allowed Jews to apply to Parliament to become naturalized British subjects. The Jew Bill passed, but so severe was public opposition—the Jewish Question in its first European iteration—that it was repealed a year later, with disastrous results for the morale of the Jewish community of England. The Jew Bill controversy, emerging as modern Europeans began offering up their dilemmas for public discussion, marks a good starting point for examining the long and as-yet-incomplete process through which Europe has struggled to redefine itself away from something roughly analogous to “Christendom.”

The Augustinian Paradigm and its Modern Permutations

Medieval Europe had no need for a Jewish Question. The answers regarding what to do with the Jews were well known. They were ugly answers, but they were straightforward, and held true for the Muslim world as well. Both Christendom and the Islamic medieval world offered the Jews a collective status that might be described as “second-class, while generally protected ... when it suits us.”⁷ The Jews were subject to the whim of rulers or mobs. If these turned against the Jewish community, the Jews had no recourse. The cycle in which Jews were invited to a new land, built up their community, and were finally expelled is a recurring pattern of Jewish life in pre-modern Europe.⁸ Even when the Jews were permitted to live among European Christians, this was understood as an act of “toleration,” a righteous intervention on behalf of those who were fundamentally undeserving. Christian

Europe located the rationale for this policy in the theology of St. Augustine, who saw the dispersion of the Jews as proof that God had punished them for their refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, maintenance of a small, humiliated Jewish community in the lands of their dispersion was a Christian interest, a living testimony to the truth of the Christian narrative of Jesus.⁹

It is only in the modern era, in the context of novel ideas of equality and individual rights that we begin to see convulsive debates over the treatment of minorities. These ideas accompanied a radical redefinition of what it meant to be an individual, a people, and in a new sense, “a minority.” Modernizing Europe developed an awareness of—and a term for—a Jewish Question.

Yet, from the perspective of the Jewish experience, the Augustinian paradigm proved remarkably resilient. The Jews became the paradigmatic manifestation of degenerate evil. Even arguments for toleration, in keeping with the Augustinian model, centered on the preservation of the Jews, not as an end unto itself, but as a means to serve other goals. Augustine’s solution to the Jewish Question has filtered down to our own age in guises such as a call to protect the Jews despite, or perhaps because of, how undeserving and despicable they may be. And so the Jews have been assisted or protected while simultaneously being held up as objects of contempt.

In 1928, the Catholic Church reiterated its disdain for Judaism in a decree that remarkably condemned anti-Semitism on the basis of the profoundly anti-Judaic doctrine of supercessionism, the idea that the Church took the place of the People of Israel as the bearers of God’s love and message:

The Catholic Church habitually prays for the Jewish people **who were the bearers of the Divine revelation up to the time of Christ** [bold added by author]; this, despite, indeed, on account of their spiritual blindness. Actuated by this love, the Apostolic See has protected this people against unjust oppression and, just as every kind of envy and jealousy among the nations must be disapproved of, so in an especial manner must be that hatred which is generally termed anti-Semitism.¹⁰

Few versions of the Augustinian paradigm in European discourse are as striking as that offered by the quintessential modern European thinker, Karl Marx. He had this to say:

Judaism continues to exist not in spite of history, but owing to history. The Jew is perpetually created by civil society from its own entrails. What, in itself, was the basis of the Jewish religion? Practical need, egoism.... The god of practical need and self-interest is money. Money is the jealous god of Israel, in the face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man—and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established *value* of all things. It has, therefore, robbed the whole world—both the world of men and nature—of its specific value.... The god of the Jews has become secularized and has become the god of the world. The bill of exchange is the real god of the Jew. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange.¹¹

Surprisingly, this calumniator of the Jews was engaged in making a case for awarding them equal rights. Here is the Augustinian argument that the Jews are to be protected despite the fact that they embody the root of evil and suffering in history—for Marx, the capitalist spirit.

The Augustinian paradigm broke down in Nazi ideology. However, it was in the Nazi “solution,” rather than in its "diagnosis" that its particular originality lay. It was widely accepted throughout European society that the Jews as such were, in some fundamental sense, damaged goods; a sick and alien element of society. The Nazis imposed a racialist rationale onto this view of the Jews, and they broke with the Augustinian paradigm in that they proposed once and for all to be done with the problem. Thus, the Nazi program of genocide, the carefully planned mass murder of the Jews, was called “the Final Solution to the Jewish Question” (*die Endlösung der Judenfrage*).

For Jews, then, the Jewish Question has been a tool for modern Europeans to address, or to find new ways to fail to address, the challenges of equality. Today there are at two main Jewish Questions that pertain to the Jews of Europe. The questions are related and their resolution may come in tandem, but they derive from very different challenges. One question is addressed to European society broadly defined,

challenging the direction in which it is developing and the Jews' role in this development. The other is addressed to Jewish society, and asks whether the European period in Jewish history has ended or has entered a new cycle of growth and revival.

The “Solution” of Clermont-Tonnerre

These were not always the “Jewish questions” in Europe. In the nineteenth century, Jewish and non-Jewish voices alike suggested that the Jewish Question dealt with the Jews themselves. The Jews must change radically if they were to fit into European society, and the “question” was whether they could or would do so.

Among the French revolutionaries, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre offered the classic formulation in his *Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions* of December 23, 1789. This text set the foundation for much of what has been said—and has remained unsaid—regarding the Jewish Question in Europe:

Every creed has only one test to pass in regard to the social body; it has only one examination to which it must submit, that of its morals. It is here that the adversaries of the Jewish people attack me. This people, they say, is not sociable. They are commanded to loan at usurious rates; they cannot be joined with us either in marriage or by the bonds of social interchange; our food is forbidden to them; our tables prohibited; our armies will never have Jews serving in the defense of the fatherland. The worst of these reproaches is unjust; the others are only specious.

Clermont-Tonnerre rejected the notion that the Jews were inherently unassimilable in the New France. Certainly, in familiar Augustinian fashion, he conceded that Jews are an odd people, despicable in their present state:

This usury so justly censured is the effect of our own laws. Men who have nothing but money can only work with money: that is the evil. Let them have land and a country and they will loan no longer: that is the remedy. As for their unsociability, it is exaggerated. Does it exist? What do you conclude from it in principle? Is there a law that obliges me to marry your daughter? Is there a law that obliges me to eat hare and to eat it with you? No doubt these

religious oddities will disappear; and if they do survive the impact of philosophy and the pleasure of finally being true citizens and sociable men, they are not infractions to which the law can or should pertain.

Yet, Clermont-Tonnerre, while generous in his offer of eventual citizenship, was also quite prepared to threaten:

We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation.... In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen.¹²

In its unquestioned sense of Western Christian superiority, Clermont-Tonnerre's argument calls to mind the delightful words of an unidentified United States senator during a debate in the 1930s: “[W]ith God’s help, we will lift Shanghai up, ever up, until it is just like Kansas City.”¹³ Clermont-Tonnerre placed at the feet of the Jews a clear message: Change your culture, reform your precepts, surrender any but the most tenuous cultural autonomy, and thereby earn citizenship. Otherwise, get out. It is important to note that in one sense Clermont-Tonnerre offered an escape from the Augustinian paradigm. While he too found Jews distasteful in their “unreformed” state, unlike St. Augustine, Clermont-Tonnerre saw no reason to preserve them either because of some perceived value in Jewish culture or as an echo of something contemptible—the hated *ancien regime*. He preferred to see them assimilate and disappear as a group in the New France.

Many of Clermont-Tonnerre's Jewish contemporaries found this formula eminently reasonable. However, Clermont-Tonnerre's dismissal of difference in the context of a smug sense of European superiority may seem out of fashion in today's

multicultural Europe. Modern Europe expresses at least a superficial willingness to both tolerate and promote voluntary shared identities and subcultures.

So pronounced has been this modern reconfiguration of the Clermont-Tonnerre paradigm that Professor Mark Lilla of Columbia University has suggested that the problem of the Jews in Europe today lies in a radically different place:

It is not the idea of tolerance that is in crisis in Europe today, it is the idea of the nation-state, and the related concepts of sovereignty and the use of force. And these ideas have also affected European intellectual attitudes toward world Jewry, and specifically toward Israel. Here there is an extraordinary paradox that deserves to be savored. For centuries Jews were the stateless people and suffered at the hands of Europeans who were deeply rooted in their own nations. The early Zionists, from Hess to Herzl, drew a very simple lesson from this experience: that Jews could not live safely or decently until they had their own state. Those who claim today that the state of Israel is the brainchild of nineteenth-century European thought are not wrong; this is hardly a secret. But the point is often made with sinister intent, as if to suggest that Israel and the Zionist enterprise more generally represent some kind of political atavism that enlightened Europeans should spurn. Once upon a time, the Jews were mocked for not having a nation-state. Now they are criticized for having one.¹⁴

To those who follow the permutations of the Augustinian paradigm, Lilla's insight is deeply worrying, but not surprising. Even so, an updated version of Clermont-Tonnerre's formula remains persuasive for many European Jews. At a conference of European Jews that was held in 2004, Mikhail Chlenov, the then-president of the Va'ad, the Federation of Jewish Organizations in Russia, interpreted Clermont-Tonnerre through the prism of this new understanding. Chlenov declared approvingly, "We see it very clearly. Yes, the Jews in the New Europe belong to this kind of identity."¹⁵ Is Chlenov correct? Can Europe make good today on the promise that it failed to honor in the twentieth century?

Let us recall Clermont-Tonnerre's rationale: if the Jews are related to as projects rather than as pariahs, they will develop until they reach the level of the

surrounding culture and become full members of European society. This rationale set for the Jews two traps.

The first was the catastrophic European failure to deliver on the promise of integration. The second was that Clermont-Tonnerre's promise of integration and equality was conditional upon the Jews' surrender of their unique identity and culture. Will European Jews pay the exorbitant price demanded by the Clermont-Tonnerre paradigm, even in its modern iteration, in exchange for equal citizenship? Can they develop a private Judaism shared over a community that is lively, meaningful, and, perhaps most critically, passes the test of transmission over generations?

This is the second Jewish Question in Europe, asked by the Jews themselves following the calamitous twentieth century: What is the long-term prospect for Jewish communal life in Europe?

Two Views of the Future of European Diaspora Jewry

On this question the Jews themselves register confusion. Former Israeli Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, himself a European-born Jew who was miraculously saved as a child in the Holocaust, raised eyebrows when he wrote in Israel's daily *Ha'aretz*, "I see the end of the Diaspora of Jews in Europe."¹⁶ No more than six months earlier, speaking at the third General Assembly of European Jewry in Budapest, British Jewish leader and chairman of the Conference of the General Assembly (GA) Jonathan Joseph said, "We are experiencing a reawakening of Jewish life and culture in Europe on a scale not seen for a hundred years."¹⁷ This double vision is a long-standing feature of Jewish discourse on Europe. In the 1990s, two books were published that reflected this perceptual dichotomy. One, written by American Jewish reporter and author Mark Kurlansky, is entitled *A Chosen Few: The Resurrection of European Jewry*.¹⁸ The other, entitled *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945*, was written by British Jewish historian and Brandeis University professor Bernard Wasserstein. Somewhere between a vanishing Diaspora and a reawakening on the scale of a resurrection lay the Jewish views on European Jewry.

This confusion is partially rooted in divergent collective memories of Europe. Some eighty percent of contemporary Jews live in America and Israel. Those whose

family origins lie in Europe are intimately connected to a Europe that may no longer exist. For the most part, the families of these individuals left Europe before World War II or soon thereafter. The depth of suspicion through which Europe can be viewed by those who were made refugees by Europe, or their descendants, may be unimaginable to others. Conversely, non-European Jews like myself have difficulty grasping the hopes that so many attach to the “New Europe.” Perhaps this is our problem and not that of Europe. In any case, it is a crucial component of the Jewish view of the Jewish Question on that continent.

My family of origin recalled the 1905 Odessa pogrom. Along with her siblings and parents, my grandmother was saved by a righteous Ukrainian whom she knew only as Mikhail. The custodian of the tenement in which they lived, Mikhail hid the family in the building’s cellar. In the aftermath of the pogrom, my grandmother and her family became refugees.

Historian Robert Weinberg informs us that the casualties in the 1905 pogrom may have numbered in the thousands, and that it was the most destructive and violent of the pogroms launched against Jews in the Russian Empire.¹⁹ It is one thing, however, to read the dispassionate description of a historian, and quite another to sit across a kitchen table and watch as your seventy-five-year-old grandmother paints with words a picture of a five-year-old girl’s emergence from the cellar after the mob has retreated.

That moment of transmission, a not-atypical experience for American-born Jews of my generation and certainly a common one for Israelis, should be considered by Europeans who attempt to appreciate the prism through which many Jews view Europe’s current Jewish Question.

A Jewish Demographic Revolution and its Implications

Further, the Jewish demographic revolution sows confusion. The admittedly fuzzy data indicates that in 1900, approximately seventy-five percent of the world’s Jews were Europeans, mostly living in Central and Eastern Europe.²⁰ They generally lived as second and third-class citizens. Many were subjected to discrimination, often inside a colonized population (in Ukraine and Poland, for example). Most were so destitute

that they considered the painful poverty of the Lower East Side of New York an improvement. With all this, European Jews were an integral part of the human scenery of European society, and had been for millennia. Outside of Europe, some fourteen percent of the world's Jews lived in the ancient Jewish communities of the Muslim world, while the last eleven percent (including an estimated 120,000 Ethiopian Jews) were scattered outside Europe and the Muslim lands, mainly in North America.

Today, Jewish demographics are altered beyond recognition. Only about eleven percent of Jews live in Europe.²¹ Nearly the entire Muslim world is ethnically cleansed of its Jews. Due to the targeted slaughter of a generation of European Jewish children in the Holocaust, Jews are probably the only ethnicity that has not regained its population in absolute numbers since World War II. The demographic recovery, hampered by a number of factors, is at least a generation behind that of everyone else who suffered through that war.

No other European ethnicity has known such a stark combination of mass murder and exodus from the continent. This experience deepens the distrust of non-European Jews toward Europe. Recalling the Jewish European demographic plunge in the past century, and given the high rate of intermarriage among Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, it seems clear that the overwhelming majority of non-European Jews alive today traces at least a portion of their heritage to that European Jewish community, and share the memory of its fate.

Hence, not a small number of Jews have a visceral sense of Europe as a place of death, expulsion, and a cruelly surrealistic promise of "liberty, equality and fraternity." Implicit to our historical narratives is the notion that our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents saved us from a horrible fate by leaving Europe behind. This line of thinking allows for the Mikhails in every country, and Yad Vashem, Israel's official Holocaust Memorial Institute in Jerusalem, goes to great lengths to commemorate them. Yet the very gratitude expressed in the Israeli civil religion and in American Jewish discourse for these acts of kindness only serves to emphasize the degree to which European society as a whole is perceived by many

Jews as fundamentally cruel and unwelcoming. The starting point in the modern non-European Jewish perception of Europe is thus one of extreme suspicion.

Why European Jews Feel So at Home

If we can understand the skepticism about Europe that comes so naturally to American and Israeli Jews (and is not lacking even in internal European Jewish discourse about Europe²²), how are we to understand the sense of belonging in Europe felt by so many European Jews today? What are the facts that support Jonathan Joseph's declaration of an unprecedented reawakening of Jewish life? A decade ago, Anthony Lerman, then chair of the Hanadiv Foundation, listed some developments:

How deep this revival is remains to be seen. Meanwhile, it would be truly churlish to underestimate such developments as the 500 percent absolute increase in children attending full-time Jewish schools in the UK; the surge in numbers attending Jewish day schools in France; working in 15 countries, the Lauder Foundation has created or supports 18 Jewish primary and secondary schools and 15 kindergartens, as well as a range of other educational projects. Then there is PAIDEIA, the European Institute for Jewish Studies in Stockholm, founded 3 years ago; the hugely successful Szarvas youth camp in Hungary; the women's teacher training college Beyt Chana in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. There are more than 80 Jewish museums in Europe and their European Association is meeting in Berlin as we speak. The European Association for Jewish Culture, set up 2 years ago, gives grants for cultural performance and production in music, literature, drama, painting, sculpture and has no shortage of applicants. The European Association of Jewish Studies has taken on a new significance as academic Jewish studies in Europe continue to expand.²³

This surge of activity in the Jewish communities of Europe underscores the reality that many European Jews feel a strong sense that Europe is home. While there is still significant Jewish emigration from the countries of the former Soviet Union and somewhat elevated levels of emigration from Western European countries, the latter is chiefly from France, and seems to come in waves following antisemitic acts. The fact is that the majority of European Jews do *not* emigrate. For the first time since

the United States closed its gates to immigration in 1924, and with the possible exception of some 12,800 Iranian Jews, there are today almost no Jews living in countries they would leave if they could. Europe's Jews live in Europe because they choose to do so. The collapse of the FSU and the opening of its gates allows for the certainty of this assertion. Thus, one might ask, what is there in European life today that prompts European Jews to choose to stay? In other words, what is the Jewish Question as seen from the vantage point of European Jews?

Grounds for Optimism

Several factors combine with the *Algemeiner*-noted research to provide grounds for optimism regarding the state of classic antisemitism. Firstly, we may note a change in European discourse on the Holocaust. The decades following World War II saw a great deal of dishonesty in Europe's response to its moral turpitude. With regard to responsibility for the events of the Holocaust, Europe had two faces in the mirror. There was the side of direct perpetration, the planning and execution of mass murder. This was the work of the Nazis, their allies, and their collaborators. Too, there was a parallel track of permissibility. European nations bear a great deal of responsibility for allowing and abetting the genocide. That they incurred no consequences—even moral ones—for this collaboration was the fault of the Allied powers and the occupied populations themselves. Europeans were extraordinarily hard-pressed to acknowledge their degree of overt complicity with the Nazis. Owning up to passive guilt was all the more unusual.

Today, however, one sees a growing internalization of the moral consequences of the Holocaust, accompanied by an increasing rejection of the denial that so characterized the societies of Europe thereafter. While decades of denial have influenced Jewish perceptions of Europe, the belated but evidently profound change in Europeans' understanding of their societies' culpability has brought about a corresponding change in the European Jews' perceptions of Europe within the Continent.

Marc Kurlansky intuited this when he wrote in the preface to his 1994 book, *Chosen Few*: "This book is ... the story of brave and tenacious people who have

rebuilt their lives in the face of incomprehensible horror and refused to be pushed out of their homes by bigots.”²⁴ Growing numbers of European Jews seem to feel that the change in the European discourse on the Holocaust has confirmed the wisdom of their parents’ courageous choice to remain in Europe.

This change has been accompanied by Europe’s burgeoning transnational politics and the sea change in the theological understanding of the Catholic Church regarding its relationship with the Jews. The perceived decline in nationalism, along with the Church’s courage in examining and correcting the flaws in its earlier teachings, holds out promise of a decline in the traditional motivations for anti-Semitism. Strikingly, in March 2000, the late Pope John Paul II visited the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and, following a Jewish custom, placed a note with a prayer into a crack in the stone wall. The Pope’s conduct, including his decision to make public the text of this prayer, would have been inconceivable in the past.²⁵

Replanting the Vineyards

It remains to be seen whether the flowering of Jewish cultural and educational activity will lead to a self-sustaining European Jewish community. The community is still in its early development and is highly dependent on Israeli and American Jewry for financial and human resources. Dr. Diana Pinto has given eloquent expression to the process through which European Jewry is coming back to life in her striking metaphor of the revitalization of European vineyards in the nineteenth century with grafts from California descended from those same continental vineyards. In a similar manner, ideas of pluralistic religious reform, born in Europe and carried by emigrant Jews to America, are now returning to provide a foundation for a reborn European Jewish community.²⁶ Pinto is something of a triumphalist in this area, arguing elsewhere that the multicultural Jewish communities of Europe could become a model for European society as a whole.²⁷

Can New Europe Be Trusted?

Yet, the nagging question remains: Can the new Europe be trusted not to collapse into madness?

Grounds for pessimism are not in short supply. Firstly, there is the bizarre relationship that the countries of political Europe as a group have with the State of Israel. It has so discouraged some enthusiasts of the Jewish future in Europe, that even the indefatigable Diana Pinto, in an article boosting European Jewry as a “third pillar” of the Jewish world (alongside the American and Israeli communities), writes bitterly of Europe’s relationship with the State of Israel:

Europeans seemed to be bogged down vis-à-vis Israel in a psychologically disturbed and most unhealthy blend of silence, guilt, Realpolitik considerations vis-à-vis the Arab world, misplaced international morality and legalistic punctiliousness, all of which wrought havoc with the very idea of Jewish life in Europe.²⁸

Secondly, we face the complicated state of Muslim-Jewish relations in Europe and their impact on the Jewish Question there. To examine this relationship, let us consider the two largest Jewish communities in the EU, Britain and France. There is a peculiar habit in some circles of comparing the intensity of anti-Semitic attitudes with anti-Muslim sentiment.²⁹ In doing so, we are told that Muslims face greater public opinion obstacles. In non-Muslim states, including France, Britain, Germany and Russia, unfavorable opinion of Muslims runs two or even four times higher than unfavorable views of Jews. But this is an eccentric measure, especially when used to make light of Jewish concerns over anti-Semitic prejudice. The fact that a Muslim neighbor also faces bigotry is of no comfort when analyzing the future prospects for Jewry in Europe. Ethnic and religious prejudice bodes ill for all minorities.

The “European Perspective on Jewish-Muslim Relations”

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the British Commonwealth, has offered what he calls a “European perspective on Jewish-Muslim relations”:

I remember how in our community, at the height of the suicide bombings in Israel, somebody came back from a visit to Israel, and people were asking him in the synagogue, "How's the situation?" And he said, "You want to know in a word? In a word, good." The other person replied, "Well, what about in two words?" "You want to hear how the situation is in two words? Not good." That is the situation in Europe.³⁰

This stereoscopic view seems to reflect global Jewish sensitivities just about right. Even a casual observer of interreligious relations in Europe may note the high level of integration of Jewish communities and the remarkable scope of interreligious discussion. Official political discourse in most of Europe has little patience for explicit racism or anti-Semitism.

Jewish anxieties about Europe are rooted, however, in realism. Muslims in Muslim countries report extreme levels of hostility toward Jews. It is to be expected that this fact would have a certain degree of influence on European Muslims. In Turkey, a nation that seeks to join the EU, seventy-three percent of the population report holding unfavorable views of Jews. Despite the total absence of Jews in Pakistan, the percentage is seventy-eight. In Egypt and Jordan, who signed peace accords with Israel, ninety-five and ninety-seven percent of the respective populations report negative attitudes toward Jews.³¹

Competition between mainstream and radical Islamist political and religious leadership groups creates its own moral morass. For instance, the ostensibly mainstream Muslim Council of Britain refused to participate in Holocaust commemoration day. Their decision was based on a purported parallel between the *Shoah* and what most Muslims refer to (following Palestinian usage) as the "*Naqba*," the Palestinian disaster of 1948. Without belittling the suffering of the Palestinians as a result of the 1948 war (or that of the Jews, for that matter), let the numbers speak for the moral myopia inherent to such a comparison: between five and six and a half million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, the result of a philosophic commitment on the part of an industrialized European nation to obliterate an entire people, one with which it had no dispute and which could in no wise pose a threat to it. Credible estimates of total Arab fatalities in the 1948 war, including Palestinians, Egyptians,

and Syrians, combatants and noncombatants alike, run between eight and fifteen thousand, with some six thousand dead on the Israeli side. How does one dialogue with a leader who uses the term “genocide” to describe the Palestinian experience of 1948 and does not distinguish between the moral challenges posed by the two events?

The “European Madness”

While that concern over relations with Europe’s Muslims lies within the scope of Rabbi Sacks’ ambivalent attitude, something deeper lies at its heart. It is what I would call the “European madness.” The most significant aspect of the Holocaust for the purpose of our discussion is so obvious a fact that it is rarely remarked upon: There was no basis for conflict between the Jewish and the German peoples. Arguably, one of the most horrific aspects of the Nazi project was that it amounted to a sustained program of collective insanity, carried out over many years by people who were considered quite sane. This cuts both ways today. On the one hand, the recognition of that horror lies at the foundation of the self-awareness of modern Europe and helps to explain its commitment to human rights and international law. On the other hand, while panic is not in order, there are signs that this madness is not wholly a thing of the past.

In an interview in the *Jerusalem Post* in March 2005, Dr. Claire Berlinski, an American Jewish historian based in Turkey and France, described this frightening irrationality:

This is where the genuine illness comes in, the absolutely irrational component that doesn’t even seem to have anything to do with European self-interest or power politics—the stuff that’s just nuts. The best example is the poll recently conducted revealing that more than 50 percent of Germans believe that Israeli crimes against the Palestinians equal or exceed those of the Nazi crimes against the Jews.³²

The University of Bielefeld poll cited by Dr. Berlinski is sobering. As the *Jerusalem Post* reported:

The survey, which aimed to determine what is “the cut-off point” between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism, finds that while “classical” anti-Semitism in Germany is on the wane, secondary anti-Semitism, often couched in anti-Israel views, are on the rise, especially among the Left.³³

In a word, “good.” In two words, “not good.”

The effects of the demonization of Israel in Europe during the Second Intifada have not dissipated, and they remain central to the Jewish discussion of the viability of a Jewish future in Europe. Rabbi Sacks connected the dots when he stated:

There have been only three mutations [of anti-Semitism] in European history: (1) with the birth of Christianity; (2) in the early Middle Ages, the demonization of Jews in Europe; and (3) in 1879, the birth of racial anti-Semitism. We are living through the fourth mutation, and every one of those mutations has been a significant shaper of European and Western history.... We now face a resurgence of anti-Semitism on a global scale, communicated by the Internet, e-mail, tapes, and videos, low-tech and high-tech.³⁴

In Rabbi Sacks's view, the crux of the new anti-Semitism lies in the demonization of world Jewry through the virulent demonization of the Jewish state. Here the main instigators are non-European, namely the Muslim states of Asia and Africa and their fellow-travelers. As Mark Lilla noted, in this latest version of the Augustinian paradigm, nationalism is the Jewish sin. For Sacks, the key reference point for this phenomenon was the Durban Conference of 2001:

What became taboo after the Holocaust? Five things: racism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, attempted genocide, and crimes against humanity. In Durban, all of those five accusations were leveled against Israel or the Jewish people, and now you see how easy it is to defeat an immune system. And that should be giving us great cause for concern. So the fact that this new anti-Semitism (*sic*) has emerged after sixty years of human rights legislation, Holocaust education, antiracist programs, and interfaith dialogue, after sixty years of saying, “Never

again,” the speed with which this has emerged should be giving us trauma. It really should.³⁵

That Europe *was* afflicted with a kind of broad cultural madness leading to genocidal mass murder is a historical fact. The two current Jewish Questions in Europe yield different and highly tentative responses. The Jewish Question in Europe directed internally at the Jews of that continent—that is, the question that the Jewish community faces regarding its demographics and its capacity to construct the infrastructure necessary to maintain Jewish life—will depend for its answer on actions over which the Jews of Europe have considerable control. Indeed, in that area, cautious optimism seems in order. As Anthony Lerman so trenchantly put it in his brief summary of recreated Jewish institutions in Europe, “it would be truly churlish to underestimate such developments.”³⁶

Regarding the external Jewish Question in Europe -- that which is directed toward European society as a whole and cannot be separated from its larger minority questions -- some signs are good; some signs are not. The new iteration of the Augustinian paradigm, in which the Jews, this time embodied in the Jewish state, are represented in European public discourse once again as the paradigmatic evil, indicate that we cannot yet rest comfortably. What are the prospects that European societies will find just solutions to their ethnic, religious and national “questions” such that Europe’s minorities and majorities will share a bright future? Let us invoke Rabbi Sacks’ wise witticism: In a word, “good.” In two words, “not good.”

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⁴ Antisemitism Summary overview of the situation in the European Union 2002–2012, EU Fundamental Rights Agency 2013, http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013_antisemitism-update-2002-2012_web_0.pdf

⁵ Holden, Michael. "British Anti-Semitic Incidents Fall to Eight-Year Low." Reuters, 6 Feb 2014
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⁷ For a discussion of the relative status of Jews in Europe and in the Muslim world in the Middle Ages, see Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 62.

⁸ A few examples: Jews were expelled from Paris in 1182, from the Kingdom of France in 1254, 1322, 1359, and 1394, from England in 1290 and Spain in 1492.

⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, Bk. XVIII Ch. 46 -- Of the Birth of Our Saviour, Whereby the Word Was Made Flesh; And of the Dispersion of the Jews Among All Nations, as Had Been Prophesied. "Therefore God has shown the Church in her enemies the Jews the grace of His compassion, since, as saith the apostle, 'their offense is the salvation of the Gentiles' (Romans 11:11). And therefore He has not slain them, that is, He has not let the knowledge that they are Jews be lost in them, although they have been conquered by the Romans, lest they should forget the law of God, and their testimony should be of no avail in this matter of which we treat. But it was not enough that he should say, 'Slay them not, lest they should at last forget Thy law,' unless he had also added, 'Disperse them,' because if they had only been in their own land with that testimony of the Scriptures, and not everywhere, certainly the Church, which is everywhere, could not have had them as witnesses among all nations to the prophecies which were sent before concerning Christ." In Phillip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XVIII.46.html#fnf_iv.XVIII.46-p6.2.

¹⁰ Decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office for March 25, 1928 (*Acta Ap. Sedis*, 20, 1928), The text is quoted approvingly in a draft encyclical entitled *Humani Generis Unitas* (The Unity of the Human Race). Ironically illustrating the Augustinian paradigm, *Humani Generis Unitas* was intended as an attack on Nazi racism and antisemitism. The statement was prepared for Pope Pius XI in 1938. He died, allegedly with the draft on his desk. His successor, Pius XII never released it. http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/education/humani_generis_unitas.htm .

¹¹ Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (*Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*; 1843) <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question> . Some scholars suggest that it is unfair to read Marx as an antisemite, claiming that he was writing in an ironic mode, satirizing his interlocutor Bruno Bauer's blatant anti-Semitic themes. See for example is Robert Fine's defense of

Marx on the anti-antisemitic left-wing Web site Engageonline. "In this essay Marx's aim was to defend the right of Jews to full civil and political emancipation (that is, to equal civil and political rights) alongside all other German citizens. " What Fine fails to answer is the charge that even given the most generous reading, Marx's whole argument hinges on the anti-Semitic caricature of Jews which he nowhere refutes outright in his essay. Further, Marx's thrust is much like that of the Catholic formulators of the Church's decree. In this "save the Jews despite the fact that they don't deserve it" approach, the fundamental corruption of the Jews is the best argument for providing for their salvation.

¹². Clermont-Tonnerre, "Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions" (December 23, 1789), <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/284/>

¹³. Ofira Seliktar, *Failing the Crystal Ball Test: The Carter Administration and the Fundamentalist Revolution in Iran* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), p. 21.

¹⁴. Mark Lilla, "The End of Politics," *New Republic*, June 17, 2003; <http://www.well.com/~mp/lilla.html> .

¹⁵. "Communities and Jewish Identity in Europe, Transcript of the First Plenary of the Third General Assembly of European Jewry, Budapest, 20-23 May 2004," presentations by Anthony Lerman, Barry Kosmin, Mikhail Chelnov, Shmuel Trigano, and Alberto Sederey, in *European Judaism* 38, no. 2 (2005): 99-114. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41443757>.

¹⁶. Barkat, Amiram. "Former Chief Rabbi: European Jewish History Nearing Its End." *Haaretz*, 3 Dec 2004.

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¹⁸. Mark Kurlansky, *A Chosen Few: The Resurrection of European Jewry* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), with a new introduction in 2002.

¹⁹ See Robert Weinberg, "The Pogrom of 1905 in Odessa: A Case Study" in John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 248-89;

<http://www.history.umd.edu/Faculty/BCooperman/NewCity/Pogrom1905.html>. Weinberg writes; In the port city of Odessa alone, the police reported that at least 400 Jews and 100 non-Jews were killed and approximately 300 people, mostly Jews, were injured, with slightly over 1,600 Jewish houses, apartments, and stores incurring damage. These official figures undoubtedly underestimate the true extent of the damage, as other informed sources indicate substantially higher numbers of persons killed and injured. For example, Dmitri Neidhardt, City Governor of Odessa during the pogrom and brother-in-law of the future Prime Minister Peter Stolypin, estimated the number of casualties at 2,500, and the Jewish newspaper *Voskhod* reported that over 800 were killed and another several thousand were wounded. Moreover, various hospitals and clinics reported treating at least 600 persons for injuries sustained during the pogrom. Indeed, no other city in the Russian Empire in 1905 experienced a pogrom comparable in its destruction and violence to the one unleashed against the Jews of Odessa.

²⁰ American Jewish Yearbook Archives,

http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1899_1900_7_Statistics.pdf

²¹ Pergola, Sergio Della. "World Jewish Population." *American Jewish Yearbook* 2008, (2008): 569-620. http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/AJYB822_WorldJP.pdf

²². In an ironic attempt to counter that discourse, a European Jewish publication chose the satiric name *Golem* for its webzine. The opening paragraph of the first edition is instructive, aimed as it is at a European Jewish audience: "Are we fools? Most Israelis would say that we are. Not only because the word 'Golem' means, in Hebrew, fool or dummy—but also that we claim that the Jews of Europe have a future, rather than just a past. European Jewry lives, despite all the Israeli and American predictions to the contrary—it is heterogenic and in the future it will be a solid component of the European concert of peoples." At "Editorial." *Golem* 1, no. 1 (1999) <http://www.hagalil.com/golem/jewish-identity/editorial-e-99.htm>.

²³. Plenary presentation at the World Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Friday, November 14, 2003, Jerusalem Renaissance Hotel, <http://www.wcjs.org/changing.htm>. Lerman is a controversial

figure in Jewish circles having in recent years adopted an attitude hostile to Israel. He no longer fills any official position in the British Jewish community or its institutions. Nevertheless, his defense of the European Jewish revival remains cogent and important.

²⁴. Kurlansky, Mark. *A Chosen Few: The Resurrection of European Jewry* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995 (with a new introduction in 2002) p. xxviii.

²⁵. The pope's prayer said: "God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations: we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant." Landau, Yehezkel. *John Paul II in the Holy Land -- in His Own Words*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000.121.

²⁶ Diana, Pinto, "The Third Pillar? Toward an European Jewish Identity," text of a lecture given at the Central European University, Budapest, Jewish Studies Public Lecture Series, March 1999, at http://web.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_pinto.pdf . Pinto wrote: "Positing a European Jewish identity implies paradoxically retracing one's steps backward and reentering the lost world of humanistic European Jewry supposedly killed at Auschwitz to look for living embers rather than ashes. This is a major challenge. Postwar American Jews are convinced that they carried off the last spark of European Judaism into the terrestrial Jerusalem of the New World far from spent Europe, and for most of the postwar period, it seemed undoubtedly so. Today however, the surviving embers of the past are coming back to life in Europe itself, fanned by the winds of pluralist democracy and by the healing powers of history ... and with the help of American Jewish institutions The comparison that comes to mind is with the California vines that were sent back to Europe after the phylloxera epidemic of the 1870's had destroyed Europe's most prestigious vineyards, so as to bring them back to life. The California vineyards had of course originally come themselves from Europe. European Judaism will be the product of a similar grafting."

²⁷. Diana Pinto, "Are There Jewish Answers to Europe's Questions?," keynote address to the Presidents' Conference, European Council of Jewish Communities, Basel, May 27, 2005 (text written in June 2005) *European Judaism*2005, 47; www.paideia-eu.org/PintoAreThereJewishAnswersToEuropesQuestions.pdf .

²⁸. Ibid.

²⁹ Kohut, Andrew, Wike, Richard, Carriere-Kretschmer, Erin, Holzwart Kathleen. *Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2008 <http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/09/17/chapter-1-views-of-religious-groups/> .

³⁰. Jonathan Sacks, Special Policy Forum Report, "Muslims and Jews in Europe Today," at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/sacks-20051128.pdf>.

³¹ <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/02/04/chapter-3-views-of-religious-groups/>

³². Ruthie Blum, "An American Jew in Paris," *Jerusalem Post*, March 10, 2005. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-106381551.html>

³³. Ibid.

³⁴. Sacks, Special Policy Forum Report, op.cit.

³⁵. Ibid.

³⁶. Ibid.



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