

A Commentary Report

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THE MYTH OF THE JEWISH-WORLD CONSPIRACY A Case Study in Collective Psychopathology

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THE MYTH OF THE JEWISH WORLD-CONSPIRACY *

A Case Study in Collective Psychopathology

IT IS OFTEN said that wherever Jews have settled since the dispersion, anti-Semitism has appeared in the local population. This is untrue. For some two thousand years Jewish settlements existed in India and China without attracting any particular attention; to this day, the Jewish artisans and peasants of India are regarded simply as one of the innumerable religious communities of the sub-continent, with nothing in the least odd about them. Even in Europe, Jews lived in peace for many centuries before it occurred to anyone to molest them. Along the Rhine, Jewish communities lived in amity with their neighbors before they were attacked and almost exterminated by the migrant hordes in the people's crusades. Clearly, the exclusiveness prescribed by Jewish religion—which is in any case no greater than that prescribed by various other religions—is not enough by itself to provoke serious hostility in non-Jews.

Even in those parts of the world where anti-Semitism is endemic, it can have very different meanings. There is a kind of anti-Semitism which is fairly closely related to the role played by Jews, or at least by some Jews, in the society in question. For instance, it has happened again and again that Jews, because of their peculiar history, have been pioneers in trade and money-lending in predominantly agricultural societies, while at the same time living more or less segregated from the population around them. In such cases they have attracted the same kind of hostility as, say, Indian traders in Southeastern Africa or Chinese traders in Java. Again, the centuries in the ghetto inevitably fostered attitudes of inferiority and of compensatory superiority in many Jews, which did not automatically disappear the moment the ghetto walls fell; and this too helped to feed anti-Semitism. But in all this there is nothing that is not paralleled in many other forms of social antagonism the world over. And certainly, though these factors might have led to occasional outbreaks of violence, they would never by them-

selves have led to attempts at genocide. The anti-Semitism that leads to such results is of a different and very special kind.

Exterminatory anti-Semitism appears where Jews are imagined as a collective embodiment of evil, a conspiratorial body dedicated to the task of ruining and then dominating the rest of mankind. This kind of anti-Semitism can exist almost regardless of the real situation of Jews in society. It can prosper where Jews form a large, cohesive, and clearly recognizable minority, but also where the only Jews are a few scattered individuals who hardly regard themselves as Jews at all. And if it thrives on the spectacle of rich and influential Jews, it does not necessarily wilt where all Jews are poor. Most striking of all, it can be found among people who have never set eyes on a Jew, and in countries where there have been no Jews for centuries.

This kind of anti-Semitism is a matter of fantasy, and what it fantasizes is the opposite of reality. In reality, Jews are just as diverse as one would expect from their extraordinarily varied history. Even before the creation of the State of Israel introduced new complexities, there was little enough to link, say, an assimilated, free-thinking Frenchman of Jewish descent with a rigorously Orthodox rabbi in eastern Europe, or an artisan in Salonika with a doctor in Berlin, or any of these with the second or third generation of Jewish immigrants in the United States. No doubt, a certain awareness of common origins and a common cultural heritage, an awareness also of repeated persecutions and migrations, colors the outlook of most Jews; but this is vastly different from the unity and uniformity which anti-Semites imagine. Again, since the dispersion there has been no central Jewish authority of any kind. Though individual rabbis have at times attained great moral prestige, there has been nothing in the least like a government—not even an ecclesiastical government—with authority over all Jews; even the chief rabbinate in the various countries is a modern invention which originated simply as an administrative convenience. Above all, the Jews of the world have never possessed, as a collectivity, any considerable power. In some countries, and at some times, individual Jews might

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† In London by Eyre & Spottiswoode.

achieve positions of influence, and individual Jewish communities might be able to defend their interests when these were threatened; it could even happen that prosperous and fortunate communities were able to assist persecuted Jews in other lands. The fact remains that Jews have not been able either to protect themselves or their fellows from wholesale massacre or to induce any great power to do so.

Such is the reality. The essence of the exterminatory kind of anti-Semitism is that it rejects and contradicts this reality and insists that Jews are united under a central government in the pursuit of total power over the whole world.

THE MYTH of the Jewish world-conspiracy, then, has very little to do with real people and real situations and real conflicts in the modern world; and this seems natural enough when one considers how it originated. The fantasy of Jews as a brotherhood of evil was first conceived between the 2nd and 4th centuries, as a device for immunizing Christians against the attractions of the parent religion; and seven or eight centuries later, in western Europe, it developed into a coherent and terrifying demonology. From the 12th century onward, Jews were seen as a conspiracy of sorcerers working on orders from Satan for the spiritual and physical ruination of Christendom. This was the period when Jews began to be massacred on charges of killing Christian children, of torturing the consecrated wafer, of poisoning wells. And in the same period the mystery-plays taught people that Antichrist would be a Jew and would have the Jews as his most devoted followers.

Myths do not necessarily disappear with the circumstances that first produced them. They sometimes acquire an autonomy, a vitality of their own, that carries them across the continents and down the centuries. This was very much the case with the demonological view of Jewry and Judaism. In many parts of eastern and central Europe it was still widely believed right into the 20th century that the blood of Christian children was used for making the unleavened Passover bread. Within the last twenty or thirty years it has happened to Jewish tourists in the remoter parts of Spain to be told that they could not possibly be Jews, as they had no horns.

imp [Out of these ancient superstitions there grew the modern myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy. The core of this myth is the belief that there exists a secret Jewish government which, using all Jews as its instruments, is aiming at world-domination.] This idea first appeared in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. In 1797, the Abbé Barruel published a voluminous work to show that the revolution had been produced by a conspiracy of Freemasons, but later he propagated the idea that the Freemasons were mere tools in the hands of an invisible Jewish organi-

zation. Moreover, this organization was supposed to be immensely ancient—the Freemasons and the French Revolution were simply the latest fruits of a Jewish conspiracy which was as old as Christianity itself. In the course of the 19th century, this myth played a certain part in the struggle between the Roman Catholic church and the forces of secularism, liberalism, and, latterly, socialism. Although no pope ever lent his authority to the idea, a number of Roman Catholic publicists in France, Italy, and Germany—including some clerics and at least one archbishop—tried to discredit these movements by presenting them as an elaborate confidence trick played by a secret Jewish government upon the unsuspecting peoples of Europe.

By the end of the century, the myth of the Jewish conspiracy had been elaborated to the point where it could function as a complete, though crazy, interpretation of the modern world. All the most characteristic features of the new civilization were presented as maneuvers in a vast Jewish campaign to secure dominion over the whole world. Capitalism was seen as a Jewish creation, and so were the various labor movements, revolutionary and reformist, which aimed at transforming or abolishing capitalism. The trade cycle, with its alternation of booms and slumps, was supposed to be devised in the secret councils of the Jews. And since the Jewish super-government was also thought to control all governments, all political parties, and all newspapers in Europe, it was held responsible for all international tensions and wars. In these ways it was supposed to be reducing the whole of Europe, and indeed the whole world, to such misery and chaos that before long—certainly within the next hundred years—it would be able to emerge openly as the world-ruler. Such would be the culmination of a plan pursued relentlessly and with absolute consistency by successive generations of Jews for two thousand years.

THE PRINCIPAL vehicle for the myth was the famous forgery known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The *Protocols* consist of a series of lectures which are supposed to have been given by a member of the secret government to a select Jewish audience; and they expound the various ways in which world-domination is being attained. They were fabricated almost certainly by the secret police of Tsarist Russia, the notorious *Okhrana*, around 1895, but they had little influence even inside Russia, and were quite unknown outside it, until the Bolshevik revolution and the civil war of 1919-1920. Then they were distributed to the troops in the "White" armies to persuade them that the revolution had nothing to do with the condition of Russian society but was simply a maneuver in the Jewish struggle for world-domination; so that the war was not really a civil war, but a war to liberate Russia from the

clutches of the secret Jewish government. This propaganda certainly contributed to the great Jew-killings perpetrated by the "White" armies. Moreover, soon the *Protocols* were being carried by right-wing Russians to the capitals of all the major powers—at first to put new life into the war of intervention, later in the hope of provoking an international crusade against the Soviet Union.

Anyone who has studied the *Protocols* can only marvel at the success they enjoyed in the 1920's and 1930's. They argue, for instance, that the purpose of underground railways is to enable the secret Jewish rulers, when the time is ripe, to blow up the capital of any country which resists their rule; and that if the sons of the nobility study Latin and Greek, it is because the Jews have chosen this as a good way of undermining their morals. Yet despite such absurdities, the *Protocols* sold in millions all over the world—indeed they were translated into so many languages that they were probably more widely distributed than any book except the Bible. In the United States, Henry Ford propagated them through his newspaper the *Dearborn Independent* in the 1920's, and in the 1930's the "radio priest" Father Coughlin passed the message on to his audience of millions. France saw many editions of the *Protocols*—one, a massive deluxe edition, was dignified by the name of an eminent prelate, while another was for many years the best-selling publication of a leading Paris publisher. The first English edition, in 1920, prompted the *London Times* itself to inquire, in a portentous article, whether the world had escaped from the *Pax Germanica* only to fall into the *Pax Judaeica*; while *The Spectator* talked of a royal commission to establish whether British Jews were in fact subjects of a secret government.

If such were the reactions in the liberal democracies, one can imagine how the *Protocols* were greeted in countries like Poland and Rumania. But it was in Germany that they celebrated their greatest triumph. Here they were used to explain all the disasters that had befallen the country: the defeat in the World War, the inflation which ruined the mass of the population, the hunger and misery—all these things were the work of the invisible Elders of Zion. At first, the deposed Hohenzollerns patronized and helped to finance this campaign but before long it was taken over by other and more sinister elements. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were at the very center of Hitler's thinking and of the Nazi ideology.

IT is characteristic of anti-Semitic forgeries and fabrications of the type of the *Protocols* that they combine the medieval with the modern. While the basic assumptions and attitudes are those of an ancient demonology, the supposed conspiracy is a thoroughly modern affair. For one thing, it operates on a bigger scale; whereas ritual murder was imagined as happening from time to time,

now here, now there, the Elders of Zion are imagined as an international government whose machinations constantly affect the whole world. And again, the means by which the Elders pursue the goal belong entirely to the 19th and 20th centuries. Instead of muttering spells, these sorcerers place articles in the press; instead of poisoning wells, they plunge whole countries into slumps and wars and revolutions.

IN ALL this, the *Protocols* faithfully reflect the complex structure of latter-day anti-Semitism at its most virulent. For in the eyes of fanatical anti-Semites the Jew, while retaining all the mysterious, uncanny, supernatural attitudes that were wished upon him in the Middle Ages, is also the symbol of modernity, or rather of everything that is felt as frightening in the modern world. The modern age brought the emancipation of the Jews, first in France at the time of the French Revolution, and then in one country after another during the 19th century. Everywhere, Jews quickly became prominent in those fields for which they had been fitted by their previous history; banking, certain branches of commerce, journalism. And at the same time Jews became prominent in liberal, radical, and revolutionary movements—as was only to be expected in view of their own experience of oppression and their often very incomplete emancipation. There was nothing mysterious in any of this—but it did mean that those who for whatever reason suffered helplessly from the modern world, and could not adjust themselves so as to benefit from it, could easily see in the Jew the embodiment of the civilization they detested.

Even here, of course, the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy remained grotesquely remote from reality. It is true that Jews benefited from the French Revolution, but totally untrue that they caused it. It is true that some Jews became prominent bankers, but utterly false that banking was invented by Jews as a means to securing world-dominion. And while many Jews became important figures in journalism and in politics, the views they expressed and the interests they supported ranged over almost the entire political spectrum.

There is, in fact, a great irony in the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy—which is, that it reached its most coherent and deadly formulation at the very time when Jews were in reality more divided than ever before: between Orthodox and Reform, practicing and indifferent, believing and agnostic, assimilationist and Zionist, not to mention the many who utterly rejected their Jewish origin. But all this had not the slightest effect on the myth or on those who propagated it; for they were in any case convinced that though the powers of darkness might put on many forms and wear many disguises, in their ultimate purposes they were at one.

IN ONE form or another the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy has survived for many centuries and has spread across the world from continent to continent. And it has always shown the same astonishing capacity to turn certain individuals into blind fanatics, beyond the reach of rational argument and impervious to evidence. This suggests that it answers to deep and enduring unconscious needs. Just what those needs are becomes apparent when one applies the insights of psychoanalysis to the structure of the myth itself.

Reflecting on these matters some ten years ago,* I advanced the hypothesis that at the deepest level, fanatical anti-Semitism is a matter of unconscious negative projections, i.e. of the mental mechanism by which human beings read into the behavior of others the anarchic tendencies which they fear to recognize in themselves. More specifically, I argued that fanatical anti-Semites are quite unaware of Jews as individuals and simply project onto Jews as a collectivity the images associated with an unresolved Oedipus complex. In other words, I suggested, "the Jew" is unconsciously seen both as the "bad" son, i.e. the rebellious son full of murderous wishes toward the father, and the "bad" father, i.e. the potential torturer, castrator, and killer of the son. Nobody could have been more surprised than I at the reception accorded to this hypothesis; for while some reviewers dismissed it as foolish speculation, others hailed it as an extraordinary revelation. In reality it was neither of these things, but a sober application to a specific problem of some of the oldest and best established of psychoanalytical findings. And I was more interested than surprised when I later discovered that several professional psychoanalysts had preceded me with precisely the same hypothesis.

Half of the hypothesis is, in fact, familiar enough. Sigmund Freud saw very clearly that the Jews, because they rejected the authority of the Christian God, were ideal symbols of the unavowed resentment which the exacting demands of Christianity have always evoked in many Christians. Following this line of thought, other psychoanalysts have argued that because they refuse to recognize Christ as God, Jews appear to Christians as unrepentant parricides and therefore easily become scapegoats both for the Christian's unavowed hatred of his God and for his unconscious hatred of his father.

The other half of the hypothesis is less familiar but more important. Unconsciously, "the Jew" is even more closely identified with the "bad" father than he is with the "bad" son. This is understandable enough, for the historical relationship of the Jewish people to Christianity and to Europe makes it almost inevitable that it should be seen as a kind of collective father-figure. As an identifiable people, the Jews are of course very much older than most of the European peoples, but that is not all: the Jewish religion is the par-

ent religion out of which, and in rivalry with which, Christianity developed. Most important of all, perhaps, is the fact that while the God of Christianity combines the attributes of father and son, the God of the Jews is father only—and, one may add, in the eyes of Christians who learn of him only from the Old Testament and know nothing of the later development of Judaism, a singularly tyrannical and merciless father at that.

The Jews in Christendom, then, were ideally situated to receive the Oedipal projections associated with the "bad" father. Now this was a terrible fate, for the fantasied "bad" father is infinitely more hateful than any real father could ever be. This is inevitable, in view of the psychic processes by which this figure is produced. When a small boy both loves and hates his father with such intensity that the conflict becomes intolerable, he may split the father-image into a "good" father and a "bad" father. This enables him, by idealizing his real father or some father-surrogate, to acquire a father whom he can love unreservedly. Unfortunately, the same process also produces a father-image which is utterly hateful—and this too can be projected onto any suitable father-surrogate that offers. To realize just what this implies one has to remember what infantile hatred is like—that where a small child hates, it wishes to kill, smash, utterly destroy the hated object. At the same time, it feels intensely guilty. This feeling of guilt is quickly repressed into the unconscious, but it finds an outlet nevertheless. The hated object itself turns into a monster demanding retribution, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The figure of the "bad" father becomes a persecutor, endowed with all the merciless hatred and destructive fury which the child feels, but dares not fully recognize, in himself.

So it comes about that the small boy constructs out of his own destructive impulses and his own sense of guilt a father-figure of quite monstrous cruelty and murderousness—a castrating, torturing, cannibalistic, all-powerful being beside whom even the harshest of real parents would appear harmless. The trouble is that the many men who never cease to be small boys in their emotional lives continue to see these monsters around them, incarnated in other human beings. It was the tragedy of the Jews that from the later Middle Ages onward, they tended to be seen in just such a way. In popular art they commonly appeared as extremely old men who are also devils—creatures with enormous growths of hair and beard, but also with horns and tails and with expressions of horrible cruelty.

Viewed in these terms, the worst of the traditional anti-Semitic accusations take on a new and still more disturbing meaning. One has only to look at any medieval picture illustrating a ritual murder story to recognize the unconscious content of the fantasy. A small boy—it is, significantly, always a boy, never a girl—is surrounded by a

* *The Pursuit of the Millennium* Torchbook edition, p. 72-73.

group of elderly men with long beards, who are torturing and castrating him and drawing off and collecting his blood. The same unconscious content is clearly recognizable in the other constantly-recurring accusation, which was of torturing the consecrated wafer. This, of course, was effective only where and when Christ was believed to be physically present in the host, that is to say in Roman Catholic countries; but there it was very effective indeed—in Poland it provoked massacres as late as the 18th century. Here, too, the illustrations show bearded Jews attacking the wafer with nails and pincers—and as though to uncover the true meaning of these stories, we are sometimes told not only that the host gushed blood but that, at the height of the torture, Christ appeared in the wafer as a small child, bleeding and weeping.

All this helps to throw a new light on the oldest and deadliest charge of all, the charge of deicide, which was still a subject of such passionate debate at the Vatican Council in 1965. In Freud's eyes the idea of deicide had only one unconscious meaning, and that was parricide; but had he known as much of Christianity as he knew of Judaism, he would undoubtedly have realized that that is not its only possible meaning. For Christians, the crucified Christ has the significance much more of a son than of a father. If, therefore, as is constantly asserted in Christian teaching, the Jews are collectively guilty of the death of Christ, they are not so much parricides as slayers of a son, the suppressers of a new generation, those who destroy fresh life and thwart its promise. And nobody who has ever watched a passion-play can doubt for a moment that that is how medieval people really did interpret the Jewish part in the crucifixion.

IF ONE NOW turns from the medieval to the modern world, one makes an astonishing discovery. It is no coincidence that in this century the very same people have often dealt in tales of ritual murder and in the *Protocols*, because they were in both cases dealing in identical unconscious fears and hatreds. For, as their name indicates, the Elders of Zion, too, are father-figures; and what they do to nations is strictly comparable with what the "bad" father is imagined as doing to the son. They draw off the lifeblood of the nations and divert it to their own sinister purposes; they drive the peoples to torment and death in wars; they deprive millions of food. Above all, they have the monopoly of power. Mysterious, inscrutable, they manipulate and torment human beings who in their hands are as helpless and ignorant as children.

Now it is quite certain that this image of the Jew profoundly influenced Hitler himself. The psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, has pointed out how mistaken it is to see Hitler as a father-figure: "Hitler is the adolescent who never even aspired to become a father in any connotation, nor, for

that matter, a kaiser, a president. . . . He is the *Führer*: the glorified older brother, who replaces the father. . . . He is . . . a gang leader who keeps the boys together by demanding their admiration, by creating terror, and by shrewdly involving them in crimes from which there is no way back." The worst of these crimes were performed against the father, incarnated in the Jew. Another psychoanalyst, delving into Hitler's youth and family background, has found strong grounds for thinking that he unconsciously identified his own father with a particular Jewish doctor and so with Jews as a collectivity. If this is true, one may be sure that the process was greatly facilitated by the age-old unconscious identification of "the Jew" with the "bad" father.

It was often noted that the Jews whom the German troops in eastern Europe treated with the greatest cruelty were the Orthodox men with their long beards. The photographs of youngsters mocking, humiliating, and killing these men of truly patriarchal appearance provide a counterpart to the old woodcuts of ritual murder—but with this difference, that whereas the ritual murders were the merest fictions, the vengeance exacted was real murder, indefinitely repeated.

Yet that is not the whole story. The deepest fear of all is that Jews are, collectively, poisoners or even themselves a sort of poison. This fantasy took shape at the same time as the fantasy of ritual murder; the first occasions when the disappearance of young boys was attributed to Jewish blood-lust were in 1144 and 1168, and the first time when Jews—eighty-six of them—were burned for plotting to poison the Christian population was in 1161. By the 14th century, such accusations were commonplace. In France in 1321 it was reported that the Jews were employing lepers to poison all the wells in Christendom. At the time of the Black Death in 1321, it was widely believed that the Jews had caused the plague by poisoning the wells with a mixture of Christian flesh, hearts, and blood (obtained by ritual murder), and of spiders, frogs, and lizards. On that occasion, some three-hundred Jewish communities in Germany, France, and Spain were exterminated; and similar accusations were made, with similar results, at innumerable local plagues down to the mid-16th century. Not that the charges were limited to such emergencies—Martin Luther was expressing the general view when he wrote: "If [the Jews] could kill us all, they would gladly do so, aye, and often do it, especially those who profess to be physicians. They know all that is known about medicine in Germany; 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." As late as 1610, the medical faculty of the University of Vienna solemnly announced that Jewish physicians were obliged by their laws to poison every tenth Christian patient.

In the modern version of the myth of the Jew-

ish world-conspiracy, these accusations reappear in a pseudo-scientific form. The *Protocols* themselves talk not only of using drink and loose women to undermine the physique of the Gentiles, but of actually inoculating the Gentiles with diseases; and in much *Protocols*-type literature, particularly in the United States, schemes for mass inoculation are interpreted as a Jewish plot to inject the population with syphilis. But here again it was Hitler who found the most effective and murderous formulation for an age-old obsession. By the peculiar interpretation which he gave to German racist theories, he made sexual intercourse with a Jew appear as something which literally poisoned the blood. In Nazi propaganda the idea was carried to the point where the Jews were habitually called "the world-poisoners" and were even themselves equated with bacteria.

Just as much as ritual murder, fantasies of this kind are rooted in the unconscious. Every psychoanalyst has had patients who are haunted by the illusion that they have taken in something bad, which is destroying them from within, or who live in perpetual dread of improbable infections; not to mention the true paranoiacs who are convinced that they are being poisoned by particular individuals. These are deep waters indeed, and this is not the place to speculate about etiologies on which specialists are by no means agreed. This much, however, can be safely said, that to imagine that the Jews have poisoned the water-supply or are corrupting people's blood is to ascribe to them truly uncanny powers. And it is certain that when anti-Semites kill not simply Jewish men but also Jewish women and children, when they see the extermination of all Jews as an indispensable cleansing or disinfection of the earth, they are moved by terrors stemming from the earliest stages of infancy.

There can be many kinds of unconscious negative projections, and it is a matter not merely of scientific interest but also of practical importance to appreciate just what projections have traditionally been attached to the Jews. It is often assumed that all ethnic prejudice is very much of a kind—that, for instance, hatred of Negroes must have precisely the same emotional roots as hatred of Jews; yet the assumption is certainly mistaken. It is of course true that the fanatical Negro-hater, say in the American South, is moved by unconscious as well as by conscious anxieties, and that his view of Negroes is gravely distorted by projections. It is also true that much of the cruelty to which Negroes have been subjected has been dictated by these projections. Yet however whites may see Negroes, they can hardly see them as father-figures, "good" or "bad." The fantasy of an infinitely powerful, world-dominating conspiracy does not, in fact, get projected onto Negroes, and that may well be why not even the most fanatical Negro-haters dream of genocide. It is a different matter with the Jews. In the most dangerous

form of anti-Semitism, Jews are seen above all as "bad" parents, and this makes them seem so overwhelmingly powerful that the only way to cope with them is to destroy them utterly. That, it is suggested, is why from the 12th century to the 20th, the truly fanatical anti-Semites—the kind who deal in tales of ritual murder and in the *Protocols*—have so frequently fomented vast massacres. For the ultimate ideal of such people is not a world where they can lord it over Jews, as the white supremacist likes to lord it over Negroes, but a world where there are no Jews left at all.

THE HISTORICAL importance of the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy lies in the fact that it has served as a warrant for many massacres, culminating in attempted genocide in the middle of the present century. Again and again, over a period of some eight centuries, and over a wide range of countries, it has enabled organized groups to kill Jews. And it has done this in two ways, which seem to have remained pretty constant down the ages: by providing the organized groups with an ideology, and by discouraging the rest of the population from interfering.

Whether one considers the Black Hundreds of Tsarist Russia, or those sections of the SS and SD which were directly concerned in the "final solution," one finds very much the same combination of types; and so far as one can tell from the records, the same combination existed already in those earlier groups of Jew-killers which operated between the first crusade and the 16th century. It cannot be said that these groups consisted wholly of genuine fanatics. On the contrary, they contained plenty of purely destructive types, who wanted nothing but a chance to torture and murder, and also plenty of looters, whose main interest was in the property of the murdered. To these one must add, for the modern period, the opportunists at all levels, for whom the organizing and carrying through of massacres was simply a means to a better income, more security, and more prestige than they could otherwise have hoped for. Yet it seems certain that however narrow, materialistic, or downright criminal their own motives may be, such men cannot operate without an ideology behind them. At least when operating collectively, they need an ideology to legitimate their behavior, for without it they would have to see themselves and one another as what they really are—common thieves and murderers. And that, apparently, is something which even they cannot bear.

The ideology which has proved most suitable for the purpose is the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy, whether in the traditional form which centered on tales of ritual murder and well-poisoning, or in the modern form which centers on the *Protocols*. And this is where the true fanatics have their place—as bearers and elaborators

of that fantastic view of the world on which the whole murderous enterprise depends for its justification. Thanks to various empirical investigations carried out by psychologists and psychoanalysts, notably in the United States, a great deal is known about the typical personality-structure of such people. What emerges when fanatical anti-Semites are subjected to psychological tests such as the Rorschach and thematic apperception tests is a quite abnormal degree of fear and hatred of parental figures, who are seen now as menacing and now as mutilated and killed. This means that the unconscious fantasies of such people correspond to the unconscious content of the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy. Fanatical anti-Semites are in fact people whose own deepest emotional needs compel them to see life as a struggle against just such a conspiracy as is portrayed in the *Protocols*. For them, belief springs from an inner necessity; and this gives them an air of absolute conviction, which in turn gives the criminals and opportunists the reassurance and encouragement they need.

A group formed out of these elements is, sociologically speaking, a very special kind of group indeed. Reflecting in 1946 on the extreme forms of Nazi anti-Semitism, the psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel remarked that the process of group-formation itself, when occurring under pathological conditions, can bring about a mass delusion, in fact a mass psychosis. And he added: "This clinical syndrome: unrestricted aggressive destructiveness under the spell of a delusion, in complete denial of reality, is well known to us as psychosis; it is a paranoiac form of schizophrenia." The parallel is a suggestive one. For though the individuals who make up a group of Jew-killers are well within the bounds of reality, and most of them are not even fanatics, and even the fanatics are far from mad—yet it is perfectly true that the group as a whole behaves like a paranoiac in the grip of his delusion.

There is another peculiarity of such groups that reminds one of paranoiac schizophrenics: their megalomaniacal sense of mission. When it comes to describing their own role, not only the medieval Jew-killers but also the Black Hundreds and the Nazi leaders, use apocalyptic imagery taken straight from the Book of Revelation. All alike see themselves as the angelic hosts overthrowing the powers of darkness, or a collective St. Michael killing the dragon, even as a collective Christ overthrowing Antichrist. No army engaged in a real war against a real enemy has ever indulged in such self-exaltation as Jew-killers engaged in their one-sided struggle against an imaginary conspiracy. To hear them on the subject of themselves, one would think that killing unarmed and helpless people, including small children and old women, was a very brave and risky undertaking. It is a phenomenon which only begins to make sense when one recalls that a paranoiac

murderer, too, can feel terrified of his harmless victims. For what these people see as the enemy is in fact the destructiveness and cruelty in their own psyches, externalized. And the greater the unconscious sense of guilt, the more fearsome the imaginary enemy.

For the sense of guilt is there, and unremittingly at work. Originally engendered by the murderous impulses felt by the small child toward its parents, it is enormously intensified by the real violence which the adult deploys against his victims. Yet it is not experienced as a sense of guilt, for it is completely denied and repressed into the unconscious. Instead, it is experienced as a sense of danger, of threat, a blind terror lest the wronged ones, the parents killed in fantasy and the parent-surrogates killed in reality, arise and exact retribution. This alone can explain the extraordinary paradox about the Nazi massacres—that as the Jews became more and more helpless, as they were killed in ever vaster numbers, so they were felt to be more and more powerful, malignant, and dangerous. It also accounts for the fact that a man like Goebbels, for whom anti-Semitism was at first little more than a technique of vote-catching, ended his days raving about the omnipotent Jewish rulers of the world. It was his own guilt-ridden unconscious that made of the imaginary Elders of Zion a power more terrible than the Nazi regime itself.

IT IS WHEN it has been adopted by groups of professional, organized Jew-killers that the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy has revealed its true potentialities. For all the indications are that however widespread and intense anti-Semitism may be, it does not result in killing unless and until such groups begin to operate. Pogroms as spontaneous outbreaks of popular fury seem to be a myth, and there is in fact no established case where the inhabitants of a town or village have simply fallen upon their Jewish neighbors and slaughtered them. This was true even in the middle ages—the great massacres which accompanied the people's crusades and the Black Death were all led by organized bands coming from outside. In modern times, popular initiative has been still less in evidence, for the organized groups themselves have been effective only when they were carrying out the policy and enjoying the sponsorship of some kind of government—whether in Tsarist Russia and under the "White" regime during the Russian civil war, or in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. Would-be *pogromshchiki* who lacked this kind of support and were resolutely opposed by the authorities—as in the United States—never managed to organize large-scale violence and soon lapsed, or were thrust, into obscurity.

Yet the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy can have its effect on the mass of the population too, and this in turn has a bearing, even if an

indirect one, on the fate of the Jews. Centuries of propaganda about sorcery and ritual murder and the secret Jewish government produced a general atmosphere of superstitious dread which was largely unconnected with specific economic conflicts. A certain suspicion that Jews constitute a united collectivity, devoted to sinister aims and endowed with mysterious powers, was still extremely widespread in the first half of the present century. No doubt fanatical believers in the conspiracy, the true adepts of the *Protocols* were always a relatively small minority; but they were still numerous enough to make themselves heard, and there were vast numbers of half- and quarter-believers to pick up scraps of what they had to say. Particularly in periods of exceptional strain, anxiety, and disorientation, multitudes of people yielded to the temptation to blame all their troubles on the machinations of those uncanny beings—reacting to social and economic crises, for instance, very much as their ancestors had reacted to the plague.

What this meant in practice, whether in Tsarist Russia or in Germany after the First World War or to some extent throughout the world in the fateful years 1933-1945, was that people were unwilling to bestir themselves on behalf of the Jews. The very widespread indifference, the ease with which people dissociated themselves from the Jews and their fate, was certainly in part a

result of a vague feeling that, even if there were no Elders of Zion, Jews were somehow uncanny and dangerous. And ironically enough, this feeling grew stronger as the persecution of the Jews grew worse. The explanation is plain, if depressing: when people know even with half their minds that a great injustice is being done, and lack the generosity or the courage to protest, they automatically throw the blame onto the victims as the simplest way of easing their own consciences. Just as the organized killers needed the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy if they were not to recognize themselves as common thieves and murderers, so did very many ordinary people need some smattering of it if they were not to see themselves as passive accomplices in the persecution and massacre of innocent people.

THE story of the *Protocols* is the story of how in 20th-century Europe a grossly delusional view of the world, based on infantile fears and hatreds, was able to find expression in murder and torture beyond all imagining. It is a case-history in collective psychopathology, and its deepest implications reach far beyond anti-Semitism and the fate of the Jews. Is it utopian to suggest that the more fully and widely these implications are faced, the better the chance of recognizing and limiting, perhaps even of forestalling, similar aberrations in the future?

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