

# AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MALCOLM ROSS AFFAIR

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In 1985, Canada witnessed the trials (under different sections of the *Criminal Code*<sup>1</sup>) of two resident anti-Semites, Ernst Zundel in Toronto, Ontario, and James Keegstra in Red Deer, Alberta. Now, in Moncton, New Brunswick, another vocal anti-Semite, Malcolm Ross, has been removed from his teaching position in the local public school system, following a board of inquiry investigation. Obviously, anti-Semitism, although not rampant in Canadian society, is not dead either, despite the lessons of the past and despite the attempts of conscientious Canadians, both Jews and Christians, to eradicate its ugly traces. Canada, in fact, spawned anti-Semites in earlier eras, notably the Quebec fascist Adrien Arcand during the 1930s, and, perhaps surprisingly, the famous figure of Goldwin Smith, once the idol of the Toronto intelligentsia and the mentor of the young William Lyon Mackenzie King at the turn of the century.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, our history in this regard is not as pure as most Canadians are inclined to believe. Moreover, both Anglo and French Canada have long been contaminated by nativist strains that, when the social fabric is torn by economic and political gales, soon show their dangerous side. The exclusion of Jewish refugees during the Nazi era was only one example of what even democratic nations are capable of when they feel threatened. After World War II, there was a great revulsion against Nazi-style racism, but, as the French writer Pierre Paraf has remarked, the power and complexity of the ideology "does not allow us to hope that it was totally effaced, even in the most crushing of defeats."<sup>3</sup> In such men as Zundel, Keegstra and Ross, the melody lingers on.

Technically, anti-Semitism (the term was coined during the Second German Reich) is a product of the modern era; in reality, it has many layers, stretching back to the pre-Christian Hellenistic world. Ancient Egyptian xenophobia, rekindled by the Roman conquest of the Greek kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean, and the apparent favour bestowed by the new rulers on the local Jewish population in Alexandria, inspired a rabid anti-Jewish hostility on the part of resentful Greeks, churning the waves of violence as well as begetting a line of literary Jew-haters. The names of Posidonius, Apollonius Molon and Apion (a contemporary of Jesus) are associated with the new genre. The Jews, according to Apion, whom we know through Josephus, the Jewish historian of antiquity,

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<sup>1</sup>R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46.

<sup>2</sup>See G. Tulchinsky, "Goldwin Smith: Victorian Canadian Anti-Semite" in A. Davies (ed.), *Anti-Semitism in Canada: History and Interpretation* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup>P. Paraf, *Le Racisme Dans le Monde* (Paris: Petite Bibliotheque Payot, 1981) at 69 (my translation).

kidnapped hapless Greeks, fattened them secretly in their temple in Jerusalem, and sacrificed them while swearing an oath over their entrails of perpetual enmity with the rest of the human race. Apion also accused the Jews of atheism, sedition, parasitism and the worship of gold. These charges infected the Roman upper classes, colouring Latin poetry and prose with a pernicious anti-Judaism before and after the birth of Christianity. Later, when the church baptized much of the Greco-Roman world after the fourth century, it also baptized this legacy of pagan animosity, creating a permanent deposit in the subterranean memory of the Christian ages.

Christianity itself appeared in history as a Jewish sect, one of the strains of a pluralistic Judaism prior to the disastrous war with Rome (66-71 CE). As a result, the New Testament, which is largely a collection of Jewish writings, contains the marks of intra-Jewish religious conflict both before and after, but especially after the Roman war. The Matthaean image of the Pharisees, for example, as legalistic, hypocritical, thieving, impious, fanatical and murderous (Matt. 23) – an image much exploited by later anti-Semites<sup>4</sup> – obviously reflects the state of Jewish-Christian relations in the post-war era when the Pharisees (the ancestors of rabbinic Judaism) and the (Jewish) Christians were at loggerheads as a consequence of the war itself, and over the right to claim the name of Israel. Similarly, the Johannine image of the Jews as the children of the devil (John 8:44ff.) – also much exploited by later anti-Semites<sup>5</sup> – reflects the final stage in the deterioration of these relations, as well as the rivalries of the diaspora and a nasty local situation in Ephesus, the site of the gospel. However, the anti-Judaism of the New Testament is still, for the most part (Luke-Acts is the important exception), a Jewish anti-Judaism, that is, an essentially sectarian rhetoric rooted in the polemical battles of antiquity, and in the identity crisis of the newly emergent apostolic church. Unfortunately, the residue of these battles became the foundation of what historians call the *adversus Judaeos* tradition of the post-Testament church: in other words, Christian theological anti-Judaism. When ex-pagans rather than Jews began to write Christian theology, they changed the intra-Jewish argument into a gentile-Jewish one. This was not a change for the better.

The ethnocentric pride of the Gentiles, infused into the new religion, had a dramatic effect. No longer a Jewish sect, Christianity, after the second century, developed what the late French Jewish historian Jules Isaac described as a “teaching of contempt” aimed at its Jewish rivals. Alexandrine symbolism and Platonic exegesis turned the Jews into Esau, the disinherited elder brother, Leah,

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<sup>4</sup>These Bible verses, from the King James translation, were entered into the Court of Queen’s Bench of New Brunswick by Ross, as part of a 60 page compilation of sources, entitled “*Book of References*,” docket #M/M/218/91 at 3-4.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* at 4-6.

the rejected wife, Hagar, the slave-woman, and Cain, the murderer, who, as a consequence of his crime (the murder of Abel, a type of Christ), is condemned, in the words of Augustine, "to till the ground of an earthly circumcision, an earthly Sabbath, an earthly Passover," showing his enslavement to the physical material world.<sup>6</sup> Hence arose the famous image of the deicidal, carnal and accursed Jew, so potent in the history of anti-Semitism. Unlike their idolatrous Jewish enemies (supposedly fixated on the golden calf), according to the church fathers, the gentiles abandoned their idols to embrace the spiritual law of Christ. To John Chrysostomos ("goldenmouthed"), the favourite saint of the eastern church, the synagogue was a brothel, a lair of wild beasts and a house of demons, and Christians who attended its services become guilty of deicide by association! The preacher was concerned about the popularity of Jewish festivals in fourth century Antioch, and the dangers of a pro-Jewish, anti-Christian shift in imperial policy, but his rhetorical overkill established a tragic model. John's sermons are still cited in anti-Semitic tracts.<sup>7</sup>

During the Middle Ages, the teaching of contempt acquired some ominous new dimensions. A rising commercial economy forced mediaeval Jewry into various unsavoury roles, including huckster, middleman and money-lender; already Cain, the murderer, the Jew, in the resentful minds of insolvent Christians, also became Judas, the traitor who sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver: a fateful fusion of religious and economic symbols. Recruitment campaigns for the crusades stirred religious fanaticism and slaughter in Christendom, although the popes did what they could to stem the violence. Discriminatory legislation followed the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), including the yellow badge (adapted, incidentally, from the Muslim world). The Talmud was attacked, and, on one occasion, actually burned in Paris (1242), beginning the ignoble tradition of anti-Talmudism. Jewish converts in the new preaching orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans usually instigated the attacks, seeking to eradicate their former religion by destroying its sacred texts, which, in their eyes, prevented Jews from turning to Christ. To this day, anti-Talmudism remains a dominant motif in the literature of anti-Semitism.<sup>8</sup> The strange charges of ritual murder and host desecration arose in northern Europe, in which the deicidal Jews, not content with having tortured and crucified Christ once, torture and crucify him again and again (in the form of a Christian child or the sacred wafer). When the disasters of plague and famine swept the 14th century, the Jews found themselves vilified as well-poisoners and sorcerers, as well as conspirators against Christendom in league with the devil. The devil, of course, was new, but the conspiracy charge had ancient reverberations.

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<sup>6</sup>Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (Reply to Faustus, the Manichaeon, 398).

<sup>7</sup>*Supra*, note 4 at 9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* at 17.

That expert on the devil, Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, also took up the Jewish question. Convinced that he was living in the last days, and that the honour of Christ had to be defended at all costs against his enemies, including Jews, Turks, Papists, false brethren and “wicked Christians,” the reformer drew his verbal sword against the first with a vengeance, earning a niche in the pantheon of Jew-haters that even his contemporaries recognized. His head stuffed with mediaeval anti-Jewish myths and assorted lies about Judaism (some of them learned from Antonias Margaritha, a Jewish apostate<sup>9</sup>), the old Luther, frustrated at the Jewish refusal to convert, called, in a vile tract,<sup>10</sup> for the imposition of such harsh measures that his recommendations to the German princes have been regarded as an anticipation of Kristallnacht (9 November 1938). Fortunately, most of them were not heeded, and Luther’s reputation suffered among his own followers, who marvelled that a “learned doctor of the soul” could descend to the mentality of a swineherd! However, the swineherd’s sentiments had their effect in later times, when their author was glorified by the nationalists as a Germanic hero, and when his anti-Jewish writings were republished by the Third Reich. Modern anti-Semites have capitalized on the legacy,<sup>11</sup> although the Lutheran churches have dissociated themselves publicly from Luther’s anti-Semitism.<sup>12</sup>

Humanistic strains in the 17th century – the “prelude to the Enlightenment” – modified traditional Christian images to some extent, and the great Protestant artist Rembrandt van Rijn employed young Jews from the Amsterdam ghetto as models for his drawings of Jesus. Despite these hopeful trends, the end of the century saw the publication of Johann Eisenmenger’s vast scholarly assault on Judaism, *Entdecktes Judenthum* (Judaism Revealed), a savage parody of rabbinic ideas that future anti-Semites could exploit. Paradoxically, moreover, the Age of Reason, that second renaissance of European culture, not only did not abolish Jew-hatred, but, in the person of Voltaire, its greatest figure, as well as Diderot and others, actually managed to revive it. A devotee of antiquity, Voltaire apparently imagined himself a “Cicero reborn,” charged, like the first Cicero, with the task of restoring the glories of philosophy in an age of decadence.<sup>13</sup> But the object of Voltaire’s veneration had fallen under the spell of Apollonius Molon, and had regarded the Jews with deadly enmity. To see the latter through Ciceronian eyes was to see them as the constitutional haters of humanity, and a people innately flawed. The ex-Christian philosophers of the eighteenth century despised

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<sup>9</sup>*Der Ganze Jüdische Glaube* (The Jewish Faith in its Entirety) (1530).

<sup>10</sup>*Von der Juden und ihre Lügen* (Of the Jews and Their Lies) (1543).

<sup>11</sup>*Supra*, note 4 at 16.

<sup>12</sup>World Lutheran Conference, Stockholm, 1983.

<sup>13</sup>See A. Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

Christianity not only because they despised religious obscurantism and superstition, but also because of its Jewish connections. Yet, since the Christian was only a corrupted pagan, he could be restored to his noble pagan nature if purged of his crypto-Jewish beliefs, whereas the Jew, so to speak, was beyond redemption: his religion and his nature were essentially one.

Obviously, a more sinister form of anti-Judaism was in its incubation. Racial fires had been stoked since the dawn of the modern era, partly as a result of the great age of discovery, and the European encounter with large numbers of non-Europeans. The birth of the life sciences, and the Enlightenment passion for the classification of data, led to a plethora of theories concerning human origins and human nature. It required the 19th century, however, and the emergence of the Aryan myth as the popular race myth of the white peoples and their alleged mental, spiritual and physical superiority before the ideology of race could arise. According to the new historiographers, a primordial white race – the noble Aryans – marched down from the roof of the world (the Himalayas) in early times, conquering older dark-skinned races and founding empires wherever they planted their banners, including the European peninsula. The imagined ancestors of the modern Europeans, they were soon contrasted with the so-called Semites, another racial family (of which the Jews were regarded as a branch) with different characteristics because of an admixture of black blood.<sup>14</sup> Civilization, according to the racial theoreticians, blooms when the Aryan blood line remains pure, and fades when it allows itself to become contaminated. Race, therefore, explains everything; indeed, to some of the apostles of the racial gospel, the struggle between Aryans and Semites (Jews) was the decisive issue of the century.<sup>15</sup> The term “anti-Semitism,” of course, incorporates this principle.

On the strength of these ideas, a score of anti-Jewish demagogues, obsessed with Jewish emancipation and achievement in post-feudal Western society, lashed out at Christendom’s traditional enemies. Intermingling old religious and new racial images in a curious medley, they attempted to stem the tides of modernity by forcing the Jews, and everything regarded as “Jewish,” including capitalism, to depart from public life. Of the many writings in this genre, Edouard Drumont’s attack on “Judaized” France (*La France Juive*, 1886) – a book that Jean-Paul Sartre once described as a collection of obscene and ignoble tales – was perhaps the most successful. In Germany, the great composer Richard Wagner wove nationalistic and racial themes into his operas, while prophesizing the birth of a new order with a new Siegfried-type of German in the future. Modern music, he

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<sup>14</sup>Count Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur L'inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853-55).

<sup>15</sup>For example, see H.S. Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des 19en Jahrhunderts* (The Foundations of the 19th Century) (1899), trans. John Lees, 2. vols. (London: Bodley Head, 1913).

believed, was a “corpse devoured by (Jewish) worms.”<sup>16</sup> Even the voices of the left, following the precedent established by Karl Marx, for whom Mammon was the true god of the Jews, managed to rail against Semitic capitalism in the name of Aryan socialism! In short, the Jews became the symbols of everything that the malcontents of the 19th century despised about the modern world: a world disoriented by economic, social and political transformations.

One transformation in particular, the 1789 French Revolution, had a profoundly unsettling effect. As the Irish parliamentarian Edmund Burke noted,<sup>17</sup> a new promethean power, unpredictable in its consequences, had been unleashed, and henceforth Europe would know no peace. The losers, the old first and second estates (the clergy and the aristocracy), forced into exile by the reign of terror, soon demonized the most traumatic event in French history, accusing initially the secret societies, notably the French Freemasons and the Bavarian Illuminati, of plotting the overthrow of Christian France as agents of Satan. The Jews (and the French Protestants) were added to the cast of plotters in the final decades of the 19th century, as antirevolutionary resentments festered in Catholic circles, especially in the provinces, creating the so-called “Judeo-Masonic” conspiracy in the literature of anti-Semitism. When, in 1870, the French Empire suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the upstart Prussians – a debacle that cost Napoleon III his throne – the nation fell into a furious and xenophobic mood, and talk of treason filled the air.

The Third Republic (like the later Weimar Republic in Germany) was shaky from the start, as anti-German and anti-Jewish feelings rose simultaneously, the latter stimulated by an influx into Paris of well-connected German-speaking Jews from Alsace and Lorraine. Those who hated the new republic in any case, because it reminded them of the revolutionary First Republic, had no difficulty in identifying the devil’s real agents, especially after the Panama Canal scandal (in which some Jewish bankers and politicians were implicated) and the anti-Catholic legislation from 1879-1883. A dualistic mindset distinguished between authentic (Aryan, Catholic, anti-capitalist, rural) France and inauthentic (Semitic, non-Catholic, capitalist, urban) France, setting the stage for the Dreyfus affair, during which the ulcer of the nation burst. The anti-Dreyfusards sought refuge in visions of an authoritarian pre-modern social order with rigid moral boundaries – a type of paradise lost – and identified their enemies with the anti-Christ. Although the infamous *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* were of Russian authorship, the forgery was concocted in Paris. What other city could have inspired such a grandiose and fantastic anti-Semitic composition?

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<sup>16</sup>Richard Wagner, *Judaism in Music* (1850).

<sup>17</sup>Edmund Burke, *Letter on a Regicide Peace* (1796).

The actual language of extermination was minted in Germany during the Second Reich; before the turn of the century, both Paul de Lagarde and Eugen Dühring spoke of ridding society of the Jews.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that they intended a metaphorical rather than a literal understanding of "extermination" (Vernichtung, Ausrottung), but such terms invite a sinister construction, as the fate of the Jews in the 20th century bears witness. Today, after their mass slaughter, a new generation of anti-Semites, building on the strata of the past, has sought to rehabilitate Nazi Germany by accusing the Jews of inventing monstrous lies about Germans in order to win support for the "true" Nazi state, Israel, and to promote dreams of world domination. If asked why the Jews choose to defame a great gentile nation, the answer given by the historical revisionists or Holocaust deniers is the same answer given by the anti-Talmudists of yesteryear: because the Talmud is a tissue of lies, it nurtures its votaries to be liars. No effort has been spared by the post-Auschwitz anti-Semites to deconstruct and reconstruct the best attested crime of the modern age, and their labours grind on, as the indefatigable Zundel (now in legal trouble in Germany) and his confrères demonstrate. Emil Fackenheim has summarized their message correctly: the Holocaust did not happen, but it should have happened, because the wicked Jews deserve to be treated in this horrendous fashion!

Contemporary anti-Semitism is not different from past anti-Semitism, only its forms are different; the substance remains the same: "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose." The anti-Semite, whom Sartre once described as a modern Manichaeus,<sup>19</sup> is still the man (or woman) unable to face and accept ambiguity or complexity in life, and consequently must organize his (or her) mental universe in dualistic terms. Dualism never requires thought, only belief, and belief more often than not is cheap. To localize evil in one place solves a host of problems, and to strike at the devil is spiritually satisfying. "Knight-errant of the Good," Sartre also said, "the anti-Semite is a holy man."<sup>20</sup> Those who see themselves in a religious light (the religion, of course, can be secular, as was Hitler's religion of race) can slay their enemies in good conscience, either with words or with guns and gas. Hitler is not the only example; the late unlamented Ayatollah, with his death sentence on the novelist Salman Rushdie, is another.

Malcolm Ross obviously belongs in this long and sorry cavalcade. Holocaust denial, "Christianity" (no doubt meaning Aryan Christianity) versus "Judeo-Christianity," the Jewish international conspiracy, anti-Talmudism, the

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<sup>18</sup>P. de Lagarde, *Deutsche Schriften* (German Writings); E. Dühring, *Die Judenfrage als Frage des Rassencharakters und seiner Schädlichkeiten für Existenz und Kultur der Völker* (The Jewish Question as a Question of Racial Character and its Harmfulness for the Existence and Culture of Peoples).

<sup>19</sup>J.-P. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1948), translated from *La Question Juive* (Paris: Morihien, 1947).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

“synagogue of Satan,” etc.; all are depressingly familiar themes. Ross, who regards himself as a Christian, has enlisted Luther as an ally<sup>21</sup> (which, of course, is not inappropriate in light of the reformer’s diatribes), but the founder of Protestantism would have made short work of anyone who denied the Jewishness of Jesus, and who attempted to turn the biblical Word of God into a racist word of blood, race and soil. Aryan Christianity is a contradiction in terms, and Christian theologians today, both Catholic and Protestant, are united in their opposition to racist bids to subvert the gospel by turning Jesus into some form of nationalistic “God-figure” moulded by the ideologies of the modern age. A great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to analyzing the anti-Jewish texts in the New Testament, and their historic setting in the first century. Once their context has been clarified – for example, the natural anger of the post-war era between the Christians and the Pharisees – it becomes easier to draw their sting. Even Protestant fundamentalists, for whom the scriptures are sacrosanct, have developed an uneasy conscience concerning anti-Jewish images in Christian theology, and would not support Ross and his allegations.<sup>22</sup> Only those who subscribe to the politics of paranoia would indulge in conspiratorial speculations on the scale of the *Protocols*, and the dialectical genius of rabbinic Judaism can be studied and appreciated by interested Christians in university courses such as those taught in my own department at the University of Toronto. A vast number of excellent books can be read on every facet of anti-Semitism, most of them written in the past twenty-five years.<sup>23</sup> Ross himself is probably incurable, but the disease can be prevented from spreading. On this subject at least, Alexander Pope was wrong: a little learning is not a dangerous thing.

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<sup>21</sup>*Supra*, note 11.

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, W. Steele, *Ross, Rights, and Justice*, this *Journal* at 295.

<sup>23</sup>For example, H. Arendt, *Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); S. Almog, ed., *Anti-Semitism Through the Ages* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988); A. Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); J. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism 1700-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); L. Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, trans. R. Howard, 4 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); H.A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism: In the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, trans. J.I. Porter (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); P.L. Rose, *Revolutionary Anti-Semitism in Germany: From Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974).