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The New Anti-Semitism

First religion, then race, then what?

By Bernard Lewis

There is a well-worn platitude that we have all heard many times before: it is perfectly legitimate to criticize the actions and policies of the state of Israel or the doctrines of Zionism without necessarily being motivated by anti-Semitism. The fact that this has been repeated ad nauseam does not detract from its truth. Not only do I accept it, but I would even take it a step further with another formulation that may perhaps evoke surprise if not shock: it is perfectly possible to hate and even to persecute Jews without necessarily being anti-Semitic.

Unfortunately, hatred and persecution are a normal part of the human experience. Taking a dislike, mild or intense, to people who are different in one way or another, by ethnicity, race, color, creed, eating habits—no matter what—is part of the normal human condition. We find it throughout recorded history, and we find it all over the world. It can sometimes be extraordinarily vicious and sometimes even amusing.

Not long after World War II, the Danes were seething with resentment against two of their neighbors: the Germans, for having occupied them, and the Swedes, for having stood by with unhelpful neutrality. A Danish saying current at the time was: What is a Swede? A German in human form. Another double-barreled insult, this one from the British army in the late 1930s, when it was concerned about two different groups of terrorists: What is an Arab? A toasted Irishman. I quote these not in any sense with approval or commendation, but as examples of the kind of really nasty prejudice that is widespread in our world.

Anti-Semitism is something quite different. It is marked by two special features. One of them is that Jews are judged by a standard different from that applied to others. We see plenty of examples of this at the present time. But there too one has to be careful. There can be different standards of judgment on other issues too, sometimes even involving Jews, without anti-Semitism or without necessarily being motivated by anti-Semitism.

For instance, in mid-September 1975 in Spain, five terrorists convicted of murdering policemen were sentenced to death. European liberal opinion was outraged that in this modern age a West European country should sentence people to death. Unheard of! There was an outcry of indignation, and strong pressures were brought to bear on the Spanish government. But in the Soviet Union and its satellite states during the same period, vastly greater numbers were being sentenced to death and executed; and, in Africa, Idi Amin was slaughtering hundreds of thousands, a large part of the population of Uganda. Hardly a murmur of protest in the Western world.

The lesson is very clear. Right-wing governments (General Francisco Franco was still in charge) are not allowed to sentence offenders to death; left-wing governments are. A further implication: slaughter of or by white people is bad; slaughter of or by people of color is normal. Similar discrepancies may be found in responses to a number of other issues, as for example the treatment of women and of ethnic or other minorities.

These examples show that even a wide disparity of standards of judgment is not necessarily in itself evidence of anti-Semitism. There may be other elements involved. For example, the comparison is sometimes made between the world reaction to the massacre of Palestinians by Lebanese Christian militiamen at Sabra and Shatila in September 1982, where some 800 people were killed, and the massacre earlier in the same year in Hama in Syria, where tens of thousands were killed. On the latter, not a dog barked. The difference, of course, was in the circumstances. In both cases the perpetrators were Arab, but in the case of Sabra and Shatila, because of the dominant Israeli military presence in the region, there was a possibility of blaming the Jews. In Hama, this possibility did not exist; therefore the mass slaughter of Arabs by Arabs went unremarked, unnoticed, and unprotested. This contrast is clearly anti-Jewish. In a different way, it is also anti-Arab.

We see other instances of differing standards and methods of judgment nearer home and in a perhaps less alarming form. We hear a great deal, for example, about the Jewish lobby and the various accusations that are from time to time brought against it, that those engaged in it are somehow disloyal to the United States and are in the service of a foreign power.

The Jewish lobby is, of course, not the only lobby of its kind. Consider three others: the Irish, Greek, and Armenian lobbies. The Irish lobby, which campaigned against the United Kingdom, America's closest ally, and the Greek and Armenian lobbies, which campaigned against Turkey when Turkey was a crucial NATO ally, were seen as pursuing their legitimate concerns. I don't recall accusations against any of them of disloyalty or even of divided loyalty.

The other special feature of anti-Semitism, which is much more important than differing standards of judgment, is the accusation against Jews of cosmic evil. Complaints against people of other groups rarely include it. This accusation of cosmic, satanic evil attributed to Jews, in various parts of the world and in various forms, is what has come to be known in modern times as anti-Semitism.

In the Western world, anti-Semitism has gone through three clearly distinct phases. Some people have written and spoken about anti-Semitism in antiquity, but the term in that context is misleading. We do indeed find texts in the ancient world attacking and denouncing Jews, sometimes quite viciously, but we also find nasty remarks about Syrians, Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and the rest. There is no great difference between the anti-Jewish remarks and the ethnic and religious prejudices expressed against other peoples, and on the whole the ones against Jews are not the most vicious. The Syrian-born Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, speaking of the Saracens, remarks that they are not to be desired either as friends or as enemies. I don't recall, in the ancient world, anything said about the Jews quite as nasty as that.

Polytheism was essentially tolerant, each group worshiping its own god or gods, offering no objection to the worship of others. Indeed, one might have been willing to offer at least a pinch of incense to some alien god, in courtesy as a visitor or, even at home, in deference to a suzerain. Only the Jews in the ancient world insisted—absurdly, according to the prevailing view of the time—that theirs was the only god and that the others did not exist. This gave rise to problems with their neighbors and their various imperial masters, notably the Romans. It sometimes provoked hostile comments and even persecution, but not the kind of demonization that has come to be known as anti-Semitism. The tendency was rather to ridicule the Jews for their faceless, formless god in the clouds and for such absurd and barbarous customs as circumcision, the rejection of pig-meat, and, most absurd of all, the Sabbath. Several Greek and Roman authors noted that because of this comic practice the Jews were wasting one-seventh of their lives.

Demonization, as distinct from common or garden-variety prejudice or hostility, began with the advent of Christianity and the special role assigned to the Jews in the crucifixion of Christ as related in the Gospels. Christianity started as a movement within Judaism, and the conflict between Christians and Jews had that special bitterness that often makes conflicts within religions more deadly than those between religions. The Christian message was presented as the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews, written in what Christians called the Old Testament. The rejection of that message by the Jewish custodians of

the Old Testament was especially wounding.

An important concern of the early Christians was not so much to blame the Jews as, for understandable reasons, to exculpate the Romans. Jewish guilt and Roman innocence, the two interdependent, became important parts of the Christian message, first to Rome and then beyond, with devastating effect on popular attitudes toward Jews, especially at Easter time.

For many centuries, hatred and persecution of Jews, and the ideology and terminology used to express them, were grounded in religion. Then came the phase when religious prejudice was discredited, seen as not in accord with the ideas of the Enlightenment. It was seen as bigoted; worse, as old-fashioned, out-of-date. That meant new reasons were needed for hating Jews. They were found.

The process of change began in Spain when large numbers of Jews—and also Muslims—were forcibly converted to Christianity. With a forcible conversion there was inevitably some doubt, especially among the enforcers, as to the sincerity of the converts. And this doubt was well grounded, as we know from the phenomenon of the Marranos and the Moriscos, the sometimes dubious converts from Judaism and Islam. Thus the practice arose of examining the racial origins of the so-called new Christians. We even find statutes in 16th-century Spain about purity of blood, *la limpieza de sangre*. Only people who could prove Christian descent for a specified number of generations could be accepted as genuine Christians. “Purity of blood” was required for certain positions and certain offices.

This is where the racial form of anti-Semitism began. It was systematized in Germany in the 19th century, when for the first time the term “anti-Semitism” was invented and adopted.

“Semitic” was first used as a linguistic, not as an ethnic or racial, term. Like “Aryan,” it was coined by philologists to designate a group of related languages. Aryan included languages as diverse as Sanskrit, Persian, and, by extension, Greek, Latin, and most of the languages of Europe. Semitic, similarly, brought together Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, and Ethiopic. Already in 1872 the great German philologist Max Müller pointed out that “Aryan” and “Semitic” were philological, not ethnological, terms and that to speak of an Aryan or Semitic race was as absurd as to speak of a dolichocephalic (long-headed) language. “What misunderstandings, what controversies would arise,” he said, from confusing the two—a correct if understated prediction.

Despite these warnings, “Semitic” was transferred from its original linguistic meaning to a new racial meaning and became the basis for a new and different bigotry. The people who advocated this bigotry spurned religious prejudice because they saw themselves as modern and scientific. Their hostility to Jews, they claimed, was based on observed and documented racial otherness and inferiority.

And then, just as religious hostility was spurned by the Enlightenment and replaced by modern and “scientific” racial hostility, so racial hostility was discredited by the Third Reich and its crimes, by the revelations after its fall of the appalling things that it had done. This discrediting of racism left a vacancy, an aching void.

This is where the third phase of anti-Semitism arises, which for want of a better term we might call

political-cum-ideological Judeophobia. Race? Oh no, we wouldn't have anything to do with that. Religious prejudice? Oh no, we're far beyond that. This is political and ideological, and it provides a socially and intellectually acceptable modern disguise for sentiments that go back some 2,000 years.

Turning from the Christian to the Islamic world, we find a very different history. If we look at the considerable literature available about the position of Jews in the Islamic world, we find two well-established myths. One is the story of a golden age of equality, of mutual respect and cooperation, especially but not exclusively in Moorish Spain; the other is of "dhimmi"-tude, of subservience and persecution and ill treatment. Both are myths. Like many myths, both contain significant elements of truth, and the historic truth is in its usual place, somewhere in the middle between the extremes.

There are certain important differences between the treatment, the position, the perception of Jews in the pre-modern Islamic world and in the pre-modern and also modern Christian worlds.

The story of a golden age of complete equality is, of course, nonsense. No such thing was possible or even conceivable. Indeed, among Christians and Muslims alike, giving equal rights or, more precisely, equal opportunities to unbelievers would have been seen not as a merit but as a dereliction of duty. But until fairly modern times there was a much higher degree of tolerance in most of the Islamic lands than prevailed in the Christian world. For centuries, in most of Europe Christians were very busy persecuting each other; in their spare time, they were persecuting Jews and expelling Muslims—all at a time when, in the Ottoman Empire and some other Islamic states, Jews and several varieties of Christians were living side by side fairly freely and comfortably.

The comparison has often been made between the Cold War of the 20th century and the confrontation between Christendom and Islam in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries. In many ways the comparison is a good one. But one has to remember that in the confrontation between Christendom and Islam, the movement of refugees, of those who, in Lenin's famous phrase, "voted with their feet," was overwhelmingly from west to east not from east to west.

This was tolerance and no more than that. Tolerance is by modern standards an essentially intolerant idea. Tolerance means that I am in charge. I will allow you some though not all of the rights and privileges that I enjoy, provided that you behave yourself according to rules that I will lay down and enforce. That seems a fair definition of tolerance as usually understood and applied. It is, of course, an intolerant idea, but it is a lot better than intolerance as such, and the limited but substantial tolerance accorded to Jews and other non-Muslim communities in the Muslim states until early modern times was certainly vastly better than anything that was available in Christendom.

Prejudices existed in the Islamic world, as did occasional hostility, but not what could be called anti-Semitism, for there was no attribution of cosmic evil. And on the whole, Jews fared better under Muslim rule than Christians did. This is the reverse of what one might expect. In the canonical history, in the Qur'an and the biography of the Prophet, Jews come out badly. The Prophet had more encounters with Jews than with Christians, so we find more negative statements about Jews than about Christians. The biography of the Prophet records armed clashes with Jews, and in those encounters it was the Jews who were killed. Muslims could therefore afford a more relaxed attitude toward Jews in the ensuing

generations.

The other advantage for Jews was that they were not seen as dangerous. Christianity was recognized as a rival world religion and a competitor in the cosmic struggle to bring enlightenment (and with it, inevitably, domination) to all humanity. This cosmic competition had important consequences. Local Christians were dangerous in that they were a potential fifth column for the Christian powers of Europe, the main adversary of the Islamic world. Jews were not suspected of being pro-Christian. On the contrary, they were seen as being reliable and even useful. It was not merely tolerance or good will—though these were essential preconditions—that led the Ottoman sultans to admit so many Jewish refugees from Spain, Portugal, Italy, and elsewhere. Jews, especially those of European origin, were active in trade and industry, and from many documents in the Ottoman archives it is clear that they were valued as a revenue-producing asset. They were not just permitted; they were encouraged and even on a few occasions compelled to settle in Ottoman lands, especially in newly conquered provinces.

Obviously, this is not equality, but it is not anti-Semitism in any sense of the word either. The Ottomans' treatment of the Jews even included a kind of respect. We do of course find expressions of prejudice against the Jews, as against any group of people that are different, but their general attitude was of amused, tolerant superiority.

An interesting difference in hostile stereotypes can be found in anecdotes, jokes, and the like. The main negative quality attributed to Jews in Turkish and Arab folklore was that they were cowardly and unmilitary—very contemptible qualities in a martial society. A late Ottoman joke may serve to illustrate this. The story is that in 1912, at the time of the Balkan war, when there was an acute threat to the Ottoman Empire in its final stages, the Jews, full of patriotic ardor, decided that they, too, wanted to serve in the defense of their country, so they asked permission to form a special volunteer brigade. Permission was given, and officers and ncos were sent to train and equip them. Once the Jewish volunteer brigade was armed, equipped, and trained, ready to leave for the front, they sent a message asking if they could have a police escort, because there were reports of bandits on the road.

This is a very interesting human document. Is it hostile? Not really. It shows a sort of amused tolerance, at once good-humored and contemptuous, that may help us to understand the bewilderment and horror at the Israeli victories in 1948 and after. We have some vivid descriptions at the time of the expectations and reactions of 1948. Azzam Pasha, who was then the secretary-general of the Arab League, is quoted as having said: "This will be like the Mongol invasions. We will utterly destroy them. We will sweep them into the sea." The expectation was that it would be quick and easy. There would be no problem at all dealing with half a million Jews. It was then an appalling shock when five Arab armies were defeated by half a million Jews with very limited weaponry. It remains shameful, humiliating. This was mentioned at the time and has been ever since. One writer said: "It was bad enough to be conquered and occupied by the mighty empires of the West, the British Empire, the French Empire, but to suffer this fate at the hands of a few hundred thousand Jews was intolerable."

The Western form of anti-Semitism—the cosmic, satanic version of Jew hatred—provided solace to wounded feelings. It came to the Middle East in several stages. The first stage was almost entirely

Christian, brought by European missionaries and diplomats. Its impact was principally on the local Christian minorities, where we find occasional recurrences of the previously little known blood libel. In the 15th and 16th centuries this had indeed been explicitly rejected in orders issued by Ottoman sultans. It was now revived on a massive scale. The first major case was the Damascus blood libel in 1840. This kind of anti-Semitism continued to grow, at first on a small scale, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, with a limited response. At the time of the Dreyfus Affair in France, Muslim opinion was divided, some against Dreyfus, some supporting him. A prominent Muslim thinker of the time, the Egyptian Rashid Rida, wrote defending Dreyfus and attacking his persecutors, accusing them not of fanaticism, since they had no real religious beliefs, but of prejudice and envy. Despite this response, one consequence of the affair was the first translation into Arabic of a batch of European anti-Semitic writings.

Then came the Third Reich, with connections to the Arab world and, later, to other Muslim countries. Now that the German archives are open, we know that within weeks of Hitler's coming to power in 1933, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem got in touch with the German consul general in Jerusalem, Doctor Heinrich Wolff, and offered his services. It is interesting that the common image of the Germans pursuing the Arabs is the reverse of what happened. The Arabs were pursuing the Germans, and the Germans were very reluctant to get involved. Dr. Wolff recommended, and his government agreed, that as long as there was any hope of making a deal with the British Empire and establishing a kind of Aryan-Nordic axis in the West, it would be pointless to antagonize the British by supporting the Arabs.

But then things gradually changed, particularly after the Munich Conference in 1938. That was the turning point, when the German government finally decided that there was no deal to be made with Britain, no Aryan axis. Then the Germans turned their attention more seriously to the Arabs, responding at last to their approaches, and from then on the relationship developed very swiftly.

In 1940 the French surrender gave the Nazis new opportunities for action in the Arab world. In Vichy-controlled Syria they were able for a while to establish an intelligence and propaganda base in the heart of the Arab East. From Syria they extended their activities to Iraq, where they helped to establish a pro-Nazi regime headed by Rashid Ali al-Gailani. This was overthrown by the British, and Rashid Ali went to join his friend the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in Berlin, where he remained as Hitler's guest until the end of the war. In the last days of Rashid Ali's regime, on the first and second of June 1941, soldiers and civilians launched murderous attacks on the ancient Jewish community in Baghdad. This was followed by a series of such attacks in other Arab cities, both in the Middle East and in North Africa.

While in Berlin, Rashid Ali was apparently disquieted by the language and, more especially, the terminology of anti-Semitism. His concerns were authoritatively removed in an exchange of letters with an official spokesman of the German Nazi Party. In answer to a question from Rashid Ali as to whether anti-Semitism was also directed against Arabs, because they were part of the Semitic family, Professor Walter Gross, director of the Race Policy Office of the Nazi Party, explained with great emphasis, in a letter dated October 17, 1942, that this was not the case and that anti-Semitism was concerned wholly and exclusively with Jews. On the contrary, he observed, the Nazis had always shown sympathy and support for the Arab cause against the Jews. In the course of his letter, he even remarked that the expression

“anti-Semitism, which has been used for decades in Europe by the anti-Jewish movement, was incorrect since this movement was directed exclusively against Jewry, and not against other peoples who speak a Semitic language.”

This apparently caused some concern in Nazi circles, and a little later a committee was formed that suggested that the Führer’s speeches and his book *Mein Kampf* should be revised to adopt the term “anti-Jewish” instead of “anti-Semitic” so as not to offend “our Arab friends.” The Führer did not agree, and this proposal was not accepted. There was still no great problem in German-Arab relations before, during, and even for a while after the war.

The Nazi propaganda impact was immense. We see it in Arabic memoirs of the period, and of course in the foundation of the Ba’ath party. We use the word “party” in speaking of the Ba’ath in the same sense in which one speaks of the Fascist, Nazi, or Communist parties—not a party in the Western sense, an organization for seeking votes and winning elections, but a party as part of the apparatus of government, particularly concerned with indoctrination and repression. And anti-Semitism, European-style, became a very important part of that indoctrination. The basis was there. A certain amount of translated literature was there. It became much more important after the events of 1948, when the humiliated Arabs drew comfort from the doctrine of the Jews as a source of cosmic evil. This continued and grew with subsequent Arab defeats, particularly after the ultimate humiliation of the 1967 war, which Israel won in less than a week.

The growth of European-style anti-Semitism in the Arab world derived in the main from this feeling of humiliation and the need therefore to ascribe to the Jews a role very different from their traditional role in Arab folklore and much closer to that of the anti-Semitic prototypes. By now the familiar themes of European anti-Semitism—the blood libel, the protocols of Zion, the international Jewish conspiracy, and the rest—have become standard fare in much of the Arab world, in the schoolroom, the pulpit, the media, and even on the Internet. It is bitterly ironic that these themes have been adopted by previously immune Muslims precisely at a time when in Europe they have become an embarrassment even to anti-Semites.

What encouraged this development was what one can only describe as the acquiescence of the United Nations and, apparently, of enlightened opinion in the Western world. Let me cite some examples. On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the famous resolution calling for the division of Palestine into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and an international zone of Jerusalem. The United Nations passed this resolution without making any provision for its enforcement. Just over two weeks later, at a public meeting on December 17, the Arab League adopted a resolution totally rejecting this UN resolution, declaring that they would use all means at their disposal, including armed intervention, to nullify it—an open challenge to the United Nations that was and remains unanswered. No attempt was made to respond, no attempt to prevent the armed intervention that the Arab League promptly launched.

The United Nations’s handling of the 1948 war and the resulting problems shows some curious disparities—for example, on the question of refugees. At the end of the initial struggle in Palestine, part of the country was under the rule of the newly created Jewish state, part under the rule of neighboring Arab

governments. A significant number of Arabs remained in the territories under Jewish rule. It was taken then as axiomatic, and has never been challenged since, that no Jews could remain in the areas of Palestine under Arab rule, so that as well as Arab refugees from the Jewish-controlled areas, there were Jewish refugees from the Arab-controlled areas of mandatory Palestine, not just settlers, but old, established groups, notably the ancient Jewish community in East Jerusalem, which was totally evicted and its monuments desecrated or destroyed. The United Nations seemed to have no problem with this; nor did international public opinion. When Jews were driven out, no provision was made for them, no help offered, no protest made. This surely sent a very clear message to the Arab world, a less clear message to the Jews.

Jewish refugees came not only from those parts of Palestine that were under Arab rule, but also from Arab countries, where the Jewish communities either fled or were driven out, in numbers roughly equal to those of the Arab refugees from Israel. Again, the response of the United Nations to the two groups of refugees was very different. For Arab refugees in Palestine, very elaborate arrangements were made and very extensive financing provided. This contrasts not only with the treatment of Jews from Arab countries, but with the treatment of all the other refugees at the time. The partition of Palestine in 1948 was a trivial affair compared with the partition of India in the previous year, which resulted in millions of refugees—Hindus who fled or were driven from Pakistan into India, and Muslims who fled or were driven from India into Pakistan. This occurred entirely without any help from the United Nations, and perhaps for that reason the refugees were all resettled. One could go back a little further and talk about the millions of refugees in Central and Eastern Europe—Poles fleeing from the Eastern Polish areas annexed to the Soviet Union and Germans fleeing from the East German areas annexed to Poland. Millions of them, of both nationalities, were left entirely to their own people and their own resources.

Some other measures adopted at the time may be worth noting. All the Arab governments involved announced two things. First, they would not recognize Israel. They were entitled to do that. Second, they would not admit Israelis of any religion to their territories, which meant that not only Israeli Jews but also Israeli Muslims and Christians were not allowed into East Jerusalem. Catholic and Protestant Christians were permitted to enter once a year on Christmas Day for a few hours, but otherwise there was no admittance to the holy places in Jerusalem for Jews or Christians. Worse than that, Muslims in Israel were unable to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. For Christians, pilgrimage is optional. For Muslims it is a basic obligation of the faith. A Muslim is required to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina at least once in a lifetime. The Saudi government of the time ruled that Muslims who were Israeli citizens could not go. Some years later, they modified this rule.

At the same time, virtually all the Arab governments announced that they would not give visas to Jews of any nationality. This was not furtive—it was public, proclaimed on the visa forms and in the tourist literature. They made it quite clear that people of the Jewish religion, no matter what their citizenship, would not be given visas or be permitted to enter any independent Arab country. Again, not a word of protest from anywhere. One can imagine the outrage if Israel had announced that it would not give visas to Muslims, still more if the United States were to do so. As directed against Jews, this ban was seen as perfectly natural and normal. In some countries it continues to this day, although in practice most Arab countries have given it up.

Neither the United Nations nor the public protested any of this in any way, so it is hardly surprising that Arab governments concluded that they had license for this sort of action and worse. One other example: unlike the other Arab countries, the Jordanians were at that time willing to accept Palestinian refugees as citizens, and the Jordanian nationality law of February 4, 1954, offered Jordanian citizenship to Palestinians, defined as natives and residents of the mandated territory of Palestine—“except Jews.” This was clearly stated. Not a murmur of protest from anyone, anywhere.

These examples may serve to illustrate the atmosphere within which the new Arab anti-Semitism grew and flourished. After the 1967 war, the Israelis came into possession of the former Arab-occupied Palestinian territories, including a number of schools run by unrwa, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. These schools were funded by the United Nations. When the Israelis had a chance to look at the Syrian, Jordanian, or Egyptian textbooks that these UN-funded schools used, they found many examples of unequivocal anti-Semitism. Although the Israelis could do nothing about anti-Semitism in textbooks in Arab countries, they felt that they could do something about anti-Semitism in textbooks used in schools funded and maintained by the United Nations. The matter was referred to the UN, which referred it to unesco, which appointed a commission of three professors of Arabic—one Turkish, one French, and one American. These professors examined the textbooks and wrote a lengthy report saying that some textbooks were acceptable, some were beyond repair and should be abandoned, and some should be corrected. The report was presented to unesco on April 4, 1969. It was not published.

For those who needed it, all this provided an up-to-date, intellectually and socially acceptable rationale for what ought to be called anti-Semitism but, since that word isn't acceptable, might be called Jew-baiting, Jew-hating, or generally being unpleasant to Jews.

The rationale has thus served two purposes—one for Jews, the other for their enemies. In anti-Semitism's first stage, when the hostility was based in religion and expressed in religious terms, the Jew always had the option of changing sides. During the medieval and early modern periods, Jews persecuted by Christians could convert. Not only could they escape the persecution; they could join the persecutors if they so wished, and some indeed rose to high rank in the church and in the Inquisition. Racial anti-Semitism removed that option. The present-day ideological anti-Semitism has restored it, and now as in the Middle Ages, there seem to be some who are willing to avail themselves of this option.

For non-Jews the rationale brought a different kind of relief. For more than half a century, any discussion of Jews and their problems has been overshadowed by the grim memories of the crimes of the Nazis and of the complicity, acquiescence, or indifference of so many others. But inevitably, the memory of those days is fading, and now Israel and its problems afford an opportunity to relinquish the unfamiliar and uncomfortable posture of guilt and contrition and to resume the more familiar and more comfortable position of stern reproof from an attitude of moral superiority. It is not surprising that this opportunity is widely welcomed and utilized.

The new anti-Semitism has little or no bearing on the rights and wrongs of the Palestine conflict, but it must surely have some effect on perceptions of the problem, and therefore on the behavior and perhaps even on the policies of both participants and outsiders. Nor is the offense all on one side. One might argue

that when Arabs are judged by a lower standard than Jews, as for example the minimal attention given to the atrocious crimes committed at Darfur, this is more offensive to Arabs than to Jews. Contempt is indeed more demeaning than hatred. But it is less dangerous.

Bernard Lewis is professor emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and the author of *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*. This essay is based on a lecture delivered at Brandeis University on March 24, 2004.

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