



The Bible, Secularism, and Anti-Semitism

by Rafael Castro

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Anti-Semitism is the most insidious hatred in history. Aversion to Jews has flourished under so many circumstances that it is hard to find a common denominator accounting for its manifold manifestations. However, there have been periods when non-Jews showed strong sympathy and solidarity towards Jews. Perhaps the best illustration of this friendship is modern America.

There are precedents showing that America's willingness to befriend the Jews is not a unique case in history. Calvinist Holland and Puritan England also displayed friendship and solidarity towards Jews, a sympathy that was expressed by fervent Christians. The fervor of those Christians was as strong as that of Catholics who burned *conversos* at the stake and of Orthodox Christian clergymen who intimidated Jews throughout Eastern Europe.

The difference between Puritans and Catholic or Orthodox Christians towards Jews was not doctrinal. These streams of Christianity each embraced the replacement theology of Augustine, which viewed Christians as God's new covenant partners. The difference is that Calvinists and Puritans embraced the Hebrew Bible, whereas Catholics, Lutherans, and Orthodox Christians tended to view the Torah as the obsolete relic of an irascible and vindictive Israelite deity.

Nowadays, many Jews are baffled that American Christians overwhelmingly embrace Jews and Israel, whereas those Jews' forefathers from the "old country" had good reason to fear and resent Christianity. This paradox is accounted for by the contrasting attitudes of Christians in North America and in continental Europe towards the Hebrew Bible. American Christians are eager and sympathetic readers of the Old Testament. Historically, European Christians have disregarded the Torah.

Indeed, the attitude of an ideology or culture towards the Torah is the best predictor of its attitude towards Jews. Nazis and Communists were on opposite ends of the political spectrum, but their hatred for the ethical and theological message of the Torah made them both implacable enemies of the Jewish people. Nowadays secular leftists and postmodernists embrace anti-Zionism and flirt with anti-Semitism, a phenomenon that dismays Jews raised on the axiom that progressivism is sympathetic to Jews. This animosity explains itself once we remember that the morality and ethics of Jewish scriptures are antithetical to postmodernism.

In this discussion Islam also plays a role. As long as Jews were submissive *dhimmis* of a self-confident Muslim polity, anti-Semitism played a relatively minor role in Islamic thought. After all, Jewish scriptures and Jewish meekness corroborated that Islam was the ascendant faith. However, once Jews returned to their historical homeland and vanquished Islamic armies on their home turf, the Torah morphed in Muslim eyes into an immoral text justifying all sorts of crimes including racism, supremacism, and genocide. Rabid anti-Semitism in the Muslim world followed.

The secularization of European and American societies has coincided with a marked rise in anti-Jewish sentiment in the Western world. University campuses in urban centers are at the heart of this hostility. This is not a coincidence given that these spaces are the least Bible-literate in America and Europe.

The Western powers would have never supported the establishment of a Jewish state in 1948 had their leaders not attended Sunday school and been knowledgeable about the Biblical stories that played out in Canaan and Judea. Indeed, Biblical literacy at the core of one's cultural identity and ethical self-understanding is the common thread shared by most Gentiles whose sympathy and support for the Jewish people has been selfless and spontaneous.

The secularization of Western society and the hollowing out of Christian culture into a digest of Gospel mantras thus constitute an existential threat to the Jewish people. Secularization erodes the traditional American identity whose sympathy and support for Jews and Israel has historically been so generous. In addition, it contributes to assimilationist trends by flattening out differences between Jews and Christians.

The fate of the Jewish people is intimately bound up with the prestige of the Torah. To strengthen flagging support for Israel and the Jewish people, the Bible and its ethos must be restored in the American educational system and culture industry. This restoration will undermine anti-Semitism more effectively than lectures on human rights and the dangers of racism.

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