

The Forever Holocaust

By Bruce Bawer

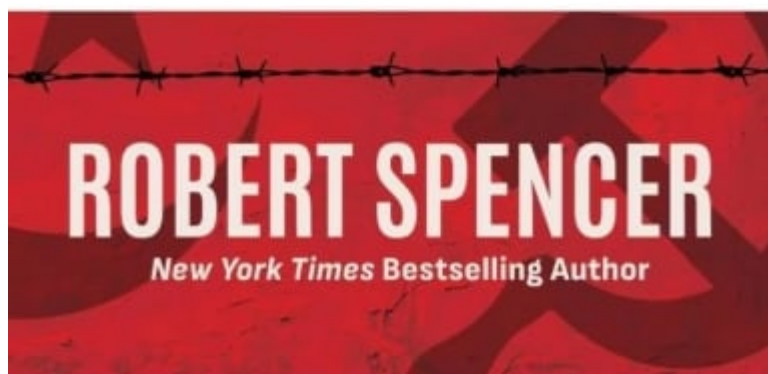
I've read more than my share of books about antisemitism. I even [reviewed](#) one of them here at *FrontPage* twelve years ago. *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives* was a collection of nineteen essays edited by Alvin H. Rosenfeld, a professor of Jewish Studies at Indiana University. "Most of the essays," I wrote, "illuminate the current situation for Jews in a specific corner of the world."

Much of the book was impressive. But several of the contributors defended Muslims from the charge that their religion preaches antisemitism, or argued, lamely, that Muslim antisemitism has nothing to do with Islam, or professed, absurdly, that Muslim antisemitism dates back only as far as the early twentieth century, when Islamic leaders became enamored of Hitler. There's something perverse about experts on antisemitism who consider it part of their professional obligation to whitewash Islam.

On my bookshelves I find other works on the subject. The subtitle of *Jødehat* (Jew-Hatred) by Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket, and Einhart Lorenz translates into English as *The History of Antisemitism from Ancient Times to the Present*, but only the first twenty or so pages cover the ancient world. (The book, originally written in Norwegian, has also been published in other languages.) And Clemens Heni's *Antisemitism: A Specific Phenomenon* focuses mostly on twentieth-century Germany.



"I do not believe a more
important book on antisemitism
has ever been written."
— Dennis Prager



These and many other books have offered useful takes on this grim topic, coming at it from various perspectives and with different emphases. But even in the company of the most valuable works on the subject, Robert Spencer's new book [*Antisemitism: History and Myth*](#) is a standout. And it could hardly appear at a timelier moment.

Spencer begins by recounting the horrific atrocities of October 7, 2023, and their aftermath. It has been a time when one might have expected decent people everywhere to rally around Israel, a highly advanced democracy that suffered the worst antisemitic massacre since the Holocaust. Instead, antisemitism has skyrocketed. Muslims and leftists around the world have demonstrated loudly and lustily in support of the jihadist butchers. The images of mobs disrupting traffic, waving Hamas flags, committing acts of vandalism, and pushing around lone Jews has been deeply disturbing. The sight of Western cops allowing this savagery to occur while arresting law-abiding Jews simply for being in the vicinity of the protests has been appalling.

Watching such conduct, millions of good people have surely

asked themselves, and not for the first time, where is all this evil coming from? What are its roots? How has it survived, seemingly intact, from primitive times into an era that we like to think of as civilized? Why does it refuse, century after century, to go away?

Robert Spencer is, of course, best known as the author of a series of superb books about Islam. He has made his reputation as an expert on that religion – its holy books, its culture, its political ideology, its history, its founder (who may or may not have existed), and its devotion to sharia and the practice of jihad. In the first chapter of *Antisemitism*, Spencer notes that after the massacres of October 7, he was surprised to see people whom he'd previously "trusted and respected" taking an attitude of moral equivalency toward Hamas and Israel.

One of those people, whom he describes as a "former friend," charged Spencer with "inconsistency," maintaining that "as a longtime foe of jihad violence and Sharia oppression," Spencer "had been unafraid to look into Islamic texts and teachings and to track the connections between them and contemporary jihad activity" but complaining that he "was now too afraid of disapproval from Jewish friends and patrons to perform the same investigation of Judaism. If I did carry out such an investigation, one longtime associate insisted, I would see that what I was dismissing as antisemitism was justified and reasonable suspicion and that to dismiss it as such was tantamount to dismissing concern about jihad as 'Islamophobia.'"

Hence this book, which is every bit as thoroughgoing, as rich in scriptural exegesis and historical detail and colorful personalities and dramatic conflicts as any of Spencer's works on Islam. He takes us, first of all, back to ancient times – to an era when expanding empires were accustomed to adding the gods of their conquered peoples to their pantheons, but unprepared to deal with a monotheistic people who refused to

let their God be treated as one more local deity on an already crowded shelf.

It was because of the Jews' repeated refusal, in ancient times and afterward, to give up their traditions and customs and assimilate into multinational societies that they attracted more hostility than more pliant groups; but it was this same "stiff-necked" quality (to quote the Book of Exodus) that enabled Jews to survive to the present day even as "their ancient enemies in the Hebrew scriptures, the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and the Perizzites, have long since vanished from the scene, absorbed into other peoples."

From the earliest times, Jews were accused of human sacrifice and idol-worship – even though such practices were forbidden by the Jewish faith. Long before there was such a thing as a tsar, they were targeted by pogroms. Flaccus Avillius, the governor of Egypt under Tiberius, made a public spectacle of the crucifixion, torture, and execution of Jewish elders, after which, in the words of a contemporary, "came the dancers, and the buffoons, and the flute-players, and all the other diversions of the theatrical contests."

With the Christian Era came a powerful new charge: the Jews had killed Christ. There ensued centuries of Jew-hatred and abuse, apropos of which Spencer asks this savvy question: "If the Jews killed Christ, and that was an act of supreme criminality, then how can it simultaneously be affirmed that he died as the result of the sins of all people and in order to renew and redeem them?"

Spencer proceeds to lead us through the writings of the church fathers St. Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Ambrose of Milan, all of whom had blistering things to say about Jews. He recounts the anti-Jewish actions of the early Christian emperors – expulsions, bans on interfaith marriages, forced baptisms of kidnapped Jewish children.

A millennium after Christ, the Crusaders took the time to wipe out Jewish communities on their way to the Holy Land. In England, King Richard I “forbade Jews from attending his investiture and had some who came to him bearing gifts flogged for their gesture of goodwill.” Now and then, here and there, powerful men made half-gestures of humankindness, declaring that Jews, while oppressed and denied equal rights, should nevertheless be treated with a degree of decency.

Eventually the blood libel came along: the allegation that Jews ritually “murdered Christian children in order to drain them of their blood and mix it into Passover matzoh.” Spencer reports that “several medieval popes...condemned the accusations as baseless.” Yet the libel persisted through the centuries.

Was the Protestant Reformation a positive development for Jews? Nope. Luther hated them, outdoing many popes with his stratagems to crush the Jews – burn their synagogues, destroy their prayer books, silence their rabbis. As for that absurd thesis, widely repeated by scholars, that there was no antisemitism in Islam before Hitler, Spencer blasts it to smithereens. One would, needless to say, have to be utterly ignorant of the contents of the Koran to believe that antisemitism was not central to Islam from the beginning.

Although the French Revolution resulted in the lifting of some restrictions on Jews, prejudice remained, as demonstrated by the Dreyfus Affair. And soon enough Marx came along. Famously, he saw all religions as the opiates of the people – but found Judaism particularly offensive. “What is the object of the Jew’s worship in this world?” Marx wrote. “Usury. What is his worldly god? Money.” The Jew, then, was the very personification of everything Marx sought to obliterate.

To be sure, Marxism-Leninism departed from this view: Lenin forswore antisemitism; Trotsky himself was Jewish. Stalin, for his part, vacillated on the matter. In any event, rather bizarrely, so many Jews became Marxists that Marxism came to

be seen as “a Jewish plot to gain global hegemony.” Among those who embraced this hypothesis was a certain Austrian who made antisemitism the cornerstone of his own new faith.

There’s much more here – an invaluable discussion of the Talmud, a fascinating history of the misrepresentation of Jewish belief. There’s a quote from Thomas Jefferson that was new to me: “It does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” And one from Himmler, who congratulates himself for his devotion to the Final Solution: “this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory.”

It’s impossible to argue with Spencer’s conclusion: throughout history, Jews have been “far more sinned against than sinning.” Yes, there have been periods of relative peace and tolerance, but the ancient hatred always returns. Early in his book Spencer quotes from Tom Lehrer’s 1965 song “National Brotherhood Week”:

*Oh the Protestants hate the Catholics
And the Catholics hate the Protestants
And the Hindus hate the Muslims
And everybody hates the Jews...*

It seems appropriate to close this review with a line from another dark lyric by another great Jewish humorist, Mel Brooks: “The Inquisition’s here, and it’s here to stay.”

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