

Who Tortured The Host? Who Are The Enemies Of Islam?

To modern perceptions (though certainly not to those of people at the time) one of the most bizarre forms of antisemitic blood libel popular in the middle ages was that of **torturing the Host**. According to this, Jews would break into churches at night and torture the consecrated communion wafers (known as the Host) which, according to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, are literally the body of Christ. As the Jews hammered nails into them, the wafers would scream and bleed. The Jews would be delighted that they were crucifying Jesus yet again, and would use his blood, which had magical properties, for nefarious purposes. Many Jews were themselves tortured and executed for this crime. None ever committed it.

Since this myth was an exclusively Christian manifestation of antisemitism, what does it have to do with the idea of the 'enemies of Islam'? On the face of it, nothing.

Yet the underlying logic is similar. In order to believe that Jews torture the Host, one must first believe that Jews *know* that the Host is literally the body of the living Jesus. But that is tantamount to their knowing that the Catholic religion is true. And indeed, the idea that The Jews *know that Christianity is true but wilfully reject it* was itself a staple of Christian antisemitism. It is a conspiracy theory that would require Jews to be lying about their own religious beliefs, in a way which, as we have discussed [here](#), would have made it impossible for those beliefs to be propagated to the next generation. The Host-torturing libel was even more incoherent because it implied that Jews were materially relying upon, and risking their very lives in order to witness, a miracle predicted only by a rival religion and contradicting their own. Unfortunately, philosophical incoherence has seldom been much of a handicap when it comes to religious doctrines.

Today, the Islamists' narrative in regard to the 'enemies of Islam' is as follows. First of all, of course, Islam is the true religion. It is also destined to spread to every nation on Earth. Why? Because that is what God in His omnipotence has willed. On a level playing field, this spread would happen rapidly and peacefully. Unfortunately, the leaders of other religions, and the demonic leaders of the West, know this and are afraid. They seize upon (or invent) every possible excuse to kill Muslims, weaken and subjugate Muslim nations, and

sow mindless hatred of Muslims among the ignorant masses of their own countries. That makes those leaders 'enemies of Islam', and Muslims are obliged by their religion to respond violently to them. In this holy war, Islam is destined to prevail.

To Western apologists for Islamist violence, some of that narrative is familiar and congenial. The inherent violence of the West, the baseness of its motives, its guilt and responsibility for the evils of the world, the explanation of history as being driven by a grand conspiracy among its 'rulers', and the fraudulent nature of its apparent success, are all themes of the basic left-wing narrative too. However, the leftist apologia for Islamist violence is that it is caused by Western oppression, and that the Islamists' specific beliefs are a mere rationalisation for their desperate lashing out: a different indigenous culture would have resorted to similar violence but attached different words to it. But to the Islamists themselves, their religion is not an 'indigenous culture' but the unique, universal truth. Their violence is a focused and moral response to a coordinated attack *on their religion* which was caused by their enemies' knowledge that that religion would otherwise sweep the earth.

But in reality their 'enemies' have no such knowledge. No one, other than Muslims, has believed anything of the sort for several centuries now. After all, the Islamic religion, which at its height managed to overtake Christianity in terms of numbers of believers, nowadays stands at closer to half, with the majority living in jurisdictions where the mildest criticism of it is savagely punished and converting to a different religion carries the death penalty. To a believing Muslim, it is not relevant that the Islamic empire passed its peak over five centuries ago, nor that Islamic nations are decades or centuries behind Western ones in terms of wealth, military power, scientific progress, cultural creativity, and every other measure that is conceivably relevant to which of them is likely to become the global civilisation. In modern times it simply does not occur to anyone without faith in Islam, that Islam will peacefully sweep the world unless it is violently stopped. But Islamists pathologically assume that it is a fact known to everyone, but opposed by the wicked, just as believers in the host-torturing myth thought that some of the supernatural attributes of Jesus were known to, but opposed by, Jews.

In reality, medieval Jews cared nothing about the doctrine of transubstantiation, and therefore did not, in reality, lie awake at night obsessing about the Host – until, presumably, it began to be used as a pretext for murdering them. Likewise, President Bush and Mr Blair do not lie awake worrying about who is going to convert to Islam next. Indeed, they were entirely unconcerned with Islam – until September 11, 2001. Just as it was sheer fantasy that medieval Jewish religious practice centred around the truth of Christian doctrines and a desire to hurt Jesus, so it is sheer fantasy that fear of the peaceful spread of Islam, and a grand historic plan to hurt Muslims, are at the heart of Western leaders' political

philosophy. But unfortunately, as incoherent fantasies go, both of

these are exceptionally nasty and dangerous ones.

There are, no doubt, some enemies of Islam who wish to spread some other religion – perhaps because it, too, contains a supernatural promise that it must inevitably triumph – or who are simply bigots. But they are of no significance in world events. Who tortured the Host? No one. And the 'enemies of Islam' in the sense envisaged in the Islamists' narrative simply do not exist either. There are only people who fear the Islamists' unjustified, conspiracy-theory-driven violence.

Note: For further thoughts on the relevance of the Host-desecration myth to present-day political issues, see [this](#) interesting article.

Sat, 02/25/2006 - 15:08 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

"Since this myth was an exclu

"Since this myth was an exclusively Christian manifestation of antisemitism[...]"

How do you infer that this is a consequence of antisemitism? Is burning a witch a sign of antisemitism? Or killing a hairy man, supposed to be a werewolf, a sign of antisemitism? And how come you have such an "exclusive" point of view? Tell me the truth, do you like to label things more than anything in your life? Or is it one of your greatest pleasures in life? You know, we have so many doctors who treat us when we are sick, maybe we should have some doctors who can tell us how to use our on capacities, both physical and mental, in a normal. It's just that the school does not suffice these most miserable days.

Go out, see the sun, watch the birds, find some friends and enjoy life (ask your grandparents how to do this, if you have no idea). You need it!

by a reader on Tue, 02/28/2006 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

Carnival of the Vanities

Thanks for submitting your post, it's listed at this week's [Carnival of the Vanities](#)

by **M** on Wed, 03/01/2006 - 06:20 | [reply](#)

a consequence of antisemitism?

It's not clear what point you are making, but it is certainly true that, as Bernard Lewis recently [remarked](#):

[I]t is perfectly possible to hate and even to persecute Jews without necessarily being anti-Semitic

On the other hand, if someone in good faith doubts that, for

instance, the Normandy landings were part of the Second World War, or that Michelangelo's David was sculpted as part of the Renaissance, then the most efficient thing from everyone's point of view is for that person simply to learn more about the war or the Renaissance. No amount of explanation about the specific event could suffice.

So in this case too, there is a large-scale historical phenomenon called antisemitism, of which the host-torturing myth is a part. The way to understand that is to learn more about antisemitism as a whole. One might begin by looking [here](#).

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 03/01/2006 - 10:01 | [reply](#)

Nice work

I'm usually harshly critical of the opinions expressed in '[The World](#)', but this one makes an excellent and too-readily-overlooked point: That the Muslim outlook on (we could say 'theory about') the world is not 'just like ours but with different names for things' but that they take the entire content of their religion with the utmost seriousness. Even moderate Muslims believe their holy book to be the absolute truth. They perceive criticism of or 'slights' to their religion to be appalling and grossly immoral, not because they take place against a political background of widespread injustices against Muslims, but *intrinsically evil in themselves*.

So what should be done? Well there's only so much that 'we' can do, but we're not doing it. For instance, it seems to me that in treating enemy 'combatants' (even the lowliest 'foot soldiers') so incredibly badly - throwing them into tiny, bare cells; mistreating/torturing them; denying them legal representation etc. with only a Qu'ran for comfort (!), this can only reinforce the impressions Islamists have that (a) the West is evil and (b) the West secretly knows that Islam is true.

by a reader on Sun, 03/05/2006 - 10:29 | [reply](#)

How do you infer that this is a consequence of antisemitism?

Well, let's see. Since that's the single most intelligible sentence of your post, suppose we deal with that one first. There is this little thing that reality based people call the historical record. It's recorded that Jews were subject to persecution by Christians for 'renouncing' *the Messiah*.

That Jews were persecuted for this supposed slight against G-d, while others who didn't believe in the Christian miracle weren't, is called "antisemitism."

Ergo, it's a rather short path from observing that Jews were persecuted for a supposed crime against G-d (that would never occur to them to commit in the first place) to recognizing that the motivation was antisemitism.

As to the rest of your post, you really, *really* need to cut back on

the pharceuticals.

by **EW1** on Mon, 03/06/2006 - 02:49 | [reply](#)

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