

Is there a Jewish People?



KURZE GESCHICHTE JUDENTUM / A SHORT HISTORY OF JUDAISM

By Micha Brumlik

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A Short History of Judaism

Theodore Herzl, the founder of the Zionist Movement, saw the Jews as a "people", one more nation among those which began to constitute themselves in the 19th century. Until then Jewry had been no more than a religious community scattered across Europe, the Mediterranean and the Orient. In Micha Brumlik's view Jewish nationalism is a cul-de-sac. He thinks the Diaspora remains an essential feature of Jewry to this day.

Rabbinic Judaism, the final form of the Judaic religion, came into being at about the same time as Christianity. Ever since Christianity had been raised to the status of state religion in the Roman Empire, the Jews, being the only non-Christians in the whole Empire, began to be felt as a thorn in the side of the Church. Over the centuries, periods of persecution swept across Europe like tidal waves, time and again. It was not until the age of Enlightenment that "emancipation" brought civic equality to the Jews in many European countries. Another change took place towards the end of the 19th century. In this phase of extreme nationalism, the Jews, being a part of the population which did not primarily define itself in terms of nationality, were subjected to a policy of exclusion all over Europe. Consequently part of the Jewish intelligentsia joined the international socialist movement, another one emigrated to America, a third one joined the Zionist National Movement. The Holocaust was a traumatic experience for the Jews worldwide, but it did not lead to Israel, which had recently come into existence, becoming a national home for the majority of Jews. Today, no less than in Antiquity, Jews live scattered across the globe. So it's in their best interest to contribute their own share to promote the growth and spread of tolerance across the world, as has been their practice, time and again, ever since the Age of Enlightenment.

The author

Micha Brumlik was born in 1947. After a few years working as an assistant lecturer in Göttingen, Hamburg and Mainz, he started teaching education at Heidelberg's Ruprecht-Karls-University, focussing on social education. Since 2000 he's been teaching general education at Frankfurt's Johann Wolfgang Goethe University focussing on "Theories on education and culture". From 2000 to 2005 he was the director of the University's "Fritz Bauer Institut", a study and documentation centre for the history and historical impact of the Holocaust.

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