

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*The Roots of
Anti-Semitism*

"American Anti-Semitism: A Reinterpretation" by Michael N. Dobkowski, in *American Quarterly* (Summer 1977), 4025 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19174.

American historians have had to face the task of reconciling widespread anti-Jewish prejudice during the late 19th and early 20th centuries with a society generally regarded as democratic and libertarian. But by stressing the "transitory" social and economic roots of prejudice, contends Dobkowski, professor of religion at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, scholars have ignored "religious, ideological, and popular attitudes that were more extensive and intense than has been previously recognized."

Analysts of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, says Dobkowski, fall into two camps: those who minimize the significance of anti-Semitism and those who seek its origins in populist rhetoric and the movement of immigrant Jews into the "gilded enclaves of patrician America." But Dobkowski believes the virulent anti-Semitism of the period had less to do with "agrarian protest" or "social claustrophobia" than with the "pervasive negative image of the Jew propagated by the popular culture."

In the literature, press, and theater of the time, he notes, Jews were almost exclusively represented as narrow-minded fanatics, arsonists, fraudulent pawnbrokers, and petty criminals; as unscrupulous capitalists, radical agitators, and unpatriotic foreigners. Shady Jewish merchants appeared regularly in Horatio Alger sagas; the *New York Police Gazette* in 1862 blithely stigmatized Jews as "receivers of stolen goods." Such stereotypes were typical, Dobkowski concludes; they reflected widely held "nativist attitudes toward the immigrants, the blacks, the Indians, and the Jews."

*When the
Kago Comes*

"Cargo Cults of the South Pacific" by Thomas Merton, in *America* (Sept. 3, 1977), 106 W. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

"Everything will be all right when the Kago comes," the natives of the South Pacific often heard the white man say. "When the Kago [pidgin for cargo] comes, we shall have beer and whiskey and rice."

According to Merton, the noted poet and Trappist monk who composed this article shortly before his death in 1968, "cargo cults" have recurred in the Pacific over the past 75 years as a response to the artificial culture thrust upon the natives by Europeans. While the bizarre native rituals designed to make the Kago come may now seem remote, he writes, the rituals tell us as much about ourselves as about the natives.

To the islanders, the coming of Kago meant the coming of the millennium; through cargo cults, they sought to reconcile their ties to the powerful white man with their own deeply disturbed culture. In