

Review

“The Paradox of Christian Anti-Semitism”

In *The Paradox of Christian Anti-Semitism*, the author argues that Jewish literature, namely the New Testament, is used by interpreters to fuel anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic sentiments.¹ The author discusses three types of anti-Judaism in early Christian literature, outlined by Douglas Hare: prophetic, Jewish-Christian, and gentiling.² She summarizes Hare’s argument that Jesus includes anti-Jewish ideas in his teaching and places Hare in conversation with Gavin Langmuir; Langmuir asserts that neither Jesus nor Paul were anti-Jewish.³

The author then examines early Christian literature for positive and negative characterization of Jews.⁴ She notes that Mark’s gospel includes a mixed portrayal of the Jewish people.⁵ The synagogue leader begs Jesus to heal his sick daughter (Mark 5), but the chief priests and scribes are the ones who seek to kill Jesus because of his teaching (Mark 11:18), demonstrating the varied character of Mark’s descriptions.⁶ The author highlights Luke’s addition to Mark’s gospel: that the spectators of Jesus’ death beat their breasts (Luke 23:38).⁷ In contrast to Luke’s depiction of a remorseful audience, Matthew says that the crowd, in response to Pilate, assumes responsibility for Jesus’ death (Matt 27:24).⁸ According to the author, this addition to Matthew’s gospel constitutes “an apparent Christian reinterpretation of events, in the enthusiasm of the crowd and their words, which drip with dramatic irony.”⁹

She moves on to discuss Paula Fredriksen’s view of anti-Judaism in the gospels.¹⁰ Fredriksen argues that the gospels are Jewish sectarian texts that demonstrate arguments between Jewish groups.¹¹ While asserting that the gospels are not inherently anti-Jewish, Fredriksen observes that the way that such Jewish sectarian texts portray other Jews negatively has been part of the development of anti-Judaism.¹² Further, Fredriksen says that differing and often contentious Jewish interpretations of historical events, viewed by those outside of the community, provided Gentiles with ammunition for anti-Jewish ideas.¹³ The author notes that Fredriksen connects the sources used for anti-Jewish arguments with Jewish sectarian literature. The author then asserts that this argument could be

¹ *The Paradox of Christian Anti-Semitism*, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

interpreted as portraying Jewish theology as responsible for the basis of Christian anti-Semitism and cautions against such logic.¹⁴

The author cites passages from Acts and Thessalonians that describes Jews as those who crucified Jesus, highlighting the paradox of Christian anti-Semitism. She concludes that the New Testament “has been rewritten and interpreted to support various later Christian theologies.”¹⁵

The author skillfully synthesizes scholarship and puts scholars in dialogue with one another, drawing out the complexities of the New Testament’s relationship to anti-Semitism. She provides a helpful overview of some of the main texts that have been used to support anti-Jewish rhetoric. Further, her contribution to the discussion of anti-Semitism is significant in a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise.

However, while the author’s discussion of the three types of anti-Judaism is informative, it is at times inaccurate and lacks analysis of Hare and Langmuir’s claims. She describes Hare’s argument that “some anti-Jewish sentiment was a factor within Christ’s teaching specifically on God’s displacement with Israel,” but fails to engage with the statement.¹⁶ The argument is factually incorrect: The Jewish Jesus arguably never teaches that God is displacing Israel. Early Christianity was one of many Jewish sects, and so disagreement between Jews is expected. The texts from Qumran demonstrate the intensity of disagreement between Jews, and the fact that Jesus disagreed with Jewish leaders fits within the world of multiple first-century ‘Judaisms.’ Such disagreement does not make Jesus anti-Jewish, although Hare argues that Jesus’ teaching is representative of anti-Jewish ideas. James Dunn comments that “what [the Dead Sea Scrolls] illustrate vividly is the *diversity* of Second Temple Judaism,” and adds that “second Temple Judaism was made up of a number of more fragmented and diverse interest groups.”¹⁷ This paper would have benefited from recognition of the inaccuracy of Hare’s assertion, proper engagement with his statement, and discussion of the context of second Temple Judaism.

Perhaps the most serious flaw in this paper is the conflation of what the New Testament says and what (anti-Jewish) Christian scholars have said. The author writes that “it is the New Testament’s ability to separate Jesus and his followers from their Jewish identity, while at the same time have the New Testament as a literal sequel to the Old Testament, that allowed for later anti-Semitic sentiment to permeate Christian scholarship.”¹⁸ The New Testament itself does not separate Jesus from Judaism. Jesus is called the King of the Jews, is portrayed as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, and himself upholds Torah. Anti-Jewish Christian scholars have claimed that Jesus separates himself from Judaism, but viewed as intra-Jewish debate, the New Testament texts themselves do not do so. This is supported by the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts. Approximately twenty years after the death of Jesus, the Council was held to discuss whether Gentiles had to become Jewish in order to be part of the Jesus-followers (Acts 15). It was assumed among the earliest Jesus-

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Paradox*, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹⁷ James. D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 16.

¹⁸ *Paradox*, 4.

followers that Gentiles had to become Jewish until Paul challenged the idea. An analysis of the Council's position calls into question the author's statement that the New Testament severed Jesus and his followers from their Jewish identity.

The Paradox of Christian Anti-Semitism provides insight into the tragic reality of anti-Semitism and the abuse of New Testament texts in creating the *Adversus Judeos*, the anti-Jewish Christian literature which later developed. While the paper includes some inaccuracies, it is a helpful contribution to understanding the relationship between the New Testament and anti-Semitism.

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