

- 1930 NT revised by C. M. Churchward, Mesulam Titifanua, BFBS London
- 1975 Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Jonah, translated by Churchward assisted by a committee

COOK ISLAND MAORI

- 1828 Galatians, LMS Huahine
- 1836 NT, BFBS London
- 1851 Bible translated by John Williams, C. Pitman, J. Buzacott, LMS, BFBS London

TAHITIAN

- 1818 Luke, LMS Huahine
- 1838 Bible translated by Henry Nott, John Davies, John Williams and other members of the LMS, BFBS London

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ALLEGED ANTI-JEWISH BIAS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: A RESPONSE

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Editorial note We are happy to publish differing approaches to subjects significant for Bible translation, and in particular readers' reactions to articles in TBT, such as the following response to Dr Roger Omanson's article in our July 1992 issue, to which a concluding note by Dr Omanson is appended. We would however draw readers' attention to the note printed on the inside back cover of each issue of TBT, stating that the United Bible Societies is not responsible for views expressed by contributors.

INTRODUCTION

It is necessary and good for committed Christians to combat anti-Semitism, and to recognize how traditional Christian theological and popular misuse of biblical texts, both in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament, has contributed to hatred of the Jewish people. The term "anti-Semitism" itself was popularized in 19th century Germany by Wilhelm Maar, and was based on pseudo-scientific beliefs that the Jews are a Semitic race threatening the German and so-called Aryan nations.¹

Genuine Christian concern about this issue has stimulated many

¹ Wilhelm Maar, *Der Sieg des Judentums über das Germanentum* [The Victory of Judaism Over Germanism], Berne Costenolle, 1879; cited by Edward H. Flannery in *The Anguish of the Jews* (London, Macmillan 1965, 178-179). Flannery notes the "extension of the linguistic distinction between 'Aryan' and 'Semitic' to a racial distinction."

Christian churches to corrective action because of their historic contribution to this problem. It has, however, provided a springboard for many critics to blur the important distinction between abuse and misuse of biblical texts and the original meaning and context of the texts themselves.

The article by Roger L. Omanson in the July 1992 issue of TBT evidences this latter tendency among many modern commentators. Dr. Omanson writes: "Anti-Jewish bias in the New Testament is nearly universally conceded among New Testament scholars, both Jewish and Christian."

NEW TESTAMENT CRITICS

Such a declaration implies that the many evangelical Bible scholars, as well as Hebrew Christian or Messianic Jewish scholars, who would almost universally demur at such a statement, are less than scholarly, or that their views are irrelevant. Yet this segment of the Bible-believing community are certainly among those most committed to the promulgation and distribution of the Bible.

Many of the critics of the New Testament seldom bother to define what they mean by anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic bias in the biblical context. Thus, the Jewish scholar Samuel Sandmel, a practicing Liberal rabbi, is cited for proof that "the Christian Scripture is permeated by anti-Semitism". Rabbi Sandmel does not, however, find any contradiction between this statement and another in a book he authored on the subject, that "'anti-Semitism' is a completely wrong term when transferred to the first and second Christian centuries" – but he insists on its use, "consciously aware of how wrong a term it is".²

What, then, is anti-Jewish bias – whether termed "anti-Semitism" or otherwise? The scholar Norman Beck divides anti-Jewish texts into three categories:³

1. Claims are made about Jesus which the Jews do not accept.
2. Claims are made that Christianity replaces Judaism in God's plan.
3. Judaism is spoken of in derogatory terms.

Claims about Jews Concerning the first category: It is a fact that the Jewish mainstream during the New Testament period and later did not accept the original Christian message; but why must such a claim be anti-Jewish? By analogy, most Christians today, like most modern secular Jews, do not regard the Talmud as the word of God, or as the Oral Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai – which is a basic Orthodox Jewish belief. It is also a fact that in mediaeval polemics, Christian rejection of the authority of the Talmud was used to circulate horrendous anti-Jewish teaching on the basis of quotations from the Talmud, often taken out of context. It does not, therefore, follow that modern Christian rejection of claims made for the Talmud by Orthodox Judaism represents a form of anti-Jewish bias.

2 Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1978, xxi.

3 Norman A. Beck, cited by Omanson in TBT 43/3 (July 1992) 302.

Replacement Theology The theory that the Church has replaced Israel in the divine economy – replacement theology – is a classical Christian teaching which persists in many quarters to this day. That this is anchored in the New Testament has long been in dispute among New Testament believers. Many doubters are convinced this theology is derived from a selective use of biblical texts, sometimes out of clearly anti-Jewish bias, but also from a misapplication of Scripture, and by oversimplifying the ancient polemic between Church and Synagogue.

The fact remains, that for many believing Christians, neither the Orthodox Judaism of the New Testament era nor of our own era can be the ultimate word of God for anyone convinced of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. It is not necessarily anti-Jewish to hold such a position.

Furthermore, many evangelical believers who unreservedly affirm the Pauline teaching of an immutable calling for the Jewish people (Rom 11.1-29) have played a significant role in resistance to anti-Semitism, and some have even participated in the modern movement of Jewish national restoration. They reject the concept that the Church has replaced the Jewish people.⁴

The multifaceted nature of Judaism The third charge, that “Judaism is spoken of in derogatory terms”, completely ignores the multifaceted nature of Judaism, then as now. The Orthodox Rabbi Harvey Falk, in his book *Jesus the Pharisee*⁵ has argued from Talmudic sources that the Pharisees in view in the Gospels were an extreme group of followers of Beit Shammai, the stricter of the two major Pharisaic sects; he cites Talmudic denunciations of certain aspects of Shammaite and other forms of Pharisaism, comparing them with New Testament denunciations.

It is a fact that the literary history of Judaism, almost from its inception, abounds in derogatory terms for rival or allegedly heretical viewpoints. (One can easily find parallels in the histories of most major religious and ideological movements.)

The Judaism of the prophets included violent denunciations of the syncretistic Baal-worshippers and their prophets in ancient Israel. We should not forget that the violent confrontation between Elijah and the followers of Baal involved Israelites on both sides of the divide (1 Kgs 18). Likewise, the angry prophetic diatribes of Isaiah, Jeremiah and others were directed primarily against Jews. The bitter conflict during the Second Temple period between the Sadducees and the Pharisees is amply documented in the New Testament and rabbinic literature.

If the New Testament texts reflect the polemical language of contending approaches to Jewish faith issues – the Hebrew Scriptures, the Messiah,

4 Kelvi Crombie, *For the Love of Zion: Christian Witness and the Restoration of Israel*, London: Hodder & Stoughton 1991.

5 Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee. A new look at the Jewishness of Jesus*, New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press 1985, 95, citing among others W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 9; B.H. Branscomb, *Jesus and the Law of Moses*, 54; G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 1.81. In a chapter devoted to “The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism: Bet Hillel vs. Bet Shammai” (111-147), Falk notes parallels between the rebukes of Shammaite Pharisees with the New Testament rebukes.

Deity, eschatology – they cannot of themselves be logically regarded as anti-Jewish.

Despite mountains of anti-Jewish misinterpretation of these issues, the New Testament itself does not deny its Jewish roots, the Jewishness of its heroes, and its sources, from the opening Hebrew genealogy of Matthew's Gospel to the closing Book of the Revelation with its mosaic of Hebrew Bible references.

No doubt, the fact that the Jewish community has confronted these texts, in part through an allegedly heretical Jewish-Christian sect, and later through hostile Gentile churches, has increased Jewish and liberal Christian sensitivity to remarks critical of any segment of the Jewish community. Similar criticisms found in the Hebrew Scriptures, also misused by anti-Jewish propagandists, have been handled more soberly by Jews and Christians.

There are also "hard sayings" in the Hebrew Bible and in the Talmud about Gentiles (for example, doctrines relating to Israel's election). While it may be advisable to provide explanations of such remarks, placing them in context, it would be unfair to categorize all such statements as anti-Gentile, even though certain Jewish sects have indeed misused such texts.

MAKING DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN TEXTS AND LATER INTERPRETATIONS

Critics of the New Testament seldom distinguish between the texts and their misuse by the later Church. While the Church rejected the Marcionite heresy which would have severed all Jewish links to the New Testament, mainstream churches highlighted the points of contention between Judaism and Christian faith. This polemic has indeed been encouraged by some translators, as noted in the Omanson article, as well as by Bible caption writers.⁶ Thus, captions or headings over Scripture relating to prophecy in the Old Testament which deals with Israel and Judah have been captioned as relating to the Church, while prophetic denunciations have been captioned for the Jews. This invidious practice should be discouraged by all publishers of Bibles and study texts.⁷

OF JEWS AND JUDAEANS

Within the New Testament text itself, the translation of the Greek term *Ioudaioi* ("Jews") in polemical contexts, especially in the Gospel of John, is a problem for modern readers and translators. Here there is a legitimate translation solution available. It can be demonstrated that in most cases in the Gospels, especially John, the Greek term *Ioudaioi*, usually translated "Jews", has a localized meaning reflecting the sectional tensions existing within ancient Israel between Judeans and Galileans. The RSV already acknowledged this possibility in offering an alternative reading for John 7.1 – "Judeans" (instead of "Jews"). In a similar situation (John 11.7-8) the translators ignored this possibility where it would be equally applicable:

6 Roger L. Omanson, art. cit., 305-306.

7 Menahem Benhayim, *Jews, Gentiles and the New Testament*, Jerusalem: Yanetz 1985, 16-17.

“After this, Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the *Judeans* (alternatively) sought to kill him” (7.1).

The translators were, however, *not* consistent in a similar context: “Then after this he said to the disciples, ‘Let us go into Judea again’. The disciples said to him, ‘Rabbi, the *Jews* were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?’ ” (11.7-8). (Why not the “*Judeans*” here, too, in the light of the clear sectional reference in the text?)

In his article “Who were the *Ioudaioi*?”, the Welsh New Testament scholar Malcolm Lowe deals extensively with this sectional terminology in the four Gospels.⁸

Whatever theological or historical explanations may be offered for the polarization between Church and Synagogue and between Jew and Gentile, it must be borne in mind that the New Testament scriptures are derived from a Jewish faith context in great tension with the mainstream of the Jewish people to this very day. This fact requires sensitivity in translation, captioning and study comments without, however, compromising the integrity of the Scriptures themselves.

ROGER L OMANSON

TRANSLATING THE ANTI-JEWISH BIAS: A REPLY

In my article “Translating the Anti-Jewish Bias of the New Testament” in the July 1992 issue of *The Bible Translator*, I pointed out that many biblical scholars today have come to the conclusion that some writings in the New Testament reflect the strong hostilities between developing Christianity and developing rabbinic Judaism in the latter half of the first century. I further argued that as Bible translators we cannot omit such passages in translation, but neither we should make the texts more anti-Jewish than they are. I maintain, *pace* Mr Benhayim, that some roots of anti-Jewish bias go back to the New Testament writings themselves and not just to a later abuse and misuse of them (though that has happened also). Scholars will continue to debate whether any passages should be called “anti-Jewish.” I also argued that the apostle Paul was not the fierce opponent of Judaism that the church has long understood him to be.

I wish to clarify that I never say that any passage in the New Testament is “anti-Semitic.” That term carries post-holocaust meaning that is inappropriate to ascribe to any New Testament writing because it is anachronistic to do so. Mr Benhayim is concerned that what I say will give freedom for people to use the Bible to defend anti-semitic attitudes. Unfortunately, in referring to my article, Mr Benhayim slides over from my term “anti-Jewish” to “anti-Semitic”, a term that I specifically do not attribute to the New Testament writers. I also wish to state that, though my views differ from Mr Benhayim’s, I do not consider my conclusions to call into question the authority of the New Testament writings for Christians today.

My concern is that if we do not help Christian readers of the New

⁸ Malcolm Lowe, “Who were the *Ioudaioi*?”, *Novum Testamentum* xviii/2 (April 1976).