

HELLENISM AND ANTISEMITISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER 8 OF THE BOOK

THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS:

WHY THEY WROTE HOW THEY WROTE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomena of cultural homogenization manifested in the Westernization of the world in recent centuries has its precedent in the Hellenization of the Levant almost 2 millennia ago. The cultural force that it exerted and its coalescent energy impacted the literate world of its citizens which was integrated by its linguistic dominance.

In the early 20th century Adolf Hitler attempted to rule the world with Nazi (National Socialist German Workers' Party) power. His policies of racism, nationalism, and state control of the economy through force was vehemently rejected and relegated by an overwhelming majority. On the other hand, history records that the Greeks under Alexander the Great invaded and subdued the Levantine with their military might in the 4th century BCE. Having subdued the nations of the region, doors were opened for Greek cultural expression through politics, language, art, and religion.

Unlike the Nazi regime of Hitler, centuries before the military invasion of Alexander, Greek culture was already pervasive through trading, language, and philosophy. The governance and subsequent colonization of the territory by Greeks concreted socio-political and religious structures that systemically re-configured the minds of the "citizens" of the new empire while assimilating their own cultures and sub-cultures in a *blitzkrieg* that eclipsed the efforts of previous empires and those that have come after. The syncretic socio-cultural blitz became known as Hellenism.

By the 1st century C.E. the military might of the Greeks was cancelled by the rising Roman superpower. However, Hellenism was now a way of life that even the Romans adopted in their ideology, philosophy, and religion. The language of Hellenism, the Koine Greek, became a common factor that united government, clergy, traders, and the man-in-the-street.

The New Testament Writings and the Septuagint were possibly compiled in Hellenism's greatest period of influence. It is reasonable to say that the writings were influenced by Hellenism because they were written in the language of Hellenism. This study examines how the hegemony of Hellenism, the worldviews of Hellenists, and the current of anti-Semitism impacted the New Testament Writers and influenced why they wrote how they wrote.

Today, Hellenists survive in small pockets and now strive for recognition in the country of their origin, Greece.

Consider the following BBC news item:

In May 2006 an Athens court granted official recognition to the veneration of the Ancient Greek pantheon. Referring to the ruling, Father Efstathios Kollas, the President of Greek Clergymen said "They are a handful of miserable resuscitators of a degenerate dead religion who wish to return to the monstrous dark delusions of the past."¹

The response of Father Kollas to Hellenists at their nadir in the 21st century draws us closer to understanding the kind of response that Hellenism at its zenith would have elicited from the New Testament writers in the 1st century C.E who had to use the same language of the Hellenists to preserve that which they received and thence transmitted.

¹ Malcolm Brabant, "Ancient Greek gods' new believers," Sunday, 21 January 2007 (London, UK: BBC News); Accessed January 12, 2016 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6285397.stm>

HISTORICAL HEGEMONY

A language is a dialect that has an army and a navy. Max Weinreich

The authors of *A History of the English Language* observe that political, social, and cultural forces influence a language. These forces shape the language in every aspect, in the amount and geographical spread of its speakers, and what is called the “the sociology of the language,” but also in the meaning of its words, in the accents of the spoken language, and even in the structures of the grammar. The history of a language is intimately bound up with the history of the peoples who speak it. The language of a powerful nation will acquire importance and prestige as a reflection of political, economic, technological, and military strength.²

K. David Harrison expresses the thought that:

Languages do not literally die or go extinct, since they are not living organisms. Rather, they are crowded out by bigger languages. Small tongues get abandoned by their speakers, who stop using them in favor of more dominant, more prestigious, or widely known tongue. Language adapt over time to serve the needs of a particular population in their environment. They have been shaped by the people to serve as repositories for cultural knowledge, efficiently packaged and readily transmittable across generations. Languages may be preserved in dictionaries and books after they are no longer spoken. But a grammar book or dictionary is a dim reflection of the richness of a spoken tongue in its native social setting.³

² Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 4th ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1993), 1, 3.

³ K. David Harrison, *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6-7.

Greek culture had begun to spread into neighboring parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe long before the formation of the Macedonian Empire in the 330s BC. Many lesser cultures and languages were absorbed and re-shaped by the massive invasion. Greek commerce reached into the western Mediterranean, Asia, and Egypt. The Greek way of fighting in disciplined and armored infantry units – the famous Greek phalanx – was another export. Along with this military technique went Greek mercenary soldiers and other Greeks seeking employment in commerce, government, and many other fields. The Greek dominated kingdom of the Ptolemies was one of the most powerful states of the early Hellenistic world, along with a Seleucid kingdom ruling much of western Asia and a Macedonian state.

As Greek culture spread into the Middle East, it also changed. Some well-springs of its own originality in the homeland dried up; Greece itself continued to absorb cultural elements from abroad, as well as exporting them to others. In sum, the Greek culture of the fifth century BC turned into the Hellenistic culture of the second, a culture that was common to the whole of the Middle East.⁴

So sensible were the Romans of the influence of language over national manners, that it was their most serious care to extend, with the progress of their arms, the use of the Latin tongue. —Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, II.

Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) conquered the Middle East in about 332 B.C. or over 300 years before the time of Jesus Christ, so the common language of the conquered peoples inherited by the Latin speaking Romans was the "koine" form of Greek. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica:

⁴ Philip Curtin, *African History*, 2d ed. (New York, NY: Longman, 1995), 47.

Alexander's short reign marks a decisive moment in the history of Europe and Asia ... it spread Hellenism in a vast colonizing wave throughout the Near East and created, if not politically, at least economically and culturally, a single world stretching from Gibraltar to the Punjab, open to trade and social intercourse and with a considerable overlay of common civilization and the Greek "Koine" as a lingua franca. It is not untrue to say that the Roman Empire, the spread of Christianity as a world religion, and the long centuries of Byzantium were all in some degree the fruits of Alexander's achievement.⁵

This led to the translation of the Old Testament into Koine Greek (as opposed to classical Greek of the philosophers) in the Septuagint (LXX) in Alexandria in the middle of the third century B.C. This is affirmed in the *IDB*: "NT Koine is not simply the everyday Greek of an Eastern people in the first Christian Century; its religious vocabulary derives ultimately, not from the Greek world, but from the Hebrew world of the OT through the medium of LXX Greek."⁶

Thus, the writers of the New Testament reflected the LXX not only in their tenor but at times verbatim. This they had to do in order to connect with their own religious heritage while reaching out to the citizens of a Hellenized empire. They wrote not only in the *lingua franca* but were keyed to the philosophy of its speakers, its idioms and expressions as they opened doors to the Gospel that they preached, taught and died for. They lived in a world where literate culture was monopolized by Hellenism that had a hegemony that had never seen its equal before in the recorded history of the Levant.

It is impossible to dismiss the writer/s of the Epistles uses of Greek Philosophy. They wrote for people who could identify with the statements, metonymy, metaphors and theses

⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. vol. 1 (Chicago, Illinois: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2005), 576.

⁶ Keith R. Crim and George A. Butrick, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* vol. R-Z (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1962), 277.

that they used to their advantage in the Christianization of the regions they traversed. So in Titus 1:12 the writer appears to be quoting from 5th century B.C.E poet Epimenides, who declared that: “The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, gluttons, lazy.”⁷

⁷ Paul Copan and Kenneth Litwak, *The Gospel in the Marketplace of Ideas: Paul's Mars Hill Experience for Our Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 121.

HELLENISTIC WORLDVIEW

One of the biggest problems facing Jews who first received the NT was confusion and invasive Hellenism. The 400 year *Intertestamental* period between the writings of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament texts saw the appearance of most of the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. It was also the time of pseudepigrapha or falsely attributed writings. The wisdom gathered in the past had lost much of its legitimacy because of corruption; hence there was no clear vision of the future. They needed a framework that could redefine their role and map a secure future. This framework would comprise major macrocosmic concepts already familiar to them that would integrate the OT with the reality of their present existence.

Two concepts distinguish NT writings and reflect OT theology, God's love and His wrath – Rom 8:38-39 and Rom 1:18. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18). These two concepts were pillars of a framework that would have constrained these writings.

According to Heylighen, our concepts constitute our "world view". In the 20th century, the Belgian philosopher Leo Apostel devoted his life to developing an *integrating world view*.⁸

⁸ F. Heylighen, "What is a World View," F. Heylighen, C. Joslyn and V. Turchin, eds., (Brussels, Belgium: Principia Cybernetica Web, 2000); document on line, www.pespmcl.vub.ac.be/worldview.html.

In his seminal book, *On Language*, Humbolt explains that human beings can become conscious of objects only with the help of concepts. He then proceeds to state that language is necessary for the existence of concepts. He reasons that since language is involved in structuring human cognition, and languages are diverse in their structure, “there resides in every language a characteristic world-view (*Weltansicht*). Human beings represent the world around them conceptually through the public language they have acquired as children, and to learn a new language is “to acquire a new standpoint although it is a new point of view still within the world-view of the old language.”⁹

Robertson’s assessment of the *Koine* commends its wonderful adaptability to the manifold needs of the Roman world. He wrote that it was the international language in an age of diverse spiritual and intellectual activity. Contrary to the belief of some, it was not an age of ignorance. What we call the “Dark Ages” came long afterwards.¹⁰ Mahaffy insists that this civilization was so perfect that, as far as it reached, men were more cultivated in the strict sense than they ever have been since. We have discovered new forces in nature; we have made new inventions; but we have changed in no way the methods of thinking laid down by the Greeks....The Hellenistic world was more cultivated in argument than we are nowadays.¹¹

⁹ Von Humboldt, Wilhelm, *On Language: On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, ed. Michael Losonsky. trans. Peter Heath (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xvii.

¹⁰ A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 74, 75.

¹¹ John Pentland Mahaffy, *The Progress of Hellenism in Alexander’s Empire* 1905 (Memphis, Tennessee: General Books LLC, 2010), 137.

Homer¹² lies at the foundation of the Greek tradition, and his prominence in the educational curriculum until the end of antiquity means that he is fundamental for Greek religious thought in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Homer exerted such a pervasive influence on literary culture that Homeric religious thought had a place in the Greek development not unlike that of the Scriptures in Jewish and Christian education.¹³

The mindset held by the Hellenists in these periods became so established that it created an irresistible incentive to adopt behaviors and attitudes associated with their culture. This mental inertia must have been very difficult to counteract. This understanding is underscored by Palmer who articulates that “a comprehensive worldview is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of the individual or society's knowledge and point of view. A world view can include natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions, and ethics.”¹⁴ Hiebert underscores that “a transformation of worldview involves changing basic cognitive,

¹² Plato's *Republic*, depicts Homer as the *protos didaskalos* of the tragedians, the *hegemon paideias*, and the ten *Hellada pepaideukon*. Homer's works provided models in persuasive speaking and writing that were emulated throughout the Ancient and Medieval Greek worlds. Remnants of Homer account for nearly half of the decipherable Greek literary papyri finds in Egypt. (Jasper Griffin, "The Speeches", In Robert Fowler, *Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 156; René Nünlist, "Homer as a Blueprint for Speechwriters: Eustathius' Commentaries and Rhetoric"; *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 52: 493–509; Moses Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: New York Review of Books) 11–2. Finley's figures are based upon the corpus of literary papyri published before 1963).

¹³ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 150.

¹⁴ Gary B. Palmer, *Toward A Theory of Cultural Linguistics* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996), 114.

affective, and evaluative presuppositions about the nature of things which dictate the course of one's life."¹⁵

Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost presented the challenge for listeners to re-evaluate their worldviews and "change course." The NT scripture translated by KJV translators reads thus: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36-37).

Peter's answer incorporates the change suggested by Hiebert: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward [problematic; improper] generation" (Acts 2:38-40).

The German word *Weltanschauung* is a concept fundamental to German philosophy. In a discussion of "Analogies for a Philosophy of Israelite Religion" Gericke argues that the language of a people reflects the *Weltanschauung* of that people in the form of its syntactic structures and untranslatable connotations and its denotations.¹⁶ The *Weltanschauung* of Hellenism was a part of the framework of ideas and beliefs through which Greco-Roman

¹⁵Paul G Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

¹⁶Jaco Gericke, *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion* (Williston, VT: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2012), 187.

occupied Palestine of the 1st century perceived the world as they generated and applied knowledge.

In *Afrikan Thought and Belief System*, Futhwa suggests that “the literature of a people with common *Weltanschauung* emerges as a holistic representation of the wide world perception of the people.”¹⁷ It is not unreasonable to deduce that the natural language of New Testament literature (*Koine Greek*) indicates that it emerged from a Hellenistic *Weltanschauung*.

An orderly elemental summary of what a worldview incorporates is presented in the publication, *Worldviews: from Fragmentation to Integration*. According to Aerts, Apostel and others in this publication, a worldview is an ontology or a descriptive model of the world that should have the following elements: an explanation of the world; a futurology, answering the question “where are we heading?”; values, answers to ethical questions such as “What should we do?”; a praxeology, or methodology, or theory of action: “How should we attain our goals?”; an epistemology, or theory of knowledge, “what is true and false?”; and an etiology – a constructed worldview should contain an account of its own “building blocks,” its origins and construction.¹⁸

The murmuring of Grecians against the Hebrews in Acts 6 may have simply been one these elemental questions of worldview suggested by Apostel; what is the methodology of Christianity? What should we expect? Where are we heading? Will we become second-class

¹⁷ Fezekile Futhwa, *Setho: Afrikan Thought and Belief System* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 90.

¹⁸ Leo Apostel, et al., *World Views: from Fragmentation to Integration*, on-line publication (Brussels, Belgium: Vrije Universiteit Brussel Press, 1994); www.vub.ac.be/CLEA/pub/books/worldviews.

citizens in this “new kingdom?” These were questions concerning Christianity that the Grecians would have pondered against the background of elitism in traditional Jewry.

ANTAGONISTIC ANTI-SEMITISM

Hellenists versus Jews

The term Semitism used in the context of this study particularly describes Jewish practice, polity, religion, culture and customs. This lexical limitation is necessarily stated because Semites are known unilaterally as people originating in southwestern Asia whose genealogical heritage can be traced to Shem the first son of Noah in the Bible. These may include Hebrews, Arabs, Canaanites, Phoenicians or Akkadians but should not be limited to these ethnic or racial groupings as some anthropologists place ethnic groups in North and East Africa in this category as well.

According to *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, at first, Alexander's successors in Egypt and Palestine, the Ptolemies and Seleucids respectively, treated the Jews well. This did not stop the Jewish high priest Onias III son of Simon II from opposing Hellenism.¹⁹ Stiff resistance also came from the Maccabees who defied the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV after he desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. Conversely, the Tobiads, Menelaus, and later the Hasmoneans under Aristobolus and John Hyrcanus promoted Hellenism. Herod the Idumean further established Hellenism as Greek legends were etched on Jewish coins and their architecture changed the landscape. Herod's temple, theater, amphitheater, hippodrome, and palace were Greek buildings in the center of Jerusalem. Some of the inscriptions in the Temple

¹⁹ Adherents to Judaism in the time of Hellenism espoused a pure unadulterated religion and as such fought against encroachment by Hellenism or any other religio-culture that threatened the purity of their religion (Ezra 10:11 "separate yourselves from the people of the land...")

were emblazoned in Greek. Synagogues of the Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and Asiatics were also in the Holy Land (Acts 6: 9).²⁰

In the time of the New Testament writers, many of the Christian converts were either former Jews or Hellenists as evidenced in Acts 11:19, 20. Writers of the period indicate also that a very strong core of Jews did not accept Christianity and became its chief opponents in some locations (Acts 13:45). These Jews resisted both Christianity and Hellenism. Schiffman notes that numerous Greek and Latin sources authored by non-Jews both in Palestine and elsewhere, provide interesting insights into the attitudes toward Jews of the Gentiles who came in contact with them. Many of the most important authors of Classical Antiquity such as Tacitus, Pliny, Juvenal, and Polybius make reference to Jews or Judaism. Some of these accounts provide accurate historical information. Others offer testimony as to how Jews were perceived by their non-Jewish neighbors. Some material illuminates governmental attitudes toward the Jews and their legal status in the Roman Empire. This enables us to understand the ways in which Gentile—Jewish relations in the Greco-Roman period prepared the way for subsequent anti-Semitism.²¹

Anti-Semitism and the New Testament

An increasing number of Christian scholars and clergy have concluded that the root of anti-Semitism in the Christian world community is ultimately found in the New Testament. Roy Eckhardt asserts that the foundation of anti-Semitism and the responsibility for the Holocaust²²

²⁰ Carl Siegfried and Richard Gottheil, "Hellenism," *Jewish Encyclopedia.com* (Philadelphia, Pa: The Kopelman Foundation, accessed Jan, 2016); <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7535-hellenism>

²¹ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *From Text To Tradition* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1991), 9

lie ultimately in the New Testament.²³ He also insists that Christian repentance must include a reexamination of basic theological attitudes toward Jewry and the New Testament in order to deal effectively with the problem of anti-Semitism and its prevention.²⁴ The general message scholars such as Eckhardt are trying to convey is that, using the NT as its authoritative source, “The Church” has stereotyped the Jewish people as an icon of unredeemed humanity; they became an image of a blind, stubborn, carnal, and perverse people. This dehumanization is the vehicle that formed the psychological prerequisite to the atrocities that followed.²⁵

Bart Erhman turns the spotlight on early Christian attitudes that could have exacerbated negative feelings towards Jews as early as the 2nd century C.E. He observes that the Marcionite Christians discarded anything Jewish. They rejected Jewish customs, Scriptures and the Jewish God. Their founder, Marcion was impressed by the writings of the apostle Paul, and in particular the distinction that Paul drew in Galatians between the law of the Jews and the gospel of Christ. Erhman purports that had Marcionite Christianity succeeded, the Old Testament would be seen by Christians today not as the Old Testament but as the Jewish Scriptures. Christians would not see themselves as having Jewish roots. The Marcionite

²² Approximately 11 million Jews, Slavs, communists, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the mentally and physical disabled were exterminated in a massive genocide between 1933 and 1945. This event has been labeled as *the Holocaust*. Richard Evans, “The Anatomy of Hell,” *The New York Review of Books* (July 9, 2015); <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/07/09/concentration-camps-anatomy-hell/>

²³ A. Roy Eckhardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1967)

²⁴ *Ibid*, *Your People, My People: The Meeting of Jews and Christians* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 1974)

²⁵ Uri Yosef, “The Anti-Jewish New Testament” on-line document (New York, N.Y.: The Jewish Home, 2010) www.thejewishhome.org/counter/AntiJewishNT.pdf. accessed 27-Dec-2014.

influence may well have opened the doors to hostilities, since the very influential Marcion seems to have hated Jews and everything Jewish.²⁶

There is no shortage of fuel in the NT for the fire of anti-Semitism. Some of the most virulent anti-Jewish polemic is found within the seven letters written by Paul. One condemning passage reads as follows:

For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews: ¹⁵ Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: ¹⁶ Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost (*KJV*, 1 Thess 2:14-16).

Defamatory anti-Jewish polemic within the New Testament served to stimulate anti-Semitism and its resultant atrocities against the Jewish people throughout the history of Christianity.

The book of John is perhaps the strongest in its condemnation of the Jews. John reports Jesus as saying to the Jews in Jerusalem:

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (*KJV*, John 8:44). He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God (*KJV*, John 8:47).

The Legacy of Anti-Semitism

In a sweeping treatise on the history of anti-Semitism Dagobert Runes identifies its seeds sown by the NT writers and clarifies that by the 4th century, the phenomenon was so entrenched that Latin Church Father, Ambrose, known as “the Bishop with the golden tongue”

²⁶ Bart D. Erhman, *Lost Christianities* (Oxford, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103-111.

could have exclaimed that “the Jews are the most odious assassins of Christ and for killing God there is no expiation possible. It is essential that all Christians hate them.”²⁷

The same antagonism was later reflected in the 16th century; the reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), wrote:

Their synagogues [the Jews] should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. Jewish homes should be broken down or destroyed. Jews should be put under one roof, or in a stable, like Gypsies, in order that they may realize that they are not masters in our land.²⁸

The 20th century also saw the resurgence of the ever-present resentment of Jews that culminated in the holocaust. In his 2nd volume of *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, Friedlander writes that: “The omnipresence of anti-Semitism in most of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches found a telling illustration in the notorious ‘Godesburg Declaration’... Point no. 3 (of 5) stated: “The National Socialist worldview has relentlessly fought against the political and spiritual influence of the Jewish race on our national [Volkisch] life...Over and above that, in the domain of faith there is no sharper opposition than the one existing between the message of Jesus Christ and that of the Jewish religion of laws and political messianic expectations.”²⁹

In the book *Six Million Crucifixions*, Wilensky elucidates that Hitler was well aware of the Church’s long anti-Jewish record. According to Wilensky, in April 1933, the fuehrer told Bishop Berning and Monsignor Steinman that for fifteen hundred years the Catholic Church considered

²⁷ Dagobert David Runes, *The Jew and the Cross* (New York, NY: Citadel Press, 1966), 61-62.

²⁸ Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und thren Lugen [On the Jews and their Lies]*, Wittenburg 1543.

²⁹ Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2008), 56.

the Jews to be a pestilent race. He continued to say that the church put them in ghettos because it recognized Jews for what they were. Thus, he posited, “he was simply moving back to the time in which the fifteen-hundred-year-long tradition was implemented and doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions.”³⁰

It is no wonder then that the Messiah Assembly, a Jewish Christian congregation headquartered in Central Point, Oregon use the *Tanakh* published by the Jewish Publication Society, *The Scriptures*, published by the Institute for Scripture Research, or *The Complete Jewish Bible* by David Stern because they believe that these translations speak to the cultural identity with which they are associated. They use them because in their opinion, these bibles more accurately portray some of the idioms, figures of speech, and nuances of the culture in which both the *Tanakh*, (frequently called the Old Testament) and the *Brit Chadasha*, (frequently called the New Testament) were transmitted. According to the society, they recommend and use these translations because they are remarkably free of some of the latent anti-Semitism that they purport has been injected into or left in other translations by either the ignorance or bias of the translators.³¹

One quarterly *Bible Study Guide* authorized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in 2014 also counters the bias in “Lesson 2” by stating that:

Many Christians have been raised on stories about Jesus’ supposedly negative relationship to the Jewish religion, an unfortunate misconception that has only helped feed anti-Semitism through the centuries. Jesus spoke out against abuses of the religion, that’s true, but not against the religion itself. After all, He was the founder of it. Indeed

³⁰ Gabriel Wilensky, *Six Million Crucifixions: How Christian Teachings About Jesus Paved The Road to the Holocaust* (Devon, UK: QWERTY Publishers, 2010), 87-88.

³¹ Messiah Assembly, “Which Translation of the Bible Should I Use?” (Central Point, Oregon, USA: 2005); internet; <http://www.messiahassembly.com/trans.asp>

the Gospel accounts of His life and ministry show that Jesus was a faithful Jew fully immersed in Jewish culture from the moment of His birth to the final week of His life in human flesh. Like every loyal Jew in the first century, Jesus was subject to the Mosaic Law. Raised in a home with loyal Jewish parents, He fully appreciated His rich earthly heritage, which was rooted in Divine providence. He knew that God himself had inspired Moses to pen these laws, with the purpose of creating a society that reflected His will and served as a beacon to the nations.³²

The NT writers, inspired and influenced by Christ would not have deliberately set out to vilify the Jews, or to disparage their own; this was not *theopneustos* which condemned sin and not the sinner. Their efforts to mirror the teachings of Christ, especially Johanine and Pauline writings, have been misconstrued historically and the misconceptions have sprouted and blossomed exponentially, amalgamated by poor pragmatics and prejudice throughout the centuries.

³² Keith Burton, *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide April-May-June 2014*, "Christ and His Law," ed. Clifford R. Goldstein (Puebla, PUE, Mexico: Corporation En Servicios Integrales De Asesoría Profesional, S.A. de C.V., 2014), 17.

SUMMARY

The morphing force that Hellenism exerted on the embryonic Christian Church is deemed by some historians and theologians to be superficial. This study has examined elements of this particular historical yet diachronic phenomenon that could have impacted those who compiled the body of Christian literature we know as the New Testament. Observations indicate that the possibility exists that Hellenism may have polarized the Church. On one side, Hellenism may have contributed to the formulation of NT doctrine consistent with OT theology by way of the Greek Septuagint written in the Koine language. NT doctrine also emerges from polemics against Hellenistic influence visible in the writings of the NT authors. On the other side, Jewish resistance to Hellenistic worldviews may lie at the root of what is often construed to be anti-Jewish statements purportedly made by New Testament writers, the echoing legacy of which may still be cause for concern in the 21st century.

Readers must however put this chapter within its proper perspective as part of a broader investigation into why the NT writers wrote the way that they wrote. When this is done, then the net effect of Hellenism on Christianity and the resultant reaction of Christians to Semitism or the Jews in particular can be better assessed.

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