

# Awakening to Judaism and Jews in Christian Preaching<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Preaching is a daring undertaking. Whether through music, sermons, reading scripture, or personal conversation, speaking of God is an interpretive act. One never quite knows how what one plays, says, writes, or depicts is received. The distance between minds is vast. And given that every set of eyes may read the same words differently and each set of ears hear each interpretive utterance differently, hoping to communicate meaningfully with those watching and listening is nothing short of audacious. Among these challenges, one of the most delicate is preaching on Judaism and Jews. Yet Christians cannot avoid it. Judaism and Christianity are one another's nemeses. Some biblical texts lend themselves to anti-Jewish attitudes and stereotypes that may be unrecognized so deep is Christian contempt for Jews and Judaism.*

*This paper offers suggestions for avoiding anti-Jewish preaching. To do that effectively it will be necessary to awaken a sensibility to the concern that pervades and penetrates Christian thought. That requires slogging through some "unprettiness." The paper first illustrates anti-Jewish preaching by interrogating a popular text, Luke's story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. It then briefly considers Christian hymns and sacred choral music and then focuses on four sermons: The Letter to the Hebrews, Melito of Sardis's On Passover, Augustine's sermon 122 on John 1:48-51, and a recent sermon on Galatians 3:23-29. It concludes with suggestions for preachers, musicians and congregations and includes guidelines for preaching on Jews and Judaism and a bibliography for further study.*

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## 1. Presenting Problems

Judaism has always been Christianity's handy whipping boy, but it was only as the Shoah came to light that Christian scholars began to realize that Christianity had paved its way over many centuries. Setting out here, it is important to distinguish four current concerns that may sometimes run together: anti-Judaism, supersessionism, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. While these overlap, they

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<sup>1</sup> To awaken a concern sleeping in the Christian living room this essay will flout several scholarly Christian conventions. It will use the Jewish Publication Society's translation of Hebrew Bible (JPS) or this author's own translation. It will list the books of the Hebrew canon in the Jewish order. It will transliterate names and places phonetically from Hebrew rather than through layers of language specific transliterations commonly used. It uses Older Testament and Younger Testament to avoid the standard supersessionism titles. In addition, when referring to scripture as understood when the documents of the Christian canon were being written it will use "scripture," to indicate the Septuagint as they had it. These unconventions may be disconcerting at first, but the topic warrants them.

<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Rev. Agnes Norfleet and Fr. Sean Mullen for commenting on a draft of this article.

are distinct. *Anti-Judaism* is theological contempt for Judaism. *Supersessionism* is the theological corollary that the Church is now the Israel of God and that the Jewish people no longer are or perhaps never really were God's people. Supersessionism is a toxic expression of Christianity because it claims that Judaism's replacement by the Christian church is God's decision. *Anti-Semitism* is animosity toward Jews. Anti-Semitism is, of course, a misnomer because not all Semites are Jews and not all Jews are Semites.<sup>3</sup> It is broader than Christianity and predates it, but Christian antipathy toward Jews has an independent life. It sometimes appeared as state policy and state sponsored violence and jurisprudence but perhaps was more frequently expressed in spontaneous local proclamation and violence and in art, music, and literature. *Anti-Zionism* is the conviction that the State of Israel should not exist and that the present nation state should be dismantled. Criticism of policies of any democratically elected Israeli administration is not anti-Zionism but critical Zionism. Either may bleed into anti-Semitism. This paper deals only with the theological concerns: anti-Judaism and its hungry child, supersessionism preached through sacred choral music, congregational singing and sermons.

### ***Anti-Judaism. Luke 18:10–14***

Contempt for Judaism began with writings that came to be called the New Testament, itself a supersessionist term. Acrimony among Judahites and between Judahites and gentiles about Jesus led to the split into two heritages. Fraternal acrimony became Christian contempt. Technically speaking, there is neither anti-Judaism nor anti-Semitism in the Christian scriptures because the contestants are among perhaps fifteen or more communities from which we have written records. We see pro- and anti-Jesus parties among them, but the situation was fluid. Various parties coalesced into proto-Christianity and proto-Judaism that eventually divorced bequeathing Judaism and Christianity to us. So, contempt for Phariseism, one of the parties that had both pro and anti-Jesus factions is built into the documents that became Christian scripture. Contempt for Pharisees and their scribes and law, the sacrificial system and its ministers and simple artisans and workers that now characterize the Younger Testament, became anti-Jewish when disputes became irresolvable. Perhaps the breaking point is the Jerusalem meeting recorded in Acts 15. Once the texts were transmissible in written form all took on a different meaning. Local disagreements lodged themselves as a war between threatening and threatened enemies.

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<sup>3</sup> Igor P. Lipovsky, Where Did the Ancient Semites Come From?, in: American Journal of Biblical Theology 10, no. 25 (August 2009): ND.

A star witness in this convoluted process is the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10–14). It is anti-proto Judaism not yet evidencing supersessionism.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

This story is a core text for preaching contrition, purveying humility to the church. It is easy to preach on, being a textbook case of good guy bad guy stereotypes. Often the good guy, the humble repentant one, is portrayed anachronistically as if he were a Christian that the audience should emulate. The bad guy, the Pharisee, is the kind of person you do not want to be—self-satisfied, smug, even though, in this instance, the gentleman is quite quiet about his prayer life, (standing by himself). Still, he is often interpreted as “the Jew,” with whom the audience does not want to be associated. That both are Jews, perhaps both Pharisees, may fall by the preacher’s wayside. Even when not named as Christian and Jew, the characterizations come easily. But the vignette intends to teach about different personalities not Jews and Christians since there were at that time no Christians. Indeed, juxtaposing a tax collector and a Pharisee is incoherent. Phariseism is a method of scripture interpretation. Tax collecting is a means of livelihood. The story is about neither. It is about personality types. Jewish tradition holds the repentant sinner in higher esteem than the one who refrains from sin. Perhaps that is the message intended here, but if so, it is lost amidst Luke’s *ad hominem* argument against people with whom he disagrees.

Even if the good-guy bad-guy stereotype is applied immediately to the people in the pews with no mention of the context in which the passage was written, the division between the arrogant Pharisee (qua Jew) and the penitent tax-collector (qua Christian) conveys Christian contempt. The near-to-hand sermon on this text points to humility as the chief Christian virtue even though it is not on Paul’s short list (1 Cor 13). Apparently breast-beating is more praiseworthy than contributing to the common good as the Pharisee does. The good guy—bad guy stereotype is misguided and harmful because we are all both. Augustine missed this important point and Christians have suffered gravely from the oversight.

Restraint is in order here to appreciate not only what the text's author intended to teach, but also what he did teach. That may be just as or even more preachable than what seems to be his message. In this pericope, Luke, addressing a gentile audience, put this self-righteous slanderous thanksgiving in the mouth of a Pharisee: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." This self-patting and cursing thanksgiving exists only in Luke's angry mind of course. Judaism has no tradition of spontaneous prayer such as this seems to suggest. Luke is caricaturing what he would like his audience to think is in the mind of the Pharisee standing off to one side.

We know that at least three of the fourteen one-sentence daily morning thanksgivings that made their way into Jewish daily morning prayer existed at that time. This is for two reasons. First, we know that Luke knew them because he ridiculed them here. He paraphrases and shortens the formula that appears in Jewish morning prayer: "Praised are you Lord our God master of the universe who..." to "God, I thank you that ...". Second, at Gal 3:28 Paul mentions and refutes these three thanksgivings that Luke is caricaturing: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Paul is overturning these daily morning thanksgivings hoping for one Jesus community. His hope fails however, and his nasty characterizations of non-Jesus following Jews in Rom 9 and Gal 4 do not help his cause. They established eternal enmity between Jesus followers and non-Jesus followers once Paul's letters became sacred scripture.

That he lists the three disconcerting blessings in the same order in which they appear in morning prayer confirms this reading. Paul's rejection serves his interest in gentiles. Luke's anger is less clear. Paul was anguished not angry. Luke, writing later, is simply angry. If he is a gentile speaking to gentiles, he would understandably object to at least one of these three blessings as Paul does. Here are the controversial thanksgivings as they appear in the Jewish prayer book:

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a gentile.

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a slave.

Praised are you Lord our God, ruler of the universe who has not made me a woman.

Current recensions of the prayerbook have revised both the Hebrew and the English. The new version translates:

Praised are you Adonai our God who rules the universe, making me in the divine image.

Praised are you Adonai our God who rules the universe, making me a Jew.

Praised are you Adonai who rules the universe, making me free.<sup>4</sup>

While Paul simply rejects the original three thanksgivings probably because they would discourage gentiles, Luke goes one step further, disfiguring them, probably for the same reason. But writing a few decades after Paul, the atmosphere was angry and tense. Here, again, is Luke's defamatory caricature. "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." Sadly, Luke's ugly spin on these thanksgivings was carved into Christian sensibility as the word of God rather than as the words of Luke. Luke, of course, could not have fathomed that he was writing "the Bible" for a religion based on love of God and neighbor. Measured speech is not his forté.

What does all this mean, then, for Luke's rendering of the story about two Jews? First, of course, we see that Luke did not understand Phariseism and did not want to. Second, he knows enough about Jewish prayer to defame it. Third, he inadvertently heralded Christianity's obsession with self-abnegating humility that began in earnest with monasticism in the fourth "Christian" century.

As an eager gentile Jesusite it was tempting to demean non-Jesusites. Perhaps beneath Luke's anger is an exegetical debate about whether Jesus is predicted by scripture. What better way to drive a lesson home than demeaning one who did not find him there? One way to treat this text is to see its moral teaching precisely in Luke's angry caricature of proto-Jewish prayer and Pharisees that libels those with whom he is angry. It aims to encourage gentiles and disgrace those at the root of Paul's olive tree. Today we would call what Luke put in the Pharisee's mouth libel. This story reveals more about passionate righteous indignation that stereotypes one group by another that thinks itself superior to the other than about Pharisees. Luke's intemperateness raises the question of how to deal with our own righteous indignation and tendency to generate stereotypes.

This story is a high wire act. For those sensitive to its anti-Jewish use, might it not be more fruitful to preach one of Augustine of Hippo's greatest gifts to the west? His psychology teaches that we are all self-serving to some degree or another. Even the best among us are narcissistically tinged. This is original sin. Although neither he nor Calvin had the phrase "self-serving," Calvin believed that every part of us can harbor it. His phrase, "total depravity" does not work well in

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<sup>4</sup> *Siddur Sim Shalom*, For Weekdays (New York City: The rabbinical Assembly; the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism 2002).

English just now. From this perspective, Luke's message applies both to the one who pays taxes to Caesar and the one who collects them for him. Both help keep the peace in a tense environment.

The tax-collector is resented by the general public because he seems to be a turncoat although he is contributing to keeping a delicate peace with Rome. Some may have been corrupt, but where is that not possible? Luke is teaching that Pharisees should be despised although they obey traffic laws, pay taxes, care for their children and parents and earn an honorable living. They also contribute to the fragile peace. The Pharisee pays his taxes; the tax-collector carries them to the government. Self-righteousness is more insidious than Luke lets on. His anger has gotten in his way, and therefore it is now in our way as readers locking us into stereotypes that became truth. Luke's good guy is as vulnerable to self-righteousness in his penitential pose as is his bad guy, perhaps even more so.

Now, how one goes about helping people deal with the angry Luke in themselves is for the preacher to decide. Self-examination is more to the point than bashing others. Even if the preacher treats the audience as if they were upstanding citizens who deserve censure for being content that they are, they know that they are really the good repentant guy, or getting there; they are in church, after all. The Pharisee invective will not stick to them because they already belong to the good guy's church.

Now the Pharisees and scribes as well as biblical teaching ("the Law") are not by-gones. Judaism as we have it today is their descendant. Preaching against the Pharisees, scribes, the law and so on, demean every Jew, including those sitting in the pews on Sunday morning and those in parishioners' extended family at Thanksgiving, perhaps Christmas. Pray that the Jews to whom you preach (perhaps unknowingly) are Jewishly uninformed and so will not recognize the insults hurled at them by the "gospel of love." Christians are aware of Phariseism primarily through its angry critics like Luke. Indeed, Phariseism saved Judaism from extinction after the massive devastation at Roman hands. Perhaps that is why the Synoptic writers went after them. Needless to say, learning about a group only from its enemies is not particularly reliable.

### ***Supersessionism***

Christian supersessionism, also known as replacement theology, displacement theology or fulfillment theology is Christianity's triumphalist ecclesiology. Basically, with Jesus God threw Judaism under the proverbial bus in favor of a new community that embraces Jesus. To protect God, Christians also argue that Jews threw themselves under the bus because most failed to

Christianize. Christians hoped that Judaism would commit suicide by accepting Jesus, but most Jews clung to God instead.

The Christian claim is that the church has displaced, replaced, overridden, or supplanted Judaism as the people of God. Judaism is now theologically dead and illegitimate. It died on the cross in God's eyes. It no longer has theological validity and so should cease to exist materially as well. Jews who think that Judaism is theologically alive and who worship God Jewishly are wasting their time and look foolish to knowledgeable Christians who have traditionally branded them as "blind" for not accepting their Christian way.

Here is an example of Christian contempt for the synagogue sculpted into Strasbourg Cathedral.



Supersessionism is not a post-biblical idea. Today some Christian communions want to demur from supersessionism, but that remains a rhetorical flourish as long as the biblical texts, music, artwork and doctrines that inscribe it remain in place. It is throughout the Younger Testament. First Peter 2:4-10 is a clear example. Another is Hebrews as we shall see. Saying that Jews are our "elder brothers" (a historical inaccuracy in itself) simply affirms supersessionism quietly because "elder" and "younger," like the terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament," mean following after one another and that is the supersessionist pose. Keep in mind that primogeniture was standard in biblical times.

Yet three times Genesis goes out of its way to reverse the normal order so that the younger usurps the primary blessing meant for the elder. Abel is preferred over Cain and is murdered for it. In late life confusion, Isaac gives Jacob Esau's blessing, creating dangerous strife (Gen 27). In his turn, Jacob gives the younger Ephraim his elder brother, Menasheh's blessing (Gen 48). The

reason for depriving the elder his due in Genesis is not at all clear, although its consequences play out repeatedly in Israel's interactions with the nations. Perhaps it was to justify Israel's own identity as God's people, since it was a small nation (Deut 7:7) that identifies itself as immigrants descended from a "wandering Aramean" to whom God gave other peoples' land (Deut 26:5).

Under different circumstances, the older/younger upending motif continues in the stories of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20), the wicked tenants (Matt 21) and the prodigal son (Luke 15). Clearly the elder should inherit but in all cases the younger does. Indeed, Paul did the same to justify a gentile church.

Rom 9:12f. splices together phrases from Gen 25:23 and Mal 1:2f. presenting them as though they were a single verse in Genesis 25 that reads: "I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau." "Jacob" is now gentiles whom God loves; "Esau" is now Jews whom God hates. This deft sleight of hand does not exhaust Paul's intention, however. He adds that "the elder shall serve the younger" (Rom 9:12). Perhaps he intends "serve" in a theological sense, as Rom 11:7–11 suggests. But the love-hatred motif carries the idea in a different direction.

The reversal of Sarah and Hagar (Gal 4:24–31) that parallels that of Jacob and Esau is also hostile with Jews being represented as children of the slave and gentiles as children of the free woman (30f.). Paul carved displacement theology and contempt for Judaism and Jews in stone for all time and it produced rivers of blood. All this is to say that elder and younger brother language does not challenge Judaism's displacement.

Here, I follow a narrow definition of supersessionism that represents the Christian view that the church has overridden or overwritten the synagogue and with it the Jewish people as the people of God. Supersessionism is the outcome of the ecclesiological struggle between the synagogue and the church, for each defines itself as the exclusive people of God over against or even despite the other's claim to the same honored status. The Christians claimed that Jesus-followers now constitute the Israel of God and that non-Jesus followers do not. At that time, non-Jesus following Judahites of course, never considered this claim seriously. Jews have never doubted that they are the Israel of God.

Scripture authenticates the election of the children of Israel, now the Jewish people, as "the chosen people" (Isa 43:20; Dan 11:15) God's "people Israel" (Deut, Judg, 1&2 Sam, 1 Kgs, Jer, Ezek, and Amos, Dan, 1&2 Chron) "the children of Israel" (Gen, Exod, Lev, Num, Deut, Josh, Judg, 1&2 Sam, 1&2 Kgs, Isa, Jer, Ezek, Hos, Joel, Amos, Obad, Mic, Pss, Dan, Ezra, Neh and 1&2 Chron) "a holy nation" or "holy people" (Exod, Deut, Isa and Dan) or simply "Israel."



Early on, Jesusites laid claim to the same identity but they could not base that claim on scripture as Jews could unless the biblical texts as read in Greek meant something other than what they said. Paul began that transformation and most Christian interpreters followed his practice, redefining Israel's scriptures as about Jesus and themselves rather than about the events and characters portrayed therein. Anachronistically eisogeting themselves into the text was the easiest way for Christian leaders do that. One example, perhaps the most successful, was to eisogete Christ into the tetragrammaton (*theos* in the Septuagint). Naming scripture the "Old Testament" clinched the deal.

Redefining scripture as Christian rather than Israelite and themselves as the people of God began long before Christianity gained power and the communities separated. The replacement of Jews and Judaism by the Christian church took some time but is incipient in Christian writings that were later canonized.

Younger Testament authors identified the church as "the household of God" (Eph 4:12, 1Tim, 1Pet); "God's field, God's building" (1Cor 3:9); "God's offspring" (Act 19:29); "God's beloved" (Rom 1:7); "God's elect" (Rom 8:30, Tt 1:1); "God's temple" (1Cor 3:17); "God's family" (Gal 1:2); "God's own people" (Eph 1:14); "God's chosen ones" (Col 3:12); "God's house" (Heb 3:6); "people of God" (Heb 4:9; 11:25), God's children (1John 3:2, 5:19). Supersessionism is perhaps clearest in 1Pet 2:9f.: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people [...]. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

The phrase, "body of Christ" (Rom 7:4; 1Cor 10:16; 12:27, Eph 4:12) need not define the entire people of God but came to be synonymous with it. The church as the exclusive people of God was nailed down by St Cyprian's dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (there is no salvation outside the church). Judaism no longer has a right to claim its scriptural identity as "the people of God" (Jud 20:2; 2Sam 14:13).

## 2. Hymns and Sacred Choral Music

Before considering hymns, a liturgical note on Christianizing psalms is warranted. The Gloria Patri has traditionally been appended to the recitation of psalms in public worship. Musical settings of psalms often give it particular flourish. From a Jewish perspective, this is a particularly egregious practice. Eliminating it would not relinquish Christian claims to the poems and it would be a powerful statement of good faith to Jews.

The musical selections here are two hymns “Come O come Emanuel,” and “Come, ye faithful raise the strain,” and a note on Christian sacred choral music.

***Come, O Come Emmanuel***

With this scriptural preparation, let us turn to displacement theology in hymns. Perhaps the most beloved Advent hymn.

O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel

It is not clear who “captive Israel” is in this lyric. If Israel is the Jewish people “that mourns in lonely exile here” as if without God, the supersessionism is blatant. Some diaspora Jews may have endured the “gloomy clouds of night,” in exile but they longed for their homeland to release them from unfavorable environments, not for God who is with them in all locations and environments and certainly not for Jesus who enabled Christianity. Where Jews were allowed to flourish, they settled in comfortably in host cultures. In bad times, longing for their native land sustained hope, but by and large being dispersed was productive for both the Jewish communities and the larger societies.

***Come you faithful raise the strain***

Another notably supersessionist hymn is “Come, you faithful, raise the strain.” “Come, you faithful, raise the strain of triumphant gladness! God has brought his Israel into joy from sadness!” Sadness is, of course, Jesuslessness. Joy is embracing him. The direct object of God’s action, “his Israel” is ambiguous. If “his Israel” refers to the Church as Israel it is clearly supersessionist. Or, if “his

Israel” refers to Christianized Jews, the end of Judaism is in mind. Either way, ending Judaism seems to be the goal.

Yet that never happened on a large enough scale to wipe out Judaism as Christianity expected it would. Yes, there were high pressure times in which Jews capitulated either to prevent expulsion, trial, economic, social, educational and professional disenfranchisement, even death in some instances. A few who converted, perhaps out of conviction brought grave suffering on their abandoned community, by supplying Jewish texts that could be used against Jews.

It is tempting for each Christian generation to presume itself better equipped, better positioned, better supported to finally win over the stiff-necked, blind, stupid Jews. Ardent as well as gentle evangelistic strategies had been tried and failed. Perhaps Christianizing Jewish scripture would do it. The mendicant orders in the Middle Ages thought that compelling Jews to listen to Christian sermons would do it. Perhaps denigrating the Talmud and publicly burning all (hand-written) copies of its numerous volumes in France would do it. Some thought that forcing Jews to dispute with the Christian power structure publicly, prearranging to humiliate them and then exiling their ensnared spokesmen would do it. Here is the advantage of being a stubborn people, indomitably loyal to God.

Later modern European scripture scholars and theologians thought that anti-Jewish interpretation of scripture or the promise of citizenship and legal, social, and economic advancement would do it. Finally, Hitler, perhaps realizing that Jews just would not do it, took a different approach to the “Jewish question.” Yet even that failed. At a ladies’ day retreat that I attended in the early 1980s with a powerful conservative evangelical church in the US, a woman spoke the following into my journalist’s tape recorder: “Good came from the Holocaust because some Jews came to know Jesus.” Her obscene smugness hangs in the air.

*Karl Barth* finally admitted that Jews would not Christianize. He alone of all Christian theologians considered that there was a theological reason for Jewish existence. The church had always believed that God has covenanted only with itself. Of course, Jews have claimed the same. But Barth had the courage to realize that pitting those elected for the covenant (Christians) against those rejected who were outside the covenant (Jews) was a mistake because Jews would never enter the Christian covenant, believing that God’s covenant with them is eternal. Barth decided to put the Jews inside the Christian covenant as those elected by God for rejection. From being rejected by God *de facto* as the whole tradition had it Jews became rejected by God *de jure*.

Barbed comfort from Barth here. At last, the Jews have a place in the Christian economy of salvation. Moving Jews inside the Christian covenant to deal with Jewish intransigence damns all Jews for all time. It is Barth’s analogue to, or perhaps application of the decide charge that

Christians took it upon themselves to punish as God's representatives. How much of an advance this is on Cyprian's teaching that individuals outside the Church are lost, when now a whole people inside the Christian covenant is rejected by God is dubious. The Roman Catholic Church considerably weakened the deicide charge in 1965 but Barth's doctrine of election stands.

### ***Sacred Choral Music***

Christianity's monumental repertoire of sacred choral music, like its architecture, sculpture, and painting shaped western civilization. Mass settings, requiems, passions, oratorios, cantatas, psalm settings, motets, settings of the canticles, and so on bring the taste of divinity to the musical palate far beyond Christian settings. It is disconcerting that Christian anti-Judaism and supersessionism infect the general public through the finest music ever composed. Music is perhaps a more powerful form of preaching than mere words.

Unlike hymnody, scholarly research on anti-Judaism in Christian sacred choral music is beginning. Michael Marissen charted this path, devoting his scholarship to disclosing this unpleasant reality.<sup>5</sup> Focusing particularly on Bach and Handel, Marissen understands that it is the texts themselves rather than the personal animus of librettists and composers that continue to transmit Christian anti-Judaism to church and concert audiences alike.<sup>6</sup> Now to sermons.

### **3. Sermons**

Sermons discussed here are Hebrews, *Melito of Sardis's* "On Passover," *Augustine of Hippo's* Sermon 122 and *Christopher Holdsworth's* sermon "According to the promise heirs" on Gal 3:23–29. A

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<sup>5</sup> *Michael Marissen*, "The Character and Sources of the Anti-Judaism in Bach's Cantata 46," in: *Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 1 (January 2003), 63–99; *idem*, *The Social and Religious Designs of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos*, Princeton 1995; *Michael Marissen*, *Tainted Glory in Handel's Messiah. The Unsettling History of the World's Most Beloved Choral Work*, New Haven 2014; *idem*, *Bach & God*, New York 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Here I pause for a personal anecdote. I was a happy subscriber to a local baroque instrumental ensemble. The season program announced that its annual Good Friday concert would be the St John Passion performed in several area churches. Six months before the performance I called the orchestra's office and asked if there would be anything said or written in the program about the anti-Jewish tone and effects of this work. I got no answer. I attended the performance. Nothing was said. Bach, of course, was a preacher in sound. The venom against the Jews is so prominent in the work that I could not sit through the second half where hostility toward Jews is more pronounced. At intermission as I was leaving the church, I saw the rector who had welcomed the audience and shared my concern that nothing was said to mitigate the anti-Jewish power of the piece. It was, after all, in a church on Good Friday. I told him that I wanted to send two of Marissen's books to the maestro and gave him my business card. He said I could bring the books to him and he would convey them to the maestro who is one of his parishioners. I did that and included a letter explaining my concern because the concert functioned as a worship service as Bach intended. Several weeks later, I received a nasty two-page single-spaced letter from the maestro chastising me for politicizing great music and that my concern was bogus. It is just great music. About a month later I called the orchestra's office again and since the maestro clearly was not interested in the books asked could I have them back. The office manager said he would do that. I never heard back. The books had been thrown away unread.

comment on *Martin Luther's* "On the Jews and their Lies" is included. Although not intended as a sermon, it preaches.

### *Epistle to the Hebrews*

The earliest extant proto-Christian sermon is the Epistle to the Hebrews (60–95 CE). It both crafts Christian doctrine and maps supersessionism. Hebrews is a homiletical midrash on scripture, Christologizing it to have it mean something other than what it says. The author has mastered the Septuagint and ranges agilely through it, taking it from non-Jesusites and giving it to Jesus-following Judahites. The story of God and Israel is no longer the story of God's relationship with the world through Abraham's descendants recounted in the Hebrew Bible, although a rendition of that history appears in chapter 11. That story is now about the preexistent Son of God and his function as the high priest of a new priesthood.

Our agile exegete picks Christian scriptural flowers Christologizing whichever texts could be reinterpreted to support his vision as he moves point by point building Christianity to separate the Jesusites from aborning Judaism from which they had come. He strains to separate the communities. For example, he uses Palms 8, 95 and 110 and not surprisingly, Jer 31 to Christianize the Israelite texts. He christologizes many other biblical texts as well. Christ is not yet God, of course, but he is superior to angels, Moses, the Aaronide priesthood, the Temple and anything connected with Judahite religion at that time.

A common historical misunderstanding must be rectified at this point. Since both Judaism and Christianity as we now know them emerged from Judahite religion, it is an historical error to think that Christianity emerged from Judaism or that Christianity is the daughter of Judaism. Israelite religion, not Judaism is the religion of the Hebrew Bible. Fred Craddock is sensitive to the supersessionism concern, yet his observation that "The writer appeals to the Old Testament as a living Word of God and presents his case for the Christian faith as being in continuity with that Word. To read Hebrews as an attack on Judaism is to misread Hebrews" is a common apologetic Christian misreading.<sup>7</sup> It is inaccurate not only because honoring Hebrew scripture does not constitute acceptance of Judaism as theologically legitimate, but also because Hebrew scripture tells of Israelite religion not of Judahite religion or of Judaism. Theologies of continuity are as supersessionist as are theologies of discontinuity. Ancient Israelite religion is one of Judaism's predecessors just as it is one of Christianity's predecessors. Hebrews is not so much an attack on

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<sup>7</sup> Fred B. Craddock, Letter to the Hebrews: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections, in: New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 12, 12 vols., Nashville 1998, 7f.

Judaism as it is a dismantling of Judahite religion at the time and repurposing the debris in a new edifice.<sup>8</sup>

The author of *Hebrews* is a deft midrashist, probably a Jewish scholar by background and training. He begins transforming the meaning of the texts by wrenching them from their historical setting; Jewish midrashic interpretation did as well. Hermeneutics is the art of crafting strategies to render acceptable texts that grate against contemporary sensibilities intellectually or morally.<sup>9</sup> *Hebrews* employs both Greek and Jewish hermeneutical strategies to argue that nascent Christianity has replaced nascent Judaism. Paul had already turned scripture on its head making it say something other than what it was universally understood to mean. Both are deconstructing normalcy and using its forms to house different matter. It is like telling citizens of a nation that their country is no more because it has been conquered by another and that they are welcome to apply for citizenship.

*Hebrews* uses various strategies to delegitimize nascent Judaism and authorize nascent Christianity in its place by showing that the new, better meaning of the scriptures is in Christ not in whatever the text says about historical events. Here are a few examples:

1:5 – The author quotes Psalm 2:7 “You are my son; today I have begotten you” to mean that Jesus is higher on the scale of divinity than angels. It locates Jesus ontologically in relation to divinity. The ontology of the title “Son of God” would officially be determined at Nicaea (325), of course, but Heb 1:5 sets the stage for it as do the hymn in Philippians 2 and the beginning of John’s Gospel. Our next theologian, Melito of Sardis, takes the hint as we shall see.

2:5–9 – On the face of it, Psalm 8 is about the ontological status of humanity in relation to angels. But *Hebrews* makes it be about Jesus. “As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” The author has, in effect, removed Jesus from humanity and put him above angels although where or what that ontological status is is nebulous. Jesus is being moved up the ontological ladder. Western atonement soteriology is gestating here.

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<sup>8</sup> A physical example of this is in the Noble Sanctuary, the Dome of the Rock. In the small undercroft beneath the main floor, where one gets quite close to the stone, is a little portico of sorts, or perhaps the remains of one. The pillar facing worshipers is recycled from a church; a Christian cross is carved into its capital. It is cemented in upside down.

<sup>9</sup> *Ellen T. Charry*, *Hermeneutics. Biblical*, in: Samuel E. Balentine (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*, vol. 1, 2 vols., New York 2014.

2:17; 5:1–10 are about the duties and responsibilities of the High Priest on Yom Kippur when he enters the holiest part of the Temple to atone for his sins, those of his family and of the entire people of Israel. Jesus, already above the angels, is also the high priest who atones for the sins of the people. Here he is the priest, not the victim.

5:10; 7; 8:1–7 dismiss the Aaronide priesthood to invent a new one, that of Malkeetzedek mentioned at Gen 14:18 and carried into Ps 110:4 (a psalm that our author finds very useful). Jesus is the high priest of this new order that replaced the House of Aaron. This is theologically important because Jesus does not have priestly ancestry and is never anointed as either king or priest although his followers applied those titles to him. The Gospel writers are not attending to scriptural detail.

8:8:13 – Jesus becomes the sacrifice that replaces the biblical sacrifices practiced in the Temple. Now he is above the angels, though our author is not quite clear about his ontological status. He is the priest making the atoning sacrifice on behalf of the people on the ground and becomes the sacrificed victim at the same time hard as that is to wrap one's mind around. The canonical Gospels repeatedly ask Jesus to explain who he is, where he has come from, what he is doing, where he is going. Hebrews adds to the confusion. Sorting it out is a matter of decision rather than discovery that reached its climax in 451 at Chalcedon. That process is not unlike the scholarly Jesus Seminar (1985-2006) that voted on what the scholars thought Jesus actually said.

We do not know whether Hebrews was written before or after the burning of the Temple by the Romans. Without the Temple, Jews had to replace the priesthood and the sacrificial system. Memory of the cult was preserved in Mishna Yoma. Perhaps people were ready to let go of them in any case. Safely tucked in memory's storehouse, however, prayer and local synagogues blossomed as the center of Jewish energy. Hebrews, on the other hand, recycles the debris from the defunct cult as Christianity. In essence, the Jews put the debris from the burned Temple in long-term storage, while the author of Hebrews recycled it.

Probably to arouse lapsing Jewish Christians to reinvigorate their new faith, our author predictably calls upon Jer 31:31–34 to argue that the prophet's notion of a new covenant now located in Jesus has replaced God's holy covenant with biblical Israel. This is a major theme of the letter developed in chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13. This new covenant has obsoleted the first one. It is better than the first covenant because it is made with blood and is eternal. Those who resist will be severely punished because they have “spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29) (cf. Rom 8:4–6). Of course, it never occurred to Jews that they profaned the blood of the covenant or even what that

refers to. Perhaps the author has Ex 12 in mind, although God's covenant with Israel is made in chapter 34 where there is no mention of lamb's blood. Poetic license provides great leeway.

Heb 12:2 has Jesus seated at the right hand of the throne of God, though not yet God. Within this, 9:15 cryptically names him "the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant." Chapter 11 explains that "those who are called" are the full panoply of biblical figures from Abel to David. Here is another way of Christianizing the Hebrew Bible. In this case, however, the characters are anachronistically Christologized and repurposed for the new covenant made by Christ's blood. Augustine, and long after him Calvin would pick up this idea of Christ as mediator of a new covenant based on Jer 31. Chapter 12:24 reasserts Christ's role as mediator. His mediatorial function between God and us is possible because our author had previously located Christ above the angels in the heavenly hierarchy where he is "crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death" and now seats him at the right hand of God's throne.

As confusing as the various roles and identities of Christ are in Hebrews, the writer is building an argument verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Hebrews gives us the Younger Testament's clearest statement of repurposing Judahite religion to create Christianity. Christ is the new Temple, the new high priest who makes atonement for the sins of the people, and well as the victim sacrificed or driven into the desert for their sake. He is above the angels and sits at God's right hand, an idea that was taken into the creeds. Hebrews includes many biblical personages and condemns those who do not fall in line. The birth of Christianity and the death of Judaism are being played out before our eyes here like a feature film scene by scene. Our next sermon is a sequel to this text.

### ***"On Passover"***

"On Passover" builds on Hebrews. It is a second "Christian century" poem in Greek attributed to *Melito*, the bishop of Sardis.<sup>10</sup> It is most likely a sermon declaimed to Christians attracted to Judaism, former Jews, or those vulnerable to Jewish evangelization against whom Christians were competing for adherents. Christianity was an upstart self-starter. Judahite religion, though struggling to find its footing after the devastating wars with Rome, had a pedigree, was respected, and legal. Christianity had none of these advantages. This poem has Christianity striving for authenticity by discrediting emerging Judaism.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Bart D. Ehrman*, *Melito of Sardis: On the Passover*, in: *idem.*, *After the New Testament. A Reader in Early Christianity*, New York 1999, 115–28.



This powerfully dramatic homily develops several themes. It discredits Passover that relives and teaches the Exodus account of the original events. It replaces the celebration of the first Passover with another: Christ. While doing this the author invents the deicide charge that became the lynch pin of standard Christian Israelology.

This discussion is of the work's theology, not its provenance, the motivations behind it or its audience that might contextualize its anti-Judaism. Its blazing oratory stands on its own. It is a detailed scolding of Jews and Judaism that cashed out for Christians. Its strident supersessionism permeates Christian Israelology ever after.

One reading of the piece is that Melito tears down Jewish Passover to build a Christian one. These scholars divide the work into two sections to that end. While that may be structurally appropriate, for the purpose of discerning the development of its anti-Judaism I will consider the sermon in four sections: its demolition of Passover's meaningfulness after Christ, the immediate salvific meaning of Christ's death, the creation of the deicide charge, and a last great burst of soteriological exhilaration like the final skyrocketing fireworks at the end of the show.

The first section, segments 1–46, argues that Christ replaces Passover. Melito uses typology to press the replacement idea. “The type was for a time, but grace is forever” ... “The [old scripture] was a model; the other [the new gospel] was found to be the finished product” (verse 4). “By the smallness of the model, destined to be destroyed, might we see that thing which is to arise from it; higher than it in size, and mightier than it in power, and more beautiful than it in appearance, and more elaborate than it in ornamentation” (36). This point is repeated multiple times indicating how important it is for his argument. Perhaps he has Phil 3:7–9 in mind. Having served its purpose, Passover, and perhaps Judaism altogether, has been theologically “destroyed” by Christ.

With Judaism now meaningless, Jews get nothing from it even if they do not realize it. In any case, it is not soteriologically significant. “When the church came on the scene and the gospel was set forth, the type lost its value by surrendering its significance to the truth, and the law was fulfilled by surrendering its significance to the gospel” (42). “Indeed, also the law was fulfilled when the gospel was brought to light, and the people lost their significance when the church came on the scene, and the type was destroyed when the Lord appeared. Therefore, those things which once had value are today without value” (43). Perhaps Passover was his point of entry because it was attractive to gentiles and important to Jewish Christians. Indeed, it is attractive to Christians today although that is a bit strained.

Christians should forego the Pesach seder because it is an empty rite.<sup>11</sup> They have a new paschal lamb, Christ, who replaces the lamb of Exodus 12. To press the point, Melito exegetes the Exodus narrative closely although some of his points do not accord with the text. He blames Jews for misunderstanding Exodus's true meaning at every step and ridicules what his audience's Jewish neighbors were celebrating.

By Christologizing Passover, Melito follows Paul (1 Cor 5:7-8) who surely knew that the paschal lamb has no soteriological significance. Atonement is made through the priestly ritual enjoined by Lev 16 that is now completely separate from Passover. But descriptions of the last supper sustain the confusion of Passover with Yom Kippur because it took place near or on Passover. It is the final seder according to Melito. "The last supper" then has double meaning. It was Jesus's last meal with his friends as well as the last theologically meaningful Jewish Passover seder for all time. There were two deaths on the cross: Jesus and Judaism altogether. Melito does not mince words: "The one first conceived, the one first born, the one sought after, the one chosen was dashed to the ground" (26). Israel, the first born of God has become one of the first-born dead of the final plague against the Egyptians.

Although replacement of Jewish Passover with a Christ-centered version occupies this section it sounded notes that would crescendo later in the poem and reverberate forever in orthodox Christianity both east and west. Early in the poem Melito says that the one "buried as a man, rose up from the dead as God, since he is by nature both God and man. He is everything...in that he is begotten he is Son, in that he suffers he is sheep, in that he is buried he is man, in that he comes to life again he is God" (8 and 9).

Section two of the poem argues that Christ's sacrificial death addressed human sin (46–71). Recounting the history leads into the significance of Christ's death. "... he accepted the sufferings of the sufferer through his body which was capable of suffering. And he destroyed those human sufferings by his spirit which was incapable of dying. He killed death which had put humans to death" (66) and "raised up humankind from the grave below" (71). The two natures doctrine, ratified at Chalcedon in 451 is already in place here.<sup>12</sup>

The third section of the poem (72–99) is high drama. It formulates the deicide charge in two steps. First it identifies the Jews as Christ's murderers and then it deifies Christ. The order is designed for maximal rhetorical effect. "O lawless Israel, why did you commit this extraordinary

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps here it is actually necessary to recall again that biblical Israelite religion is not Judaism. Jews do not slaughter, roast and eat an animal at today's Pesach seder, although they do eat matzah and they do eat meat. The sacrificial apparatus has not been part of Judaism since 70 CE.

<sup>12</sup> Nostra Aetate – On Relations with Non-Christians, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v2non.htm> (accessed May 13, 2019).

crime of casting your Lord into new sufferings...” (81). Melito recognizes the necessity of the execution but laments that the job was not left to gentiles (75f.).

Naming all Jews as Christ’s murderers may be the first charge of collective guilt. It is not those whose actions harmed others who are responsible for the effects of their actions or policies, but all who are like them in a way that the complainant deems pertinent to their particular suffering. Here the perpetrators are all Jews against Christ. Collective guilt is now applied to a host of perpetrators. Germans, men, Australians, Caucasians, Turks, heterosexuals, Israelis, Christians and so on all are called to account for their offenses. A difference between these applications of collective guilt and Melito’s is that victims of the modern perpetrators are other people. Melito’s ire is not about what Jews have done to Christians but about what they have done to Christ.

In segment 82 of “On Passover,” Christ becomes “the firstborn of God the one who was begotten before the morning star.” He created the universe and accompanies, guides, and chastises Israel’s misdeeds throughout scripture (81–85). This is the one “you” (Jews) murdered. The Romans disappear. Writing extensively in the second person plural now strikes its blow. “Why have ... you ... O Israel ...?” becomes the unrelenting antiphon connecting lists of Israel’s many failings that Melito levels against the Jews he is speaking to in absentia. The knife plunges deeper knowing that while the charges are leveled in the second person plural, he is addressing Christians. One wonders if they received his taunts with glee overhearing his assault on their neighbors.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, while our author heaped derisive scorn on “you ... O Israel,” his Jewish contemporaries and their forebears, he did not project that guilt and shame onto all Jews going forward. He left that for the later church that readily took Melito’s place as the prosecuting attorney.

One last element is needed to clinch the doctrine: the identity of the victim. Having introduced the grounds for decide in segments 8 and 9 the drama climaxes succinctly: “God has been murdered” (96). It is finished. The Jews are accused of murdering God although of course, everyone knows that that is a rhetorical flourish because God is unmurderable. The idea that the Jews murdered God is nonsense. Melito preempts Nicaea, just as he has preempted Chalcedon.

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<sup>13</sup> *Augustine* used the same technique to rouse his Christian hearers against the Jews in his *Answer to the Jews*: Augustine of Hippo, *Answer to the Jews*, in: *Writings on the Old Testament*, vol. 1/14, *Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, Hyde Park, NY 2016, 750–77. Bad-mouthing people behind their back is a standing temptation, usually done in the third person. But speaking condemnation to a third party already predisposed to dislike those being spoken to as if they were present carries invective to a new level. Turn the table and imagine a rabbi’s sermon to her congregation in which she says “why have you Christians hated us? Why have you Christians reviled us? Why have you Christians exiled us? Why have you Christians accused us of poisoning your wells? Why have you Christians accused us of murdering your children? Why have you Christians locked us in ghettos? Why have you Christians locked us out of your universities? Why have you Christians killed us?” Now the perpetrators know the truth about how they are perceived by their victims. Melito and Augustine were brilliant preachers.

Christ's blood is redemptive, but centuries of harming Jews left the Christian Church sitting in a pool of Jewish blood that unfortunately Jews had to photograph for Christians to see. The church blinded itself to its crimes against the Jews in its triumphalist belief that their treatment of Jews was warranted by God's judgment against them. Again, the argument is that Jews threw themselves under the bus. That blindness is the great sadness of Christian history. How to mop up the blood one is sitting in when it is invisible? The charge that all Jews killed God lived unquestioned for eighteen centuries until one Jew, Jules Isaac, managed to speak with Pope John XXIII in 1960.

The final section of this sermon (100–105) paints word pictures of the saving benefits of Christ, some of which were introduced previously. He now adds forgiveness of sins and reprises resurrection and the death of death (that may or may not be tied to resurrection). Melito's literary fireworks led later theologians and artists to depict several scenarios and interpretations of salvation. Resurrection is central. He has Christ say, "I am the one who destroyed death and triumphed over the enemy and trampled Hades under foot and bound the strong one" (102). The "strong one" was assumed to be the Devil; his defeat by Christ defeats death, or in other visions ransoms believers from mortality (echoing Gen 3:10). The imagery was fleshed out in theology and art as Christ entering Hades to release the Patriarchs and other just ancestors from death. The idea circulated and became part of the baptismal creed (the Apostles' Creed) with the words "he descended to the dead." It is also in the "Athanasian" Creed with the wording "descended into hell." Both creeds post-date "On Passover." The harrowing of hell, as this descent was called, became associated with Holy Saturday.

In the very next segment however, Christ appears as the pascal lamb: "I am the passover of your salvation, I am the lamb which was sacrificed for you, I am your ransom," followed by a slew of additional benefits of his death (103). Here, following John 1:29, Christ's replacement of the pascal lamb is for forgiveness of sins although that is not its function in the Exodus story or the seder as noted above. But the word "ransom" harks back to the devil motif. In short, Melito bubbled over telling his audience of the wondrous accomplishments of this one murdered by the Jews for the sake of the well-being of gentiles. Here we see the cornucopia of understandings of salvation all run together. It becomes understandable that enthusiastic Christians would plead with Jews to join them and enjoy all these blessings.

In addition to the themes discussed, this sermon points toward other anti-Jewish attitudes:

1. *Jews are “blind” because they do not agree that Jesus is the content of their scripture.*

They hold to the text that is before them. Or, Jews are stupid refusing the truth that is right in front of them in christologized scripture. This approach often uses promise-fulfillment typology. The meaning is not discernible in the words of the texts. Later theologians used demeaning adjectives describing Jews alone but without the explanatory “because” clause that would focus the epithet. Without an explanatory rationale for them, these adjectives become general character traits of Jews. Matthew 23 bequeaths “hypocrites” and of course, “blind guides” to lead the attack. Luke gives us “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). Others added more adjectives.

2. *The Christian Church: New Israel... or True Israel?*

These post-biblical phrases are often run together but they are significantly different. “New Israel” is traditional Christian supersessionism. Hebrews and Melito both exemplify it even though neither coined the phrase. Melito is a “continuity” theologian. Israelite history prepared for Christ so it “is both old and new” (57 and 58).

The term “true Israel” however is quite different, for it implies that the Israelites, now Jews, never truly were Israel. They were just a placeholder until Christ came (Gal 3:24.25). There are passages where Paul can be read as implying that gentile Christians are the great nation gathered from all the families of the earth promised to Abraham. That enables Paul to make the grand reversals in Galatians 4 and Rom 9:6–8. Gentiles are “the children of the promise,” the descendants of Isaac and Jacob, and Sarah (Gal 4). He does not qualify these replacements with “now” or “but now.” Of course, other passages in Paul lean toward supersessionist Israelology, so the question is worth discussing. Whatever Paul was thinking about that, Justin tells Trypho that “we, who have been quarried out of the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelit[e] race.”<sup>14</sup> Clement of Alexandria uses “true Israel” in *The Instructor*.<sup>15</sup>

3. *In executing Jesus, the Jews killed their own messiah.*

What “messiah” means, however, varies by context. Jews did not need a messiah to save them from their sins because the sacerdotal sacrifices did that when it functioned. In the diaspora and exile other mechanisms developed to serve that function. Judaism has no artistic or literary depictions of hell or divine wrath, and so no medieval penitential system to address them. These

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<sup>14</sup> *Justin*, Dialogue with Trypho, in: Thomas P. Halton/Michael Slusser (eds.), *Selections from the Fathers of the Church*, v. 3, Washington, D.C. 2003.

<sup>15</sup> *Clement of Alexandria*, *The Instructor*, Edinburg/Grand Rapids 1986.

fearmongering institutions hit their mark in Luther. Some preachers took it upon themselves to put “the fear of God” into Christians to spur moral living.

Further, certainly the idea that “messiah” (anointed one) constituted an ontological status other than thoroughly human was beyond imaginability, perhaps because Jews assiduously avoided pagans while Christianity sought them. Even the idea that the messiah would be a military leader like Bar Kok̄ba was not self-evident although it had a following. Whatever energy there was for this surely quelled with Bar Kok̄ba’s utter defeat. There have been at least a dozen messianic claimants in Jewish history. A different image ensconced in Jewish memory is in the Babylonian Talmud.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said to Elijah: When will the Messiah come? Elijah said to him: Go ask him. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked: And where is he sitting? Elijah said to him: At the entrance of the city of Rome. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asked him: And what is his identifying sign by means of which I can recognize him? Elijah answered: He sits among the poor who suffer from illnesses. And all of them untie their bandages and tie them all at once, but the Messiah unties one bandage and ties one at a time. He says: Perhaps I will be needed to serve to bring about the redemption. Therefore, I will never tie more than one bandage, so that I will not be delayed (Sanhedrin 98a).

#### 4. Conclusion

“On Passover” is a *tour de force*. Its powerful rhetoric, carefully crafted cadences and adroitly interlaced doctrinal steps build what seems to be an air-tight case of Christian truth against Jewish resistance to their own God. The deicide charge against the Jews amounted to Judeocide by Christians.

By the time it was written, treatises against the Jews were already beginning to appear. Melito did not invent the genre but he carried it to rhetorical perfection. Quite apart from its anti-Jewish accomplishments, “On Passover” is remarkable because it directs or anticipates what became Christian orthodoxy. It anticipates the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian doctrine of the incarnation of the dual nature of Christ. Further, it anticipates many soteriological images that were later elaborated. Again, this uncannily anticipates history. There was never a church council to select one soteriological image as orthodox so all the images and perhaps others remain available. In short, this brilliant work of art decisively shaped Christianity and Christian Israelology beyond anything its author might have hoped or imagined. And so it was.

***Augustine of Hippo (354–430)***

No presentation on anti-Jewish preaching would suffice without considering Augustine of Hippo. Of the 430 sermons that we have, we will look at 122.<sup>16</sup> We do not know its date, but he tells us that it was addressed to educated Christians. When reading Augustine, do keep in mind that he was the weightiest mind of his day (and knew it). He carefully preserved his corpus like a space capsule knowing that it would enable western civilization to revive after what we once called the Dark Ages because a) he lived a long time, b) he did not develop Alzheimer's, and c) he wrote more than anyone before him and quite possibly after him. He died in 430 as Mediterranean civilization was dramatically ending.

In reading his massive corpus, it is also helpful to know that he did not know Hebrew and he struggled with Greek. We do not know which Latin translation of the Bible he relied on in which work. As we can see from looking at just two Christian texts, by Augustine's day anti-Judaism was in full dress augmented by numerous *Adversos Iudaeos* tracts since Melito including his own.<sup>17</sup> Here we examine Sermon 122 on John 1:48–51.

Nataniel asked [Jesus], "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nataniel replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Augustine's sermon proceeds like this. What Jesus says to Nataniel actually applies to the whole human race, and the fig tree represents sin here. He associates the fig tree with the fig leaves in Genesis 3, going out of his way to note that human sexual organs are not sinful. It is the sin of wrong eating that made Hava (life) and Adam (earth) ashamed not their nakedness.

The mention of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man takes Augustine to Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder and God's powerful promises to him at Gen 28:10–22, of course. Augustine is intensely interested in the stone that Jacob anoints the next day naming the place Beyt-El, the house of God. The anointed stone becomes the anointed Christ (although we have noted that no event anoints him). At this juncture, Augustine leaves these texts without cause and stops the flow of thought to denigrate the Jews.

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<sup>16</sup> *Augustine*, On the Words of the Gospel of John 1:48-51: "When You Were under the Fig Tree I Saw You." Sermon 122, in: *Sermons*, (94A–147A) on the New Testament, vol. 4, Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century 3, Charlottesville, VA 2009, 238–43.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, Answer to the Jews, in: *Writings on the Old Testament*, vol. 1/14, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Hyde Park, NY 2016, 750–777.

He turns to the parable of the tenants in the vineyard that relies on Ps 118:22: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” It is low-hanging fruit for the supersessionist mind.

He is the stone about which he said himself, *Whoever stumbles over this stone will be shaken to bits; while anyone on whom this stone comes down, it will crush him* (Mt 21:44). He is stumbled over when he is lying on the ground; he will come down on him when he comes from on high to judge the living and the dead [...]. Woe to the Jews, because they stumbled over Christ when he was lying there humbly. *This man*, they say, *is not from God, because he breaks the sabbath* (Jn 9:16). *If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross* (Mt 27:40). Madman, the stone is lying there, and that's why you mock it. But if you mock, you're blind; if you're blind, you stumble; if you stumble, you are shaken to pieces; and when you have been shaken to pieces by him lying there now, you are going to be crushed by him coming down on you afterward (239).

To make sure that his audience has grasped the condemnation of Jews that Augustine concocts, he recurs to Yaacov's birth holding onto his twin brother's heel (Gen 25:26). He construes the name Yaakov (meaning “by the heel”) to mean supplanter. The annotator of the new translation, an acclaimed Augustine apologist, knows that this is a non sequitur but lets it stand. Augustine hangs his obscure argument on a bevy of unrelated scripture texts skipping all around trying to support his unrelated point. He next jumps to Gen 32:24–31, Yaacov's night-long wrestle with a man that left him injured but blessed with another name that would serve to justify the church to consider itself to be “Yisrael.”

Augustine plays on the two name changes, that of Avram to Avraham and that of Yaakov to Yisrael.

The name Avraham was to receive its explanation in this world, because it was here that he became the father of many nations, which is what he got the name from. The name Israel, on the other hand, belongs to the next world, where we will see God. So the people of God, the Christian people, is in this world and this time both Jacob and Israel; Jacob in our actual situation, Israel in our hopeful expectation. The younger people, you see, is called the supplanter of its brother, the older people. But have we supplanted the Jews? Well, we are called their supplinters, because they were supplanted, or set aside, for our sake. Unless they had become blind, Christ would not have been crucified; if Christ had not been crucified, that precious blood would not have been shed; if that blood had not been shed, the whole world would not have been redeemed. So it's because their blindness was profitable for us that the elder brother was supplanted by the younger, and the younger was called “Supplanter. But the question is: for how long? (p. 241)

The answer to that question is, of course, forever unless Jews convert. Consider a scarcely recognized observation. While our bishop recognizes that Christian salvation requires Christ's execution, why is he not exultantly celebrating the Jews for assisting that? Christian blindness at what is simply before them is astonishing.



Note: Even in John, the Gospel that has the most vicious things to say about Jews in the Bible, the author recognizes one good one: Nataniel. Yet even that poignancy cannot arouse a sympathetic word from the most influential bishop of the church. The Jews are supplanted, they have stumbled, they are crushed under Jesus. This translation of Augustine's sermons was published in 2009 in the new translation of Augustine's works for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The commentator says not a word about this sermon's anti-Judaism.

### ***Martin Luther***

Even the briefest review of anti-Jewish preaching cannot avoid the Protestant Reformation. "The Jews" were a ready cipher for criticism of the papacy and several reformers take full advantage of that handle. While the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition had its heyday in the Patristic Age, Martin Luther revived it in "On the Jews and their Lies" (1543) that he insisted on publishing against collegial advice. The 150-page tract (in English) is not a sermon, but it certainly preaches.

Luther's scandalous tract advises the following seven point policy toward Jews in German lands: burn down their synagogues, raze and destroy their homes, burn their prayer books and Talmudic writings, forbid rabbis to teach, revoke safe conduct policies, prohibit usury, set them at hard labor. At another point, he approves of cutting out their tongues. He continues: "God's anger with them is so intense that gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little. Therefore, in any case, away with them!"<sup>18</sup> He calls for their expulsion from German lands without police escort several times in this work. It was his final solution. Hitler took over the German church rather easily. Celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's Reformation (1917) had fueled nationalism, a point not lost on Hitler. *Mein Kampf* appeared in 1925. The "Confessing Church" that objected to Hitler on theological grounds was not concerned for Jews.

***Christopher Holdsworth***, "According to Promise Heirs," on Gal 3:23–29 was preached on 15 June 2019.<sup>19</sup>

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by

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<sup>18</sup> *Martin Luther*, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in: Franklin Sherman (ed.), *Christian in Society*, vol. IV, 55 vols., 47, Philadelphia 1971, 268–272.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/according-to-promise-heirs-christopher-holdsworth-sermon-on-justification-240443> (accessed July 29, 2020).

faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (KJV)

Holdsworth's short and rather unremarkable sermon does not press Christians beyond their comfort zone. It does not assault Jews as do other texts that we have reviewed. Its supersessionism is more subtle. It explains that like children we [gentiles] started out needing tutoring and Jewish practice did that. Of course, for a post-Pauline Christian, Jewish practice/teaching/custom – that is God's instruction through Moses – became a deterrent because circumcision and dietary restrictions were onerous (especially men) so Paul dropped them to make his gospel more appealing. Quite unnecessarily, perhaps simply for rhetorical flourish, he went on to denounce them as well, as if they are theologically offensive rather than simply a hindrance to church growth.

The preacher reads this text as comforting Christians with Christian freedom (as Luther put it), release from the ordered life at which Mosaic instruction aims. What matters is faith, to be “in Christ.” From our perspective looking at supersessionism, it is notable that being “in Christ” makes one a child of Abraham and that wipes out the distinctions that Paul rejects in this passage. The preacher homes in on the intimacy between being “in Christ” and being Avraham's children.

The closing paragraph of this chapter [of Galatians] is leading to a triumphant conclusion: literally, “If ye are Christ's, then Avraham's seed ye are, and according to promise heirs” (Gal 3:29). This explains the radical unity here: again, “There is not Jew nor Greek; there is not bondman nor [sic] free; there is not male and female” (Gal 3:28). That is to say, all these distinctions are irrelevant to “as many as were baptized into Christ because Christ ye did put on (Gal 3:27).

This theme continues:

I have pointed out before just how frequently Paul uses the expression ‘in Christ’, ‘in Him’, ‘in the Beloved’ in Ephesians 3:1-14. The Apostle writes here in Galatians that we are sons of God through faith ‘in Christ Jesus’” (Galatians 3:26); that “as many as were baptized into Christ” did “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27); that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28); and that “if ye are of Christ, then Abraham's seed ye are” (Galatians 3:29).

For our interest here, the preacher's message is that the only way to be Abraham's children is to be in Christ. Those not in Christ are not Abraham's seed, as Paul said at Rom 9:6f.: “It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants.” This is stated explicitly by John 8:39–44.

Our preacher explains further:

Then we read that “we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Jews are still Jews and Gentiles are still Gentiles (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:13), but in Christ (and only in Him!) the old distinctions are done away (cf. Ephesians 2:15). He concludes: “Thus we come full circle back to where we began: ‘If ye are Christ's,

then Abraham's seed ye are, and according to promise, heirs' (Galatians 3:29). The spiritual heirs of Abraham are in view here: all those who are found in Christ Jesus. Ours is a spiritual inheritance: 'eternal in the heavens' (2 Corinthians 5:1); 'to be with God which is far better' (Philippians 1:23); 'and so shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Alleluia. Amen.

John and Paul, and of course our preacher are clear: Jews have been disinherited. But Christians exhale and rejoice for they are in the right place. In Christ, or at least at the communion rail (where there is one), worldly distinctions momentarily vanish.

Christian triumphalism is the flip side (the upper side?!) of supersessionism. Here is the silent stab of Christian supersessionism. Those not feasting with us, even if they abstain on grounds of conscience and principle that Christians want to respect may be honored at the interpersonal level but that does not speak the word of the church. Doctrinally speaking, there can be no respectful disagreement in this case. Of this contempt, Rev. Holdsworth says nothing. The few selections here among many. The dangling question is what fuels this libelous powerhouse of scorn. The obvious answer is that comfortable Christians have simply assumed that Christian anti-Judaism is true because it is written in their books and been preached by great minds. Further, anachronistic scripture interpretation---reading Christ as central to the Hebrew text---has blotted out the text itself, blunting the Christian conscience and dulling Christian consciousness. Hoping to overcome the spiritual vapidness of some modern critical exegetical tools, the recent theological interpretation of scripture movement, to which this author has contributed, risks subduing the voice of historical-critical method that is essential to liberate the voices of the Hebrew Bible from pious distortion.

## **5. Walking Forward**

The few selections here are among many. The dangling question is what fuels this libelous powerhouse of scorn. The obvious answer is that comfortable Christians have simply assumed that Christian anti-Judaism is true because it is written in their books and been preached by great minds. Further, anachronistic scripture interpretation – reading Christ as central to the Hebrew text – has blotted out the text itself, blunting the Christian conscience and dulling Christian consciousness. Hoping to overcome the spiritual vapidness of some modern critical exegetical tools, the recent theological interpretation of scripture movement, to which this author has contributed, risks subduing the voice of historical-critical method that is essential to liberate the voices of the Hebrew Bible from pious distortion.

Those aware of Christianity's underside must judge whether Christian anti-Judaism and supersessionism are a theological problem to be addressed for the moral and theological integrity

of Christianity.<sup>20</sup> Numerous church bodies have condemned anti-Semitism and Pope John Paul II took responsibility for Christian antisemitism: “For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of antisemitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the old Covenant.”<sup>21</sup> But such statements do not touch Christian anti-Judaism.

As noted, considerable rhetorical repair work has been accomplished in the past half-century. A large and still growing body of fine scholarship on both anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism accumulates on library shelves. Would that it trickled into seminary classrooms. Historical unmasking, enlightened biblical scholarship and interpretation, liturgical repair including long-resisted revision of the Oberammergau passion play, is completed or in process. Some Christian children’s Bibles and teaching materials have been revamped, most notably their visuals that had previously depicted “Jewish” characters as unsavory, ugly, swarthy and strange while “Christian” characters were painted in bright colors, with smiling faces and inviting gestures. Thanks to the liturgical renewal movement published prayerbook liturgies have largely been cleaned up.

Unfortunately, pictorial materials in college textbooks often still use photographs of ultra-Orthodox Haredi Jewish men dressed in seventeenth century costumes as if they represent all Jews. Perhaps publishers think that exoticism will sell books.

Eradicating offensive preaching and teaching begins with each teacher, especially teachers of preachers. Assuming that Christian anti-Judaism is a Christian problem, seminary curricula would need to take up this task. Anti-Judaism impacts every field of theological education.<sup>22</sup> Sadly, excellent scholarship remains locked in the library, of course, because academics often write to debate one another and do not write for preachers. Until Jewishly sensitive scholarship trickles into university and seminary classrooms informed perspectives will remain in the academic preserve.

This essay focused on preaching at the local level. From where is our help to come? Current on-line resources are the “Internet Jewish History Sourcebook” (<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/jewish/jewishsbok.asp>) and “Reading from the Roots” (<http://readingsfromtheroots.bard.edu/first-sunday-of-advent/>). The former will help preachers understand Judaism in Jewish terms. The latter is English translations of passages in the Revised

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<sup>20</sup> A student of mine approached a highly esteemed colleague saying that he was interested in this matter and was considering studying with me. My colleague assured him that concern about Christian anti-Judaism was a fad, so he needn’t bother.

<sup>21</sup> [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19901108\\_amb-germania.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1990/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19901108_amb-germania.html) (accessed July 29, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Eugene J. Fisher, *Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations. A Curriculum and Resource Handbook*, Washington, D.C. 1988.

Common Lectionary translated less anti-Jewishly than other translations. It calls for a companion to help preachers deal with problematic passages. Less than a handful of books help Christian preachers avoid anti-Judaism.<sup>23</sup> Guidance for sermon preparation is sorely needed in electronic form.

## Leadership

This essay offers suggestions for the local level, for preachers, musicians and for congregations. The easiest place for preachers to begin redressing Christian anti-Judaism is with themselves. Guidelines for avoiding contemptuous preaching are appended here in the concluding Appendix.

Preachers are the keepers of Christian rhetoric. Passion for proclaiming the gospel may discourage nuance, however. Melito, Augustine and Luther are examples. Luther could not curb his tongue. The writers discussed here were passionate for their causes. Yet maturity restrains the prudent who can anticipate harm that might flow from their sentences. This is difficult.

Contextualizing problematic texts may help a bit because it grants distance from the text. Historical appreciation that the context of vituperative anti-Jewish language is not our own –that the maestro in my anecdote refused to grant – is essential in order to distance hearers from a text’s or a musical setting’s venom. But preaching, whether through music or sermons, seeks the precise opposite. That is a tightrope that preachers must walk. Having people cry “crucify him, crucify him” when staging John’s passion narrative does not help, even when Christians are invited to see themselves as vicarious Jews. Caricaturing one’s worst self as a Jewish self only exacerbates the problem.

Musicians are especially important here because they understand that when words and music come together, they are more powerful than either is alone. Choral anthems and hymn and song lyrics may be revised rather easily. Aside from recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and money collected, singing may be the only aspect of the worship that comes from the worshipers. Where emendations are not feasible note should be made of the harmful consequences of the text and music and encourage listeners to distance themselves from it.

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<sup>23</sup> *Marilyn J. Salmon*, *Preaching without Contempt. Overcoming Unintended Anti-Judaism*, Fortress Resources for Preaching, Minneapolis, MN 2006, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip065/2005035400.html>; *Clark M. Williamson*, *Interpreting Difficult Texts. Anti-Judaism and Christian Preaching*, Phila 1989; *Ronald J. Allen/Clark M. Williamson*, *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews. A Lectionary Commentary*, Louisville, KY 2004. *Amy-Jill Levine/Marc Zvi Brettler* (eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament. New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*, Oxford 2017. Though not on preaching *per se* it is a great resource.

Christian congregations can also take reparative steps toward their Jewish neighbors. A dedicated confession of sins against Judaism and the Jewish people could be written for Christians to say among themselves to encourage reflection on and education about Christian history. A special penitential service that brings Christians and Jews together may also be appropriate. Christians can take leadership by reaching out to their neighbors contritely. Unlike Christianity, Judaism thinks of sin first on the horizontal plane where hurt occurs and only subsequently on the vertical plane. For Christians to meet Jews on the horizontal plane would be a step forward.

Repentance recognizes the need for resolution of the theological enmity between the traditions but does not do more than that. “Let bygones be bygones” will not do. Ignoring the past will not quell Jewish fear or diminish institutional memory. Recognizing Christian failure faces in the right direction. The Jewish High Holy Days offer Christians an opportunity for contrition. Elul is Judaism’s penitential season. It is a month and the first two weeks of the following month, Tishrey, a total of about 45 days. It is a season of self-examination and an opportunity to repair damaged relationships. The season usually corresponds to August-September of the Gregorian calendar, some years extending into October. Lent is Elul’s Christian analogue.

Elul is a season of soul-searching examination of one’s life over the preceding year. Special penitential prayers and Ps 27 are added to the daily morning service and the shofar is sounded daily to awaken people to themselves. The most stirring practice of this month is to approach everyone whom one might have offended during the past year and ask forgiveness, perhaps talking about the troubles if that would be helpful. Further, since we don’t always know the hurt we have caused, it is appropriate to approach many family members, friends and colleagues seeking to learn of hurt given. This strenuous spiritual work requires almost eight weeks. Should an offended person refuse forgiveness one waits a bit then tries a second time. Should that too fail one waits again and tries yet a third time. Should forgiveness not be forthcoming one seeks forgiveness from God on Yom Kippur.

Elul prepares for the great Ten Days of Awe from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur when the metaphorical Book of Life and the gates of heaven open and everyone’s fate for the coming year inscribed. As the 24-hour fast of Yom Kippur ebbs the Book of Life closes and the gates of heaven lock for another year. So, it would be appropriate that Christians publicly repent before the Jewish community by partnering with a local synagogue during Ellul.

Christian admission of sin against the Jewish people (not a service of reconciliation) would be suitable. If a Christian minister were to reach out to a local synagogue proposing such a possibility and the synagogue agreed, the Jewish participants should structure the event. Only the offer of public repentance should come from the Christians. Meeting in the synagogue is preferable to

meeting in a church building. The annual Selihot service, traditionally a midnight service on the Saturday night before Rosh HaShanah is an opportunity for liturgical creativity. Such a program must preclude Christian evangelism and testy topics like Zionism, Jesus, and the Trinity that are not appropriate for a penitential setting.

Such an event would take much planning and preparation of participants. A service of Christian repentance designed by Jews is a grand leadership opportunity for Christians. It would step toward Christian-Jewish rapprochement. Further events and opportunities could flow from it. These are weighty matters. Reconciliation is not yet in sight. But it is never too late to repent.

[May] YHWH guard you from all harm.

[May] he guard your life.

[May] YHWH guard your going and coming now and forever.

(Ps 121:7 JPS)

### **Appendix: Guidelines for avoiding preaching contempt for Jews and Judaism**

It is difficult for Christian preachers to avoid encountering Jews and Judaism. Christianity traditionally treats the Older Testament as a foil against which Christianity is superior, not only in degree but in kind. Christianity is true; Judaism is false. Indeed, Christianity depicts Judaism as theologically empty; faithful Jews are quite wrongheaded. The Younger Testament's dependence on Israel's scripture for its pedigree requires preachers to interpret the Hebrew texts that the Christian church made its own. The Older Testament transmits a vision of ancient Israelite religion that both Jews and Christians claim as the foundation of their exclusive identity as the one and only Israel of God.

Ancient Israelite scripture is neither Judaism nor Christianity. In Christianity's Greek scriptures, we see both nascent Judaism and nascent Christianity emerging from Second Temple Judahite religion. The communities of Jesus-followers recorded in the Greek scriptures are competing with one another and with Pharisaic, Sadducean and Essene interpretations of Second Temple Judahite religion to capture the proper way to worship Israel's God in a tumultuous time. It was a religious free fall.

Caricaturing Jesus's opponents as bad people, blind guides, hypocrites, children of the devil and so on happened in a highly polarized moment when tensions among these various contestants were high and anger unrestrained. These angry outbursts became frozen as the words of God! Similarly, the angry moment of the Protestant Reformation became frozen into its own perennial present. Preaching Christian scripture millennia later trying to socialize each generation into these

past frozen moments has been injurious to Jews and Judaism to be sure, but perhaps also to those who have imbibed another age's anger as their own. Preaching frozen texts is a delicate enterprise. Considering the tragic history that they fostered, it behooves Christian preachers to pause before preaching on any text involving Jews and Judaism.

In preparing a sermon consider:

1. how your remarks may shape the auditors' understanding of Jews and Judaism.
2. how Jews will receive your remarks about them; they may well be in your audience.
3. how the situation depicted in problematic texts is unlike your own.
4. nuancing forceful rhetoric.
5. how a New Testament writer is using Older Testament material and to what end.
6. preaching frequently on Older Testament texts as living voices to deepen your congregation's understanding of God's life with Israel.
7. providing information about the passage and its historical context that would help an auditor distinguish the original context from your appropriation of it.
8. identifying positive characteristics of negatively portrayed characters and their situation.
9. whether a biblical character or setting is truly pejorative or whether received interpretation assumes it to be so. Nicodemus is such a figure.

Consult:

1. several translations of the Bible for their translation of texts treating Judaism and Jews. The *Contemporary English Bible* is sensitive to this concern as is *Norman A. Beck*, presenter, in: *The New Testament. A new Translation and Redaction*, Lima, Ohio 2001). An important on-line resource with this concern is "Reading from the Roots" (<http://readingsfromtheroots.bard.edu/first-sunday-of-advent/>).
2. a Jewish colleague who will read your sermons and help you avoid giving offense. S/he will have relevant Jewish materials that will nuance your reading.



Avoid:

1. demonizing characters in the text and local communities descended from them.
2. applying contemptuous depictions of Jewish characters in the text to people today.
3. depicting characters in the text as one dimensional.
4. absolute contrasts to enhance impact of your message.
5. the temptation to smugness.

Remember:

1. Christians and Muslims worship the God of Israel.
2. Jews today are direct descendants of the Jews in the Younger Testament.
3. Jesus, Paul and the disciples were not Christians.
4. to understand before you condemn.

Scrutinize:

1. the text's portrayal of interchanges between Jesus and his opponents in an enflamed moment.
2. the text's portrayal of Jewish leaders from their perspective.
3. partisanship in the text, appreciating that every story has two sides.

Reminder from King Solomon:

Reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

Instruct a wise man, and he will grow wiser;

Teach a righteous man, and he will gain in learning (Proverbs 9:8b-9, JPS)

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