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"The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel

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RADICI DELL'ANTIGIUDAISMO IN AMBIENTE CRISTIANO

Colloquio Intra-Ecclesiale

ATTI DEL SIMPOSIO TEOLOGICO-STORICO

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COLLANA ATTI E DOCUMENTI

1. GLI INIZI DEL CRISTIANESIMO IN LIVONIA-LETTONIA. *Atti del Colloquio Internazionale di Storia Ecclesiastica, in occasione dell'VIII centenario della Chiesa in Livonia (1186-1986)*, Roma, 24-25 giugno 1986.
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6. IL CRISTIANESIMO NEL MONDO ATLANTICO NEL SECOLO XVII. *Atti della Tavola rotonda tenutasi a Montréal (29 agosto 1995) al XVIII Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche*.
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"THE JEWS" IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In recent decades many scholars and people of good will have struggled with the burden of history on relations between Christian and Jewish communities. Undeniable bigotry and prejudice on the part of so many Christians over the centuries are seen to be rooted, not merely in the friction arising from communities living cheek-by-jowl without proper avenues of communication, but also in a theological prejudice on the part of the younger community. Even though some Jewish scholars have found John's Gospel to be the most Jewish of the four, blame for theological anti-Judaism pervading the writings of Church teachers and preachers in every age has been laid primarily at its door.

I. Studies since 1965

Solutions to the anti-Jewish character of John have focused on the fact that the phrase *hoi Ioudaioi* occurs 71 times throughout the Gospel, sometimes as part of a simple phrase of identification, sometimes in a positive sense, but most often as a term to designate the opponents of Jesus. Dagobert Runes eliminated the problem by substituting "the Romans" for each time it occurred in the King James Version of the Gospel!¹ Gerard S. Sloyan proposed not to translate the term, leaving *hoi Ioudaioi* in the text, to "heighten awareness that the term is a calculated piece of obloquy, not a description of an entire people, and that it is directed against persons nowadays unknown".² This challenges the preacher or

¹ DAGOBERT RUNES, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1976). A more sophisticated effort, but still an over-simplification, has been made for the Contemporary English Version (New York: American Bible Society, 1996).

² GERARD S. SLOYAN, *John* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) p. xiv. See DAVID EFROYMSON, "Let Ioudaioi be Ioudaioi: When Less is Better", *Explorations* (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute) 11 (no. 2, 1997) p. 5. See "Translating *hoi ioudaioi* in the New Testament", *Tic Talk* (Newsletter of the United Bible Societies) No. 24 (July-September 1993).

teacher to interpret each passage in a way that avoids prejudice, but such a solution presupposes the knowledge necessary to do so.

Recognizing that the phrase *hoi Ioudaioi* usually refers to inhabitants of the province of Judea, Malcolm Lowe suggested that the English text be rendered "Judeans".³ This approach has been followed by Claude Tresmontant who considers that John's Gospel was written in Hebrew before the year 40, then translated into Greek by someone who did not always understand the original.⁴ Sidestepping the claim of Tresmontant that he has initiated a veritable "Copernican revolution" in Gospel studies, we note with Pierre Grelot and others that "Judeans" does not fit the context of John 2:6; 6:3, 41, 52; 7:2 and several other passages. This translation is not satisfactory.

Summarizing his work a decade earlier, Gregory Baum interpreted the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Church's Relations to the Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) with reference to John's phrase *hoi Ioudaioi* as follows:

1. "It is a designation for the Jewish authorities (elders, priests and scribes) who, according to John, bore the heaviest responsibility for the opposition to Jesus..."

2. 'The Jews' designates members of the People as representatives of 'the world', humanity in as much as it is hostile to God and the one whom he has sent... According to Christian teaching, there is a permanent opposition to the Gospel in the world of men... This opposition is found everywhere in the human family, even — and especially — in the Church herself'.⁵

This twofold level of interpretation juxtaposes the historical and symbolic orders. Baum makes a good point for preachers and

³ "Who were the Ioudaioi?" *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1974) pp. 101-130. See G.M. SMIGA, *Pain and Polemic: Anti-Judaism in the Gospels* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) pp. 160-173.

⁴ *Évangile de Jean* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1984) and *Le Christ hébreu* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983; ALBINO MICHEL, 1992). See the review by Pierre Grelot, *Revue Biblique* (1987) pp. 269-272.

⁵ G. BAUM, "Christianity and Other Religions: A Catholic Problem", *Crosscurrents* 16 (1966) p. 456. See *Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?* (New York: Paulist, 1963). Baum drew attention to the fact that the Gospel is proclaimed liturgically to challenge the listeners to reform. In worship, each member of the congregation should examine his or her conscience in the light of the Scripture passages for the day. The need of Christians is clear from the tradi-

teachers that fits the tradition of liturgical implementation of biblical texts. However, in recent years scholars have shown that the historical and literary issues are more complex.

Over recent decades several careful studies tried to discern stages in the evolution of the Fourth Gospel by exploring the uses of *hoi Ioudaioi* and other designations for the opponents of Jesus.⁶ Portraits of the Johannine community have been constructed as another approach to understanding the Gospel; necessarily these efforts dwell on the relationship between the community and its human environment, of which the Jewish communities are an important constituent.⁷ These efforts remain hypothetical to some degree, but are very useful, especially since a simple reading of John removed from its historical context may convey the impression that this Gospel provides only ethereal, eternal principles for Christian faith and practice.

A review of recent scholarship should include as well the use that John makes of the Jewish Scriptures and traditions. That has been done by C. WESTERMANN, G. REIM, M. MENKEN and WOLFGANG KRAUS.⁸ We proceed to a presentation of a recent work by a grand old master of New Testament studies, Pierre

tional prayer of the priest as he kissed the Lectionary: "Per evangelica dicta, deliantur nostra delicta; through the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out".

⁶ See URBAN VON WAHLDE, "The Terms for Religious Authorities in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Literary Strata?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979) pp. 231-253; "The Johannine Jews: A Critical Survey", *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982) pp. 33-60; *The Earliest Version of John's Gospel: Recovering the Gospel of Signs* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989).

⁷ See RAYMOND E. BROWN, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979); DAVID RENSBERGER, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988). Recent Studies are listed by GÉRALD CARON, "Exploring a Religious Dimension: The Johannine Jews", *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 24 (1995) pp. 159-171 (at p. 159) and MATTHIAS RISSI, "Die Juden' in Johannevangelium", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (ed. Wolfgang Haase) II Band 26; 3. Teilband pp. 2038-98.

⁸ See CLAUS WESTERMANN, *The Gospel of John in the Light of the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998; MAARTEN J.J. MENKEN, *Old Testament Quotations in the Fourth Gospel: Studies in Textual Form* (Kampen: Pharos, 1996); G. REIM, *Erweiterte Studien zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund des Johannes* (Erlangen, 1995) and WOLFGANG KRAUS, "Johannes und das Alte Testament: Ueberlegungen zum Umgang mit der Schrift im Johannevangelium im Horizont Biblischer Theologie", *Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 88 (1997) pp. 1-23.

Grelot.⁹ He refers to the great commentaries on John since Rudolf Bultmann's in 1941 but debates only with Claude Tresmontant and John A. T. Robinson.¹⁰

II. Pierre Grelot and Gérard Caron

Grelot begins with an investigation of the term "Judean, Jew" in the Jewish Scriptures and the rest of the New Testament before he places each Johannine use in context. Then he explores possible "stages of composition" for the Fourth Gospel, again reviewing the entire text. In chapters IV and V he contrasts "indications of antiquity" (Temple worship and feasts) with those of "late redaction" (the "law", expulsion from the synagogue). The final chapters discuss the controversy between Jews and Christians concerning Jesus under the headings "Jesus and Jewish practices", "titles and functions of Jesus", "the death and resurrection of Jesus", "fulfillment of the Scriptures". Then he analyzes the evangelist's attitude toward Judaism, concluding that "Jesus is too Jewish, his evangelist is too Jewish for anti-Judaism to be the *leitmotif* of the work. It is a work of controversy". For this reason, it makes manifest two correlative facts: "Judaism remains a question posed to every Christian for the understanding of his faith; conversely, Jesus remains a question posed to every Jew for the understanding of his Jewishness" (p. 183). Without referring to *Nostra Aetate*, Grelot states that Jews today are not in solidarity with Caiaphas any more than non-Jews

⁹ *Les Juifs dans l'Evangile selon Jean: Enquête historique et réflexion théologique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1995). See the reviews by LUC DEVILLERS in *Revue Biblique* (1996) pp. 288-298 and GIUSEPPE FERRARO in *Gregorianum* 78 (1997) pp. 158-159. On background discussed by Grelot, see MARGRET H. WILLIAMS, "The Meaning and function of *Ioudaios* in Graeco-Roman inscriptions", *Zeitschrift fuer Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 116 (1997) pp. 249-262; SHAYE J. D. COHN, "Ioudaios: 'Judaean' and 'Jew' in Susanna, First Maccabees, and Second Maccabees", *Geschichte-Traditions-Reflexion: Festschrift fuer Martin Hengel* (ed. Hubert Cancik et al.) (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1996) I pp. 211-220; GRAHAM HARVEY, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); L. DEVILLERS, "La lettre de Soumaios et les Ioudaioi johanniques", *RB* 105 (1998) pp. 556-581.

¹⁰ J.A.T. ROBINSON, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977) and *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985).

are with Pilate (p. 183). The Christian should not enter into polemics with Jews. For him Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but in a way different from what Judaism of the time expected... He must remember what Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me..." (John 6:44)... "At the threshold of personal conscience, the Christian more than anyone else has the strict duty to stop in silence" (p. 184).

Earlier, Grelot asked: "Does the way the evangelist speaks of the Jews manifest only his desire to present, concerning Jesus, historical reality as it was in his time? Does it not also manifest a theological intention which actualizes past history to cast light on the current period? These two goals are not incompatible, if one understands them precisely: their association is essential to the very idea of Gospel" (p. 97). To examine the final edition of the Gospel in relation to "the Jews", Grelot discusses the use of *apodynamos* in John 9:22, 12:42; 16:2 (a *hapax legomenon* in all Scriptures). He notes: "Exclusion from the Synagogue does not focus on the *places* called by this name, but on the *assemblies* which are held there and which constitute the gathering of the community of Israel" (p. 93). Persecution might lead even to death (16:2, cf. Acts 7:45-58; 12:1-3; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* xx:197-203). The reference in John 12:42 to the Pharisees hints at their authority after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70. The account of the man born blind (John 9:1-41) shows the difference between the religious inquiry of some Pharisees (9:13-17) and the official questioning by the authorities (9:18-34), whom John calls "the Jews" (9:18, 22). John does not hesitate to project the general measure existing in his time to the narrative of the man born blind (pp. 94-95). The Jewish Christian "expelled from the synagogue" not only lost his social relationship with the Jewish community, but also his civil status before Roman law, which recognized that the Law of Moses governed Jews, who were exempt from worship of the divinized Emperor (p. 96).

Unfortunately, no documents are extant concerning Jewish-Christians and the *privilegia* granted to the Jews of the Empire. Silence about the requirement to pay the *fiscus judaicus* to the Capitoline in Rome after 70 may indicate that Jews who became Christian were

no longer subjected to the *privilegia*. (However, lack of information about so many questions makes silence a weak argument).

Like many scholars, Grelot attributes the expulsion of Christians to the *birkhat ha-minim* (not a blessing but a curse against heretics) added to the Eighteen Benedictions after 85 in association with the "synod of Javneh/Jamnia". Already in 1977 Asher Finkel argued that the "minim" at the time were Jews who had become Gnostics. Only after the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135) was the prayer applied to Jewish-Christians for their refusal to accept Rabbi Akiba's declaration that Bar Kochba was a Messiah.¹¹ The first direct reference to the synagogue curse against *nosrim* (Christians) comes in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho (16:4; 47:5; 96:2; perhaps 137:2) which purports to record a discussion shortly after the second revolt.

Why do scholars postulate that an official decision and prayer lie behind the Johannine references to expulsion from the synagogue? A small community would have felt the brunt of a practice to exclude their Jewish members from the synagogue and especially disciplinary actions that might be interpreted as persecution. This would be sufficient to attribute discriminatory acts to "the Jews" (9:22) or "the Pharisees" (12:42), long before scrutiny of Christians became policy throughout the Empire.

Grelot's analysis of key passages shows that the term "the Jews" often designates the adversaries of Jesus; most of them were members of the chief priesthood or learned Pharisees (7:32, 45; 11:47, 57; 18:3). Caiaphas played the determining role in the decision to have Jesus put to death (11:47-50). The emphasis on the responsibility of the high priesthood, representing "the nation" before Roman authorities, explains Jesus' response to Pilate: "... "The one who handed me over to you has the greater guilt" (19:11). There is no collective guilt imputed to "the nation" (18:35) but a *personal* sin committed by the high priest in favoring national interests (p. 98-99). The verb *pardidumi* ("to hand over") refers to Judas Iscariot eight times in this Gospel, but also to the agents of Caiaphas

¹¹ Finkel's paper at the National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations was published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18:2 (1981) pp. 231-250 under the title "Yavneh's Liturgy and Early Christianity".

(18:30, 35); Pilate himself delivered Jesus to "the Jews" i.e. to the chief priests, to be crucified (19:16). The chief priests alone are in the forefront (19:15,21); behind them is the authority of Caiaphas. Pharisees are totally absent from the narrative (p. 158). Certainly this clear limitation of responsibility for the death of Jesus is important for exegetes, theologians and preachers to recognize.

Although some recent commentaries have only a brief mention of the phrase "the Jews",¹² Francis J. Moloney has an insightful reflection on "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel. He states that "the Jews" do not represent the Jewish people but are those who have made up their mind about Jesus. "The conflicts between Jesus and 'the Jews' are more the reflection of a christological debate at the end of the first century than a record of encounters between Jesus and his fellow Israelites in the thirties of that century. *They do not accurately report the experiences of the historical Jesus* (italics in the original)... The expression 'the Jews' in the Gospel indicates those people who have taken up a theological and christological position that rejects Jesus and the claims made for him by his followers".¹³ These studies on the several levels of the Gospel text are helpful in depicting the tensions that must have existed in the area where the community of John lived. However, the pastoral application of these insights is an enormous challenge for the Church's teachers and preachers as they distill the wisdom of the Gospel for a generation that needs to be inoculated against the anti-Jewish venom that has been transmitted from both Eastern and Western thinkers as deriving from the Fourth Gospel.¹⁴

¹² BEN WITHERINGTON III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) pp. 138, 387 note 10.

¹³ FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ For example, David Efroymson has studied "Jews and Judaism in Chrysostom on John" (unpublished essay) to complement the work done on Chrysostom's eight Homilies or Discourses against the Jews, translated as *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* by Paul Harkins (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1977). Without mentioning the Fourth Gospel, Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) offers a wide-ranging discussion of the theological reasons for Christian teachings against Jews rather than the persuasive "social conflict" theory. See my review in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1997) pp. 289-291.

Grelot offers a diachronic study with a theological and pastoral interest by trying to discern the evangelist's presentation of the teaching mission of Jesus and make application to the period in which the writer worked. Taking a synchronic approach to the Gospel in its present form, Gérald Caron offers a thorough review of contemporary studies and then focuses especially on John chapters 5 and 8, situating this discussion of *hoi Ioudaioi* in the wider context of the entire Gospel.¹⁵

The first reference to "the Jews" (Jn 1:19) implies an official character to their intervention, as may be noted in many subsequent texts. However, the phrase is not simply a substitute for "the authorities". The expression "the Jews" is invariably in a religious context, so John is dealing with "official Judaism", associated with Jerusalem; each encounter of Jesus with "the Jews" is at the occasion of a feast. This means that Jn 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2 and 11:55 are not simply "neutral" uses of the term. As guardians of the Temple and the Law, "the Jews" reject the claims of Jesus and attack him with death threats. Jn 5:16-18 manifests the murderous plot to destroy Jesus because of the Law (pp. 77-78).

According to Jn 5:19-30, Jesus judges and brings life according to a person's response to his word; "greater things than these" (5:20) may be seen in the light of verse 25 to refer to events at the "hour" of Jesus, his elevation on the cross (see 3:15-16; 8:28; 12:32). The "amazement" of "the Jews" (5:20) indicates that the evangelist has hope for them; however, 5:18 makes clear that "the Jews" have made their choice and come under the judgment of Jesus (5:30) which will reveal their true identity, when they make their choice again before the "greater works" whereby the Father will reveal the Son (pp. 120-121).

As interpreters of the Law, "the Jews" refused to believe in Jesus; they erred when they pitted his word against God's word in the Law. Where would Moses stand (5:45-47)? Those who come to Jesus but seek to destroy him (5:18), not the Jewish people, are

¹⁵ G. CARON, *Qui sont les Juifs de l'évangile de Jean?* (Quebec: Editions Bellarmin, 1997). This is a revision of a doctoral dissertation at St. Paul University in Ottawa in 1988. He does not cite Grelot.

those whom Jesus accused of never hearing the word or seeing the face of God the Father (p. 140). "The Jews" are "sinners" who erroneously claim to follow Moses. They place self-glory before that of God; they are not faithful to the Law of Moses but to their own law (p. 155).

In Jn 8:12-20 the world/darkness are unmasked by the coming of Jesus as the light. Rather than make "the Jews" symbols or representatives of the world hostile to Jesus, it is more faithful to the text to find "the world/darkness" in the work of "the Jews". Then "the world" serves to define "the Jews", not the other way around. This passage establishes a close link between the Pharisees and "the Jews" but does not identify them as the same, since "the Jews" can include the chief priests and the crowd as well as Pharisees. An attitude or type of "Judaism" is found in each of these groups, especially Pharisees and chief priests (pp. 177-178).

Jn 8:21-30 depicts "the Jews" as belonging to this world here below; they are incapable of appreciating the mystery of Jesus and his relation with the Father. However, once Jesus is lifted up on the cross and they know him, they will have a second opportunity to accept or refuse God's salvation proclaimed in him (8:28; 12:32 see p. 197).

"Those Jews who believed in him" (Jn 8:31) did not remain in him in order to know the truth and find freedom. They remained slaves without knowing it. Jesus acknowledged that they were children of Abraham (8:33,37). Their claim to be children of God as well led to hostility against Jesus (p. 216). Their attitude showed that they were not what they claimed to be. Their murderous intention revealed their real father, the one under whose influence they stand: the devil, the adversary of Jesus and enemy of the truth. "The Jews" are called liars only in 8:55, but this may be inferred from 8:45-47; they could not hear the words of Jesus because they were not from God (p. 238).

Judging Jesus to be a blasphemer, they tried to stone him. Throughout the Fourth Gospel "the Jews" are implicated in all references to the death of Jesus except 11:45-54, where chief priests and Pharisees consult. It is noteworthy that the reason given here is

political, differing totally from the religious motives of "the Jews" throughout the Gospel (see 5:18, 8:59; 10:31-33; 19:7). Thus, the Gospel of John has two dimensions, offering two different visions of the same reality. The expression "the Jews" clearly indicates the religious dimension. These two dimensions explain the constant change of interlocutors, especially in the Passion narrative. One should not try to identify the two terms but pay attention to the dimension that each represents (pp. 256-257).

After his detailed discussion of chapters 5 and 8, Caron notes that "the Jews" are placed in direct relations with Jesus, the man born blind and Pilate but never with the Pharisees, the chief priests or the crowd. Twice they seem to designate the powerful group of chief priests and Pharisees (cf. Jn 11:45-51 with 18:14 and 18:3 with 18:12). In at least two texts (6:41, 52) they are mentioned instead of the crowd, as if the latter was transformed into "the Jews".

The text seems to use the phrase "the Jews" to exclude the other terms; they may be found in the same narrative but never in the same phrase (e.g. chief priests and "the Jews" are not interchangeable). "The Jews" do not form another group alongside the Pharisees, chief priests or even the crowd, yet they constitute an "agent" totally different from them. This cannot be ignored without changing the Johannine text radically. To respect the distinctive character of "the Jews" and their relation with the other groups, this term should be understood in the sense of "Judaism".

Caron offers three reasons for this rendering of *hoi Ioudaioi*. It excludes a nationalistic or ethnic sense and connotes the religious preoccupation of "the Jews". They are concerned with the question of the Messiah (1:19-28; 9:22; 10:24). As defenders of the Temple and the Law, "the Jews" challenge the deeds of Jesus (2:13-22; 5:16-18) and his teaching (19:7), as well as those who respond to him (9:22; 19:38). Confrontations always take place about the time of a feast of "the Jews", when they celebrate their identity (their origins and history). They react to the identity of the Messiah, to the Temple, the Law, the feasts and confession of the one God as these related to their competence. The most important benefit of this understanding of the place and role of "the Jews" in John is

the double dimension given to the narrative: political (focusing on the authorities) and religious (representing the authorities and/or the people adhering to a particular type of Judaism). The phrase has three traits: official character, centered in Jerusalem, very hostile to Jesus. Its pervasive influence, even on crowds in Galilee, is noted in Jn 6:41 and 52 (where the term cannot refer to the authorities).

This "Judaism" is found among chief priests and Pharisees, but not all of the latter (see Nicodemus in 3:1-10; 7:50-51 and others in 9:16); they are absent from the Passion narrative. Only "the Jews" remain hostile to Jesus throughout the Gospel.

Caron then reflects on "the Jews" and Jesus in relation to the Law of Moses, Moses himself, Abraham and God. They accuse Jesus of breaking the Law and try to execute him in the name of the Law (5:18 and 19:7), for which Jesus accuses them of transgressing the Law (7:19-23). Sometimes John uses "Law" as equivalent to "Scripture" (1:17), but usually the term has a negative connotation, associated with "the Jews" (10:34; 18:31, see 15:25) or the Pharisees (8:17). They are faithful to a false interpretation of the Law of Moses. While claiming to be disciples of Moses (9:28), they do not believe in him nor in what he wrote, bearing witness to Jesus (5:39, 46-47).

"The Jews" are descendants of Abraham but do not act as his children since they seek to kill Jesus (8:56-59). They represent a pseudo-Judaism. The true Judaism, which does the works of Abraham, believes in Moses, recognizes in Jesus the one sent by the Father, led the disciples to Jesus (1:29-51). "The Jews" claim to be children of God (8:41) yet Jesus states that they have not heard his voice nor seen his face (5:37). Their search to kill the one sent by the Father (8:40-42) leads to the accusation that they are murderers and liars like the devil, their father (8:44). The devil, not "the Jews", is the principal adversary of Jesus and he is the power that holds them. Although they are murderers like he is and liars, this is not by nature, as in the case of the devil, but because they are completely under his dominion. Jesus speaks the truth as faithful ambassador of the Father but because "the Jews" are liars (8:45-47, 55) they are opposed to him. The intention to destroy Jesus (seven

times in Jn 1-12) is an essential element in John's portrayal of "the Jews". This official "pseudo-Judaism" of Jerusalem is responsible for the death of Jesus.

If one takes seriously the role of "the Jews" in the Passion narrative, it is difficult to consider them to be simply representatives or symbols of the world hostile to God and to Jesus. "The world", in its negative connotation, designates the darkness which dwells in humanity and among "the Jews", i.e. the official "Judaism" of Jerusalem. "The world" describes a quality or trait of "the Jews" (see 8:23) who pertain to the domain of "the Prince of this world" (12:31; 14:30).

Even if this "pseudo-Judaism" is judged and condemned for its culpable rejection of Jesus, he is more interested in their future, when they will see "greater works" (5:20) linked to the "hour" of Jesus (5:25) when they will see the extraordinary manifestation of God's love in the elevation of the Son of Man (3:14-16; 8:21-29; 12:31-32). Once the Prince of this world has been vanquished and his dominion broken, "the Jews" will have another opportunity to respond to the invitation of Jesus. The Gospel does not state what happened (p. 287).

Although Caron ends with the statement that "the Jews" have a second chance, he did not discuss two relevant passages: The "chief priests of the Jews" complained about Pilate's inscription (19:20-21), which was read by "many of the Jews". On Easter Sunday, the disciples locked the doors of the room "for fear of the Jews" (20:19).

In the light of the declared purpose of the Gospel (20:30-31), the authors and redactors would see conversion as the only viable response to Christian proclamation of the Paschal Mystery, the "hour" of Jesus. A study of "the Jews" should include a reflection on the *titulus* fixed to the cross, stating that the crime of Jesus was the accusation that he declared himself "King of the Jews" (19:19, see the dialogue with Pilate in 18:33-38). Ending his investigation of "the episode in John", Raymond E. Brown wrote: "In John this is Jesus' final encounter with his Jewish adversaries, and the 'chief priests of the Jews' still refuse him any acknowledgment. That is

given by the representative of the Gentiles".¹⁶ The citation of a clause from Zechariah 12:10 is also pertinent to this same study. In reference to the three-fold prediction of Jesus being lifted up (3:14, 8:28; 12:32-34), Brown remarked that "there is always a twofold aspect, positive and negative, in the judgment constituted by seeing and encountering Jesus; and that will divide those who encounter the pierced one as well. Those who accept the witness of the beloved disciple see and believe... But for 'the Jews' who caused the piercing by their demand to have Jesus' legs broken, the pierced one is in Johannine thought a sign of punishing judgment".¹⁷

Again on the level of personal encounters we find the theme of bringing judgment upon oneself in response to Jesus (see 12:44-50). The Gospel teaches that a specific act of faith is required from an inquirer of good will (1:11-13; 3:5-8), who must be drawn by the Father (6:44). The Johannine references to Nicodemus are pertinent to this perspective of Christian hope for "the Jews". Slowly he is drawn to appreciate Jesus as teacher (3:1-10; 7:50-52) and his deed of mercy after the death of the Master would seem to show a deep commitment to him (19:39). Thus, one identified as "a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews" became an exemplar for that change of attitude presented by Caron. The Johannine epistles do not seem to offer evidence of the groups joining the community. Luke, however, drew attention to the increase of adherents to the Jerusalem (Christian) assembly, stating that "even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Just as John offers some hope for those among "the Jews", so the Gospel also presents the risk taken by Jesus in choosing disciples by contrasting two whose name is "Judah". Of the apostles Jesus asked: "Is not one of you a devil?" (6:70). The foreknowledge of Jesus is a theme for the evangelist (2:24-25), who refers the question to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot (6:71 see 13:2, 21-30, especially "Satan entered him" in verse 27). Only Luke (6:16) among the Synoptics lists two apostles with the name "Judas" but John

¹⁶ R.E. BROWN, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) volume 2 p. 967.

¹⁷ Brown, op. cit. p. 1188.

14:22 reports a question by "Judas, not the Iscariot" at the Last Supper. Whether this is the proper name of Thomas ("the Twin", see 11:16) is irrelevant to the point of contrast between the betrayer and another man of the same name. Given the importance of the term "the Jews" to the evangelist, there may be a message for readers that the proper moral response depends on the right relationship with Jesus, without whom we can do nothing (15:5) and the community (see 12:6, where Judas Iscariot is accused of theft).¹⁸ This challenge of Jesus' message to each person is stressed in 12:44-50. In this passage summarizing his ministry, Jesus does not so much judge the world as provide a context wherein each person faces his or her God with the witness that conscience bears regarding obedience to the divine commandment. This judgment is beyond the knowledge of all except God, so the Christian must be very circumspect about the condemnation of others, including "the Jews".

The careful interpretation of each passage of the Gospel, with attention to clues about developments in the earlier tradition (Grelot) as well as to the final text (Caron) is important to the larger enterprise of a new Christian "theology of Judaism". Clearly, the work must build upon other portions of the New Testament and the evidence of God's plan in the survival and vitality of Jewish communities in spite of tremendous adversity through the ages (see Acts 5:38-39). The teaching and example of Pope John Paul II has provided a firm foundation for Catholics engaged this essential task of repentance and reconciliation.¹⁹

¹⁸ The Qumran Community, with whose vocabulary and imagery John shares in many ways, emphasized the danger of hypocrisy and other flaws among its members. Like John, this community's extant writings present a stark contrast with the official Judaism centered in the Temple of Jerusalem. However, they are even less open than the fourth evangelist to a salutary change on the part of these leaders.

¹⁹ See EUGENE J. FISHER and LEON KLENICKI (ed.) *Pope John Paul II, Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) and *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998). For a list of recent scholarly works in this field, see my essay in SIDIC 28 (no. 2, 1995).

III. Key Passages: positive and negative (John 4:22; 8:44)

Neither Grelot nor Caron examine the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman with regard to the statement "Salvation is from the Jews". Rudolf Bultmann declared it to be a gloss because it did not seem to be consistent with the other uses of "the Jews". However, with Moloney, we would note: "The Johannine Jesus speaks in coherence with the rest of the early Church, which was never ashamed of the fact that its origins lay within the story of the Jewish people".²⁰

After a review of German scholarship on John 4:22, Otto Betz²¹ has shown how the statement "Salvation is from the Jews" is rooted in Jacob's blessing of Judah. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until *Shiloh* comes, and to him shall be the obedience of peoples" (Genesis 49:13). In the Patriarchal Blessing from Qumran Cave 4, *Shiloh* is interpreted as a reference to the Messiah in connection with Isaiah 11:1,4 and 2 Samuel 7:12-13. John notes the Samaritan woman's understanding of the same point: "I know that the Messiah is coming" (4:25); the peoples will listen to him as an authoritative teacher. They will receive the gift of salvation through Jesus, the Savior of the world (4:42).

This study is very helpful for an appreciation of John's statement but it does not investigate the immediate context. Jesus told the Samaritan woman: "You worship what you do not know: we worship what we do know: for salvation is from the Jews" (4:22). Only by considering the background of the Jerusalem Temple and its liturgy can the Johannine vision of God's gift of salvation be appreciated.²² Knowing God's plan as celebrated in the feasts and

²⁰ MOLONEY, *op. cit.* p. 132.

²¹ OTTO BETZ, "To Worship God in Spirit and in Truth: Reflections on John 4:20-26" *Standing Before God* (ed. A. Finkel and L. Frizzell) (New York: Ktav, 1981) pp. 53-72 at 65-68.

²² See my essay, "Temple and Community: Johannine Spirituality", *Mystics of the Book* (ed. R. A. Herrera) (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON, "Reflections on Worship in the Gospel of John", *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 19 (1998) pp. 259-278. The important question of Jesus "fulfilling" or "replacing" the Jewish feasts will be discussed elsewhere.

fasts of the Jewish people, beginning with Passover but also including Hanukkah (10:22), the evangelist prepares his community to understand Christian worship in relation to the "hour" of Jesus. For Christians in any age to grasp the message of John, they must be imbued with a deep understanding of Jewish worship in the Second Temple Period.

Perhaps the single most devastating statement about "the Jews" in the Fourth Gospel is the accusatory dictum summarized as "Your father is the devil" (8:44). Is this text (or the tradition behind it) the background for the phrase *synagogē tou satana* (Apoc 2:9; 3:9)?²³ Rather than showing an appreciation for the Jewish heritage of Jesus and his Gospel, the Church Fathers (especially Ambrose and John Chrysostom) and later generations of Christian teachers used this image of the diabolical to describe the synagogue and Jewish prayer in their own times.

These preachers and writers did not realize that the intense pitting of life against death, truth against falsehood, God against Satan in John was a literary approach that derived from polemics between Jewish teachers of the age.²⁴ They must have understood that the reprimand of Jesus to Peter: "Get behind me, satan!" (Matthew 16:23) was an admonition rather than a declaration of definitive rejection. Unfortunately, it suited their purpose to construe this debate about Jews being the children of God and of Abraham so that Jesus seemed to be making an eternally valid condemnation of all Jews of all periods of post-biblical history, except those who converted to Christianity.

²³ F.W. HORN, "Zwischender Synagoge des Satans und dem neuen Jerusalem", *Zeitschrift fuer Religion und Geistesgeschichte* 46 (1994) pp. 143-162. The term *synagogē* was transliterated into Latin and other languages with devastating effect. The New American Bible reads "assembly of Satan".

²⁴ John's use of opposites to represent the contrast between Jesus and his opponents is a technique found throughout the scrolls of the Qumran Community. Its opponents are called "son of Belial" (1Q Serek HaYaHaD 2:5, 22, etc.), which would be an equivalent of the Johannine concept "sons of the devil". On later developments, see Frank Felsenstein, "Jews and devils: Anti-Semitic stereotypes of late medieval and renaissance England", *Journal of Literature and Theology* 4 (1990) pp. 15-28; Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections on the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1997). John 8:44 was brought into Nazi propaganda on every level, from little children's picture books to roadside signs.

We should now explain that, like the prophets of earlier times, John the Baptist and Jesus exercised the function of *mokeah*, "admonisher" to their peers as teachers of the ordinary people. Name-calling was a method commonly used to shake those judged to be complacent leaders into a realization of the effect of their instruction. Sometimes a title, such as "guides of the blind" would be reversed (see Romans 2:19; Matthew 15:14; 23:16, 19, 24) to startle the opponents into a reflection on their work. Because misinterpretation of Scripture could be attributed to the devil (see Matt 4:6) erroneous teachings might be wittingly or unwittingly diabolical (see 2 Cor 11:14-15). Scandals or obstacles to the faith of the "little ones" must be avoided at all costs (see Matt 18:6-10). But, on the other hand, in situations of conflict or disagreement, people should hearken to the advice of Gamaliel: "Any group of human origin will break up of its own accord, but if a movement comes from God you will not be able to destroy them, but you might find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:39).

As Jules Isaac discussed traditional "teaching of contempt", he listed three major themes: the decide charge, the accusation that Jews are of the devil and to do the devil's work and that they are rejected by God.²⁵ In his evaluation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church with regard to Jews and Judaism, Rabbi Jack Bemporad found that these three insidious teachings have been eliminated. The only use of John 8:44 is to authenticate the existence of the devil.²⁶ One would hope that future editions of the *Catechism* will focus on another more pertinent passage!

IV. Liturgical Use of John

The Fourth Gospel is not proclaimed throughout the three-year lectionary of the post-Vatican II Roman rite in the same way as the

²⁵ Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

²⁶ LAWRENCE E. FRIZZELL (ed.) *The Catholic Catechism on Jews and Judaism* (South Orange: Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies, 1996).

Synoptics. Certain passages of John are introduced sporadically in "Ordinary Time". John 4:5-42; 9:1-41 and 11:1-45 are chosen for the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent in Year A. These dramatic passages are used as well in the other two years when catechumens are progressing through the revised Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Leaders and sponsors involved in this ministry must be prepared carefully so that anti-Jewish prejudice does not emerge from study of or preaching on these Gospel texts.²⁷

Certainly the reading of the Passion according to John on Good Friday necessitates dealing with the inclination of the faithful to generalize at least to all Jews of that time when they hear that "the crowd", identified as "the Jews" (19:7), called for Jesus to be crucified.²⁸ Ideally, pastoral preparation for Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum should include these themes pertinent to Christian-Jewish relations. However, this effort to study the Gospel would reach only a small part of the typical parish. A preparatory statement, to be introduced before the reading of the Passion, drawing from the 1974 "Guidelines", is an essential catechetical effort,²⁹ but is this sufficient to lead the ordinary faithful away from anti-Jewish prejudice? Given the length of the Liturgical Service and the rich themes

²⁷ An example of the danger is found in ELLEN MARIE COLLINS, *Catechism for Infant Baptism* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996). As she educates the baptismal ministry team, John 9:1-41 is dramatized with two sets of six candles: one (not yet lit) for the man born blind and the other (already lit) for "the Pharisees". In the context of a dialogue, candles are extinguished on the Pharisee side and lit for the man who received sight (pp. 34-31). The message would be all too clear! We must alert converts to the tragedy of Christian anti-Judaism but not perpetuate it.

²⁸ On interpretations of the liturgical texts and traditions, see my forthcoming essay with J. FRANK HENDERSON, "Jews and Judaism in the Medieval Latin Liturgy", *Liturgy and Society in the Middle Ages* (ed. Thomas Heffernan, Kalamazoo: Institute of Medieval Studies) and MICHAEL MARISSIN, *Lutheranism, Anti-Judaism and Bach's St. John Passion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Although many music ministers replace the *Improperia* (Reproaches) with other hymns during the veneration of the cross on Good Friday, this traditional piece, so commonly misapplied to refer to the Jewish people, may enter paraliturgical services, such as the way of the cross. Pastors and educators must be vigilant!

²⁹ COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS, "Guidelines for Religious Relations with the Jews (December 1, 1974), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (ed. Austin Flannery) (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975) pp. 743-749; EUGENE FISHER and LEON KLENICKI (ed.), *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990) pp. 29-37.

it presents in relation to the entire Paschal Mystery, the average homilist will not dwell on the interpretation of "the Jews" in the Gospel. In some countries the text of the Lectionary itself has been adapted for a liturgical proclamation that avoids problematic statements. Certain inflammatory verses have been omitted; in other places, where the context shows that the authorities are designated, the phrase "the Jews" has been replaced by "the religious leaders". There is no substitute for adult education using a scholarly translation of the Gospel. In and out of season, teachers and homilists should foster a positive appreciation of the rich and varied response to the biblical heritage among the Jews of the Second Temple period. Then the faithful will be equipped to reject a stereotypically polemical reading of Gospel passages. Simplified or "sanitized" translations alone will not suffice, because eventually someone from a fundamentalist background will show uninstructed people "the real Gospel". Then they would be overwhelmed by "the Gospel truth" that seems to portray "the Jews" or "the Pharisees" in such dismal terms. In Italy and, more recently, in Poland the local hierarchy has designated a Sunday each year for every parish to provide positive instruction on Jews and Judaism. That requires an educated clergy! There is much to accomplish in coming years, but recognition of the burden and challenge is the crucial first step toward a commitment of continuing responsibility. A proper understanding of the Jewish background to the New Testament is an essential element in Christian education throughout the world. Some Christians in Africa and Asia speak of "the European problem" i.e., the Shoah (Holocaust) and concern for Christian-Jewish relations. However, the very integrity of Christian faith everywhere requires positive attention to Judaism and the Jewish people. Our task is not merely to overcome Christian anti-Judaism but to allow the deepest resonances of God's Word in both Testaments to influence the lives of the faithful. Jewish and Christian scholars and teachers have much to share in responding to the biblical message.³⁰

³⁰ Some of the issues raised here are discussed in DARRELL J. FASCHING (ed.), *The Jewish People in Christian Preaching* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984). In January 1998

Only then can we guide people toward an appreciation of its spiritual and theological riches.

Conclusion

Any part of Sacred Scripture torn from its context and taken as the core of a condemnatory message can serve a distorted or evil purpose. Although the Fourth Gospel, designated "the spiritual Gospel" in Christian tradition, offers a profound insight into the person and work of Jesus, it contains themes and passages that must be approached with great care. In recent decades, many scholars have endeavored to apply the message of John so that the faithful will appreciate its salutary intention to the full. We salute those who have endeavored, with sensitivity to the mind of Christ, to guide the faithful so that they will respect the people and faith wherein he revealed himself to the Church.

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Professors Reimund Bieringer and Dr. Didier Pollefray of Leuven University initiated a research project on the internet on "The Gospel of John and Jewish-Christian Dialogue". The address is ww.kuleuven.ac.be/facdep/theology/en/pj-john-jews2.htm.