Jewish Studies and the Gospel of St John

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Edited by

Zev Garber and Kenneth L. Hanson

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

KENNETH HANSON

Why are Jewish scholars interested in the Christian Gospel of John? In most cases, it is not for theological reasons, given that traditional Christian scholarship is more than capable of examining the mental conundrums of trinitarian Christology vis-à-vis the fourth Gospel. Jewish scholarship, however, must by necessity recognize the seminal place of the Christian Gospels and John in particular in the tragic growth and development of anti-Judaism/antisemitism.

Holocaust scholar Robert Wistrich famously referred to antisemitism as the "longest hatred."[1] Its roots are deeper and its consequences more devastating than any form of ethnic or racial prejudice ever manifested during the course of human civilization. The deliberate targeting and persecution of sundry minority communities has been all too common in world history, but attempts to annihilate the Jewish people belong in a category all their own. Without question the Shoah (Holocaust) may be seen as directly rooted in religious antisemitism, which in the final analysis was spawned and encouraged by generations of clerics, going back to the earliest church fathers, and before them arguably, the New Testament. Some of the most vicious anti-Jewish verbal harangues include:

- Augustine: "Judaism, since Christ, is a corruption; indeed, Judas is the image of the Jewish people: their understanding of Scripture is carnal; they bear the guilt for the death of the Savior, for through their fathers they have killed Christ;"[2]
- John Chrysostom: "[the] synagogue [is] not only a brothel and a theater; it also is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts;"[3]

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[1] See Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred.*
[2] See Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of Antisemitism* 52.
[3] Chrysostom, *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.3.1. in *The Fathers of the Church: Saint John Chrysostom*, vol. 68.

- Justin Martyr: "All this has happened to you rightly and well, For ye slew the Just One and His prophets before Him, and now ye reject, and … dishonor those who set their hopes on Him, and God Almighty and Maker of the universe who sent Him …";[4]
- the apostle Paul: "For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets …" (1 Thess 2:14–15, NKJV).

The extent to which such influence was also rooted in the New Testament Gospels also deserves serious consideration. Of the four Christian Gospels, the book of John is arguably the most popular, and equally the most troublesome with respect to the genesis of Christian anti-Judaism/antisemitism. Down to the present day, it is doubtless the most quoted of the four Gospels, as it includes some of the most theologically significant statements attributed to Jesus. In the mouth of Jesus, we find the declaration: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV). But what of Jesus' own people, traditional Jews, who do not now and never have come to the Father by him?

Most troublesome, however, is the Gospel's bifurcation of Jesus and "the Jews," depicting the latter as antagonists, if not conspiratorial murderers. Of particular note is when Jesus, in addressing "those Jews who believed Him," declares: "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning…" (John 8:44, KJV, ed.). A related question is whether the theology presented in John is alien to Judaism. To what extent is it anti-Jewish? This is a more nuanced issue, but very much relevant to the larger discussion of the degree to which John's Gospel has historically promoted anti-Jewish sentiment

In order to understand the purportedly anti-Jewish themes in John's Gospel, it is essential to understand the overarching *raison d'être* of the book, its fundamental reason for composition. What did the Gospel set out to accomplish? Why was it important to place language in the mouth of Jesus which by anyone's estimation denigrates the Jewish people and the Jewish faith? Clearly, the Gospel sets out, from its opening verses, to combat the rising tide of Christian Gnosticism, which, as early as the late first century, was gaining in popularity across Mediterranean lands. Gnostic thought of this variety was harshly anti-Jewish in tone, differentiating the God of wrath and judgment found in the Hebrew Bible from the God of grace and mercy, conveyed in the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles.

[4] Martyr, *The Dialogue with Trypho*, 33–34, sec. 16.4.

Gnostic dualism perceived the cosmos as embodying two mutually exclusive realms. The invisible world of spirit was pure and untainted, while the physical world was intrinsically evil, as Adam's initial sin was seen as responsible for the downfall of the divine principle. Rather than God being good, having created a good world, Gnosticism inverted Jewish thought, seeing the God of Israel as the evil and deranged demiurge.[5] The natural world, as well as moral law, which was intended to regulate human behavior, was likewise viewed as corrupt and defiled. Israel's God, while responsible for all of creation, was depicted in gnostic texts as an inferior deity, whose Law/Torah and commandments (*mitzvot*) were degraded and therefore to be and rejected. Gnosticism asserted that human beings could only receive salvation through a special knowledge granted to the chosen elite via communion with spiritual entities. By transcending the false reality of the material world, the redeemed soul could grasp the eternal truth of the spirit.

To be sure, the modern study of Gnosticism has been influenced, perhaps more than by any other commentator, Hans Jonas, who characterized the gnostic use of the Hebrew Scriptures as vilification, parody, caricature, conscious perversion of meaning, wholesale reversal of value-signs, savage degrading of the sacred, and gleefully shocking blasphemy. He delineated the gnostic attitude toward Judaism as being drenched in "anti-Jewish animus." Jonas further reported that Gershom Scholem, with whom he conversed, viewed Gnosticism as "the greatest use of metaphysical antisemitism."[6] Both saw it as intrinsically and theologically antisemitic.

While John's Gospel purports to reject Gnosticism, it in fact embraces many gnostic tenets, concurrent with the rise of Pauline Christianity. Indeed, John was certainly aware of other Christian writings, including Paul's letters, and especially Colossians, which would have circulated through John's milieu. While the Gnostics conceived of the Torah as an evil revelation, the developing theology of Christianity, delineated by Paul and reflected in John, viewed it as a temporary, limited revelation, to the extent that those who continued to observe it did so in betrayal of the true light of God. The Jewish people, in their guilt for rejecting and murdering Jesus, were consequently cast as agents of Satan, who was waging war against God. Persevering in their fidelity to the Torah, which had now been nullified and declared obsolete, the Jews were viewed as being in league with Satan,

[5] Robertson, *Gnosticism and the History of Religions*, 81.
[6] Gager, *The Origins of Antisemitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, 168.

bringing to naught the salvific commission of God's son.[7]

On an important level John's Gospel contests gnostic principles, through his insistence on the corporeal physicality of the human-born Jesus: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:14, KJV). Even at the end of the gospel, John adds a detail in which a Roman soldier pierces Jesus' side ("and immediately blood and water came out"), thus underscoring his physical death (19:34). John nonetheless conveys a number of gnostic concepts, including the emphasis on spiritual rebirth, the metaphysical notion of the pre-existence of Christ, the notion that "knowing" the divine beings, father and son, may be equated with eternal life (17:3), and that the spirit alone gives life and that the flesh is of no avail (6:63). Understandably, John's Gospel enjoyed wide popularity in many gnostic circles. Most troublesome, however, is that, in perpetrating elements of gnostic ideology, it appropriates Jewishness at the same time as it repudiates Jews.

The current volume contains a lively assortment of perspectives on the troublesome issue of anti-Judaism/antisemitism in John. Did this theology, itself considered antithetical to Judaism, contribute to anti-Jewish attitudes among Christian clerics, which were ultimately filtered to the broader population of what became Christian Europe?

Zev Garber notes in his essay: "In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people by Christian believers based in part on the anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John." He points out that "the cornerstone of supersessionist Christology is the belief that Israel was spurned by divine fiat for first rejecting and then killing Jesus." He encourages the "… professing and confessing, spoken in the spirit of *teshuvah* (repentance), from Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations in the 'Body of Christ'," suggesting that "… it bodes well for Jews to offer *teshuvah* (response) in kind" (Chapter 3).

Norman Simms, writing of the Gospel's anti-Jewish themes and images, notes that "John writes, as some have said, the most and least Jewish of the Gospels." He observes that "… the situations, circumstances and religious context of John reveal the author's anti-Jewish biases." Moreover, his "grandiose philosophical language does not save him from tripping up on the way the arguments and actions come about" (Chapter 4).

[7] Maccoby, "Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism," 16.

Steven Jacobs takes up the treatment of "the Jews" as a pejorative term in the Gospel, challenging both Christians and Jews "… to meet the challenges of their own texts head-on." He notes "… a significant distinction between the *anti-Judaism* of the initial Christian communities, including the unknown Gospel authors and Paul, and the later *antisemitism* of, primarily, the Christian West, whose literalist readings of those same OT and NT texts has resulted in a history of violence towards Jews and which should never be minimized" (Chapter 5).

Chris Seeman develops a parabolic analysis of John's portrayal of "the Jews," drawing on the synoptic Parable of the Sower as an alternative frame of reference (Chapter 6). Particularly in its Markan context, this authoritative teaching of Jesus can help ordinary Christian readers see and grasp the dangers of John's polemical maneuvers while simultaneously being challenged to apply the parable's warning to themselves as readers.

Eugene Fisher considers the understandings and misunderstandings, uses and misuses of the Gospel of John in Christian teaching and preaching, how John was/is interpreted and misinterpreted in the early centuries and today to form a basis for the ancient (and, sadly, modern) Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism, which became the basis for modern racial antisemitism.

Itzchak Kerem suggests that the rapport of the Apostle John to Jews was not anti-Semitic per se, but a reflection of the disappointment that the Jews did not accept Jesus as the messiah and son of God. John positively noted Jesus ' Jewish roots, but resented the Judeans for rejecting him and portrayed Judas as the devil for betraying him.

Kenneth Hanson takes up the question of whether John's *logos* theology, "… while appearing alien to Jewish thought as traditionally expressed, may in fact be seen as adhering in a broad sense to some of the earliest and most ancient contours of Jewish messianism" (Chapter 9). He also deals with a passage traditionally placed in the Lucan account, but which likely belongs in John, regarding the woman caught in adultery.

Herbert Basser argues that there must have been knowledge of a Johannine tradition in Jewish Sources and of Jewish tradition in Johannine sources, affirming Jesus 'approval of circumcision and the oral laws of the Sabbath. He posits that a significant sector of the Johannine communities were Torah observant, while at the same time affirming Jesus as a divine or deified man, infused with God's identity.

Finally, Nathan Harpaz notes that the popularity of John as a disciple, as he was depicted in Christian iconography, also illuminates the production of anti-Jewish images inspired by his demonization of Jews in his Gospel. Throughout the Middle Ages images of the Ecclesia and Synagoga, distorted Jewish faces in different episodes of the Passion, or the manifestation of the Jewish hats were surfacing in European Christian Art. During the time of the Crusaders, the Black Plague, and beyond, anti-Jewish images were intensified. Such images are another legacy of the Gospel with which contemporary Christians must cope.

It is hoped that the diversity of approaches reflected here will further enliven an interfaith discussion which has already admirably begun, but which is still in its relative infancy.

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CHAPTER ONE

ANTISEMITISM IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL: EDITOR'S NOTES

ZEV GARBER

Gospel of John: Introduction and Overview

Tradition and modern scholarship differ regarding the authorship and time of composition of the Fourth Gospel. The former maintains that knowledge of the Fourth Gospel extends to the second century (first half, texts of St. Polycarp and St. Ignatius of Antioch; second half, attested by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and the Muratorian canon) and the authorship is credited to St. John the Apostle. Contemporary academics reflect the total rejection of authenticity, historicity, and unity of the Fourth Gospel to acknowledging an amount of Apostolic inspiration and historicity. Authorship/unity attributed to John the Presbyter is based on a passage preserved by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiastica*, III xxxix, 4) where a reference to John in the list of the Apostles is immediately followed by the mention of John, called the "Elder". Church historian Eusebius claims that the Apostle John and John the Presbyter lived in Ephesus at the same time. Modern scholarship rejects the two John hypothesis and claims that only John the Elder lived in Ephesus at the time and that he is the author of the Fourth Gospel. Conservative scholarship rejects this view and claims that the Apostle John is the author supported by tradition and by internal evidence, e.g., the author's presence in the Prologue (John 1:14) and related events (John 1:29,35,39;4:6 and on). The conservative view rejects John the Presbyter and opines that the Beloved Disciple and the Apostle John are the same person witnessed by his testimony at the crucifixion (John 19:35) and the ending of the Gospel (John 21:24).

The Gospel of St. John, also known as the Fourth Gospel, differs considerably from the preceding three Synoptic Gospels in regard to

content, objective, and theology. Outstanding incidents include the shift of Jesus' activity from Galilee to Jerusalem; Jesus overturning the money changers table is found at the end of his ministry in the Synoptics account but at the start of his calling in John; and the shifting of the dates of the Last Supper and Crucifixion from Nisan 14 and 15 to Nisan 13 and 14. Additionally, the narrative of the Adulterous Woman (John 7:53 –8: 11) is unusual. This pericope is not found in the Synoptics nor in the original text of the Fourth Gospel nor in many of the Greek manuscripts except for Codex Bezae nor in manuscripts of the Coptic, Latin, and Syriac versions. Nonetheless, the content of the woman and her accusers mirror the historicity and teaching of Jesus (forgiveness, mercy, turn the other cheek, etc.) and fit accordingly with received narratives from the Synoptics.

The tenor of the Fourth Gospel is different in thought and presentation than the Synoptics. Teachings of Jesus are delivered in discourses not in parables nor sayings. Additions and omissions distinguish the Gospel of John from the Synoptics. For example, John emphasizes the divinity of Jesus but excludes the body and blood. Eucharist symbolism at the Last Supper; and the raising of Lazarus is excluded from the Synoptics. To explain the differences in content and orientation, conservative scholars understand the objective of John to be higher learning and doctrines reserved for the disciples of Jesus based on the popular catechetical teachings of the Synoptics reserved for the common folks. For example, the intent of the Fourth Gospel is to strengthen the believers' faith in Jesus as the Redeemer and the Son of God, so that they may have life in his name (John 20:31). So understood is the Logos doctrine of the Prologue to represent the theology of the Incarnation in philosophical terms (John 1:1–18). This teaching is manifested throughout the Gospel of John though the Logos term is mentioned only in the Prologue suggesting to some scholars that the word was later added to enable the Johannine doctrine to be more appealing and acceptable to Hellenistic readers.

Thematic narrative progressively underscores the Johannine theme of the manifestation of the Divine Word, the Light in the darkness. The Light appears and is gladly received by people with joy (John 1–4). When Jesus ' teaching becomes more specific and directional, people begin to accept or not accept his teachings (John 5–6). Formation of two parties, those who oppose and those who accept the teachings of Jesus become his faithful followers (John 7–12). To a small group of loyalist followers, Jesus reveals his inner being, purpose, and teachings (John 13–17). The powers of darkness seem to have conquered (John 18–19). But their success is only

temporary for the final victory is that of the triumphant Risen Christ (John 20–21).

Compared to the Synoptics, Christology is the dominant and repeated doctrine in the Gospel of John. All who are faithful and loyal are referenced as the children of God, but Jesus, the pre-existent Logos (John 1:1–5; 8:58; 17:5, etc.) is the only-begotten Son of the Father (John 3:16–18). The root of Trinitarianism is clearly planted in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus claims his unity with God and Jews respond with blasphemy (Jon 5:18). He accepts his disciples' accolade that he is all-knowing (John 16:30), he and the Father are one (John 10:30), and own the same possessions (John 16:15). This union is coordinated by the Holy Ghost who dwells in the faithful (John 14: 17, 26) and is their guide to fulness of truth (John 16:13). Visible signs of this spiritual-human unity are the loving observance of Christ-God's commandments (John 14:21); total peace and interior joy even in the midst of persecution (John 14:27; 15:11, 20); and the union of the faithful among themselves, a union seen to model the union of the Father with the Son (John 17: 20–24). Nonetheless, several Johannine verses suggest otherwise. Jesus teaches his dependency on God the Father (John 5:19, 26) and his inferiority as man to God the Father (John 14:28). It appears that the teaching of the Incarnation, that is, Jesus is truly man and truly God, is not emphasized or taught. Yet in the Prologue, Jesus is portrayed as the Incarnate Word sent to the world to be its light and life (John 1:4–9), through whom alone can one reach God the Father (John 14:6), for he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the preservation of his sheep (John 10:11–16). Finally, Jesus' being and teachings have brought mankind to salvation by revealing God in his own person, meaning, to know Jesus as Savior/Redeemer/Christ is to acknowledge God the Father (John 14:7) and in him man has eternal life.

Antisemitism, Anti-Judaism

With one notable exception, the term "Jews" in the Fourth Gospel of John is derogatory and resonates with negative overtones. Compare the exceptional Jesus 'retort to the Samaritan woman at the well, who refers to him as a prophet and requests assistance, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22) and the more common response to Jews who doubt and question the person and mission of Jesus, "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he

lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Robert L. Brawley ("The Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John") limits the carnal anti-Judaism understanding of the Johannine *hoi Ioudaioi* to the literary character of the Fourth Gospel as a fictive narrative and not necessarily referenced to historical time, place, and personage then, now, and ages in between.[1]

Joseph B. Tyson ("Acts, the 'Parting of the Ways 'and the Use of the Term 'Christians'" [2]) negates a first-century dating of Luke-Acts, and reads the Acts of the Apostles as a second-century document which sheds light on a later not early separation of ways between "Jews" and "Christians." The conflicting picture of Paul suggests the rupture. Paul is a Torah observant Jew (Acts 21:24; 23:3; 23:6; 24:14; 25:8; 26:5, 22) but he is met with fierce opposition from Jews (Acts 13:13–52; 14:1–7; 17:1–9, 10–15; 18:1–17). First-century followers of Jesus are called believers, disciples, saved, righteous, and rarely "Christians" (Acts 11:26; 26:28). The successful establishment of the first Gentile church in Antioch and subsequent ingathering and dominance of Gentiles for Christ seeds new terminology and destiny. Departure from the Jewish way of Torah and Halakha to the universal way of Christ and Christian belief and practice.

Language is a reciprocal tool: It reveals, and, at the same time, it is revealing. We use language to explain the things that define our world, but, by the same token, the way we use language also necessarily discloses how we explain and define ourselves within that world. In general, everyone can instinctively grasp how a given word or phrase is used to demarcate, even create, that small bit of universe that it encompasses in linguistic terms. So, for example, centuries-old "perfidious" Jews, a people *formerly* chosen by God, recited in Good Friday liturgy may be viewed as anti-Judaism but it is not seen and thus condemned as racial antisemitism. Similarly, Torah-observant Jews view co-religionist active participation in Christian worship services as *`avodah zarah* ("strange work," idolatry) for him/her but not for the Trinitarian Christian. But, the subtle aspects of how this same word or phrase might disclose a part of our own identities are less obvious and are less consciously considered in the old-new language of hate and violence. How and why are reflected in this monograph of essays entitled *Jesus Wasn't Killed by the Jews: Reflections for Christians in Lent* edited by John Sweeny (Orbis Books, 2020) designed for Christian supplementary reading in the period of Lent that expounds on like and dislike of group-people-

[1] Chapter 8 in Kalimi, *Bridging between Sister Religions*, 195–127.
[2] Chapter 9 in Kalimi, *Bridging between Sister Religions,* 128–140.

religion identity and that somewhat parallels, contributes to, and prevails alongside the Sabbath attacks on the synagogues in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Poway, California in October 2018 and April 2019. This is cited in the Foreword by Rabbi Abraham Skorka as a major catalyst for the writing and publication of this book and insightfully developed by conventional wisdom and scriptural scholarship in the Afterword by Amy-Jill Levine.

Since the 1970s, Jews and Christians in dialogue have cast as wide a net as possible in speaking about and correcting. important facets of Christian *Adversus Judeo* teachings and the responsibility of the Church to correct old-new teachings of contempt in the teaching and portrayal of the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Jesus Wasn't Killed by the Jews*, a collective effort of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish scholars takes a different track; it focuses less on history and more on theology and presents articles that largely consider aspects of a singular ecclesiastical, scriptural, and Christological question. That is, can faith believing Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians affirm unequivocally that Christ Jesus is the Savior of all humanity and not at the expense of the Jewish People's covenantal life with God? Innately controversial and not easily resolved, the chapters are distinguished by a dual accomplishment. A select reading of the hermeneutics and magisterial teaching tradition emanating from the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* suggests a context of Judaism and interaction with its classical teachings is primary in the Church's affirmation, belief, and teaching of Christ Jesus. Second, shared God talk and values, common morals, and ethics, stressing the Jewish factor in the Church's understanding of the legitimacy of Christ Jesus paves the road from Calvary to Auschwitz to the Vatican and other Christian centers with teachings of *teshuvah* and fulfillment not conversion nor replacement. Also, Christian and Jewish interfaith dialogue affects self-identity and long-standing issues of redemption are challenged and determined by interaction with the Other; of particular importance in this volume is the belief that Jews are "Christ-murderers," the ultimate reason of the murdered Jewish millions referenced as "Holocaust" (burnt offering demanded by God).

Although historians agree that the *Endlösung,* proclaimed at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, was the goal of the mass extermination of European Jewry and was linked to the attempts by the Nazi German state to destroy Europeans during World War II, they differ in how to evaluate Christian belief and teaching about Jews and Judaism in leading to a Passion-justified near extinction of European Jewry. Most noteworthy are

the charges of Deicide and misanthropy. See Matt 27:11–26; Mark 14:1, 11, 43ff., 55, 64; 15: 11–15; Luke 23:1–25; John 8: 42–47; 19:1–16; Acts 2:22–24; 7:51–53; 1 Thess 2:14–16. In Christian preaching and teaching on the Jews, Catholic Saints (e.g., Augustine, John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas) and Protestant Reformers (e.g., John Calvin, Martin Luther) appear united in their teaching of contempt of the Jewish way before God's grace and love. Teachings, I might add, that contributed to the suffering, tragedy, and the near-successful extermination of European Jewry which was set within the chain of command that began and ended in the phrase, *Es ist des Führers Wunsch*– It is the Fuhrer's wish."

Disassociate the imagery of the Cross of the Passion from the language of the crooked cross is a solemn language-teaching from this Introduction. The Third Reich was established by the Nazis and lasted from 1933–1945. Religiously, however, *Drittes Reich* means "Third Kingdom" and is rooted in German Trinitarian pietism: "Kingdoms of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit." Shortly after his election as *Reichkanzler* in 1933, Hitler with a worn-copy of the New Testament of Martin Luther in hand proclaimed before a group of Methodist deaconesses that he received his power, "from God's word."[3] Arguably, the twin meanings of Third Reich (Empire and Kingdom) became one: Hitler regarded himself as sent by Providence to establish the German Reich for "a thousand years," and his divine mandate was to disenfranchise, ghettoize, expel, and ultimately murder the Jews. How to explain and learn the lessons from this banality of evil in the heartland of Christianity is a major objective related to a monograph on antisemitism in the Fourth Gospel.

Also discussed are trends of positive progress made by the Vatican and Protestants in relation to Jews and Judaism. Commendable, this monograph exposes scriptural passages, mean-spirited theology, and lethargic liturgy which contribute to a toxic view of Jews, peoplehood, and religion. To correct Jewish caricature, damnation, misinformation, and on, practical, pastoral, belief, and practice are offered to help Christians move beyond a religion and teaching of contempt. For example, Jewish identity and practice, however, logistically interpreted and liberally practiced, is central to Jesus, his followers, and New Testament authors; hence, negative referencing of Pharisees (the term occurs over 100 times in the New

[3] Noted in a paper ("Anti-Judaism and Biblical Authority: The Case of Luke-Acts") given by Joseph B. Tyson at the "Remembering for the Future II" Conference, Berlin, March 1994. Tyson cites Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches Under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (1979) as his source.

Testament; most vicious reference in Matt 23) and Jews (cited seventy-one times in the Fourth Gospel) are interpreted as insider criticism and disagreement not intended to be supersessionist replacement theology nor eternal. Damnation. Thus Jew *and* Gentile, not *the Jews* alone, as archetypes of the unbeliever who reject Jesus as the universal light (John 1:9), who illuminates the path for all who walk in darkness (John 8: 12; 9:5), as the true Revealer of God's essence and existence, and as the Redeemer of wo/mankind are inextricably entwined and judged.

In sum, our monograph is an innovative Catholic-Protestant-Jew attempt to reconstruct old-new corrections for the Christian remembrance and observance of scriptural, liturgical, and ecclesial lessons related to the Fourth Gospel. It all begins with language. The Judean/Jewish Jesus was not suppressed by the Jews but by Christian replacement theology now being atoned. So it is claimed, so may it be.

Natural Evil: Text and Theology

The Word Became Flesh (John 1:1–18, NRSV)

> **1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. **6** There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. **11** He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. **14** And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. **15** (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") **16** From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **17** The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

On that eventful day in 2004, in the holiday season celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace, Mother Earth unleashed a 9.15 magnitude earthquake, which lasted eight minutes, and set off waves 33 feet high that smashed into shorelines of Indonesia, and swept away people, towns and villages in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, and other Indian Ocean countries. It is estimated that about 230,000 people were killed or disappeared in the Indian Ocean tsunami, nearly three-quarters of them in Indonesia's Aceh province on the northern tip of Sumatra. In October 2005, Hurricane Wilma, the most intense hurricane on record in the Atlantic Basin, thundered through large areas of Florida. However, the most devastating and expensive natural disaster in the 2005 hurricane season, made landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought incredible loss of life and property, including the near-total destruction of the City of New Orleans.

Pondering the ways and whys of natural disasters, pundits, politicians, and everyday people offer a plethora of explanations. Different scholarly disciplines have their own particular patterns of thinking, inquiry, information gathering, and distribution. For example, scientific inquiry, rooted in empirical data, calls for observation, classification, and problem solving based on discriminating observation, careful explanation, and considered conclusions. In general, philosophy is interested in the humanistic aspects of natural calamities, and philosophy of religion invokes the God factor. In classical Jewish and Christian theology, Almighty God created *ex nihilo* a natural world order and declared *ki tov* ("it was good," repeated seven times in Gen 1). And the Johannine Gospel proclaims that the Word of God is the light that penetrates the darkness (John 1:5). But adverse natural events produce untold human suffering such as the tsunami tragedy in the Andaman and Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal, home to some of the world's most primitive tribes. How do loyalists to the covenants of Sinai and Cavalry reconcile the flaws of Heaven on Earthly shores? Is the Intelligent One an Evil Designer and tens of thousands of victims and survivors are the evidence? And, academically, how may one understand scriptural texts in context and against the ravages of nature and nature's God?

Pedagogical Musings on Teaching Methodology

My thirty years of involvement in ecumenical Midrash[4] dialogue has led me to realize that not all phases of the Jewish-Christian encounter are covered nor is it possible to delve completely into a subject under discussion, say post-Shoah theology. Rather the experience speaks of a "beginning" and not an "end" to a critical exploration of ideas regarding one's religious beliefs and set in a cross cultural and denominational vision of the other. The effort has caused me to take seriously the four sequential steps of learning and teaching: confrontation, analysis, interaction, and transformation of values.

Successful teaching, I believe, is a learning exchange. In classes of philosophy and religion, some class topics deal with abstract philosophical and metaphysical discussions. Other subjects deal in the main with real-life situations with or without noticeable theoretical content. All emphasize a major pedagogical principle that students learn better and appreciate their understanding of the subject matter if they are actively involved in learning rather than being passively taught. Learning involves not only information given but the recipient's critical application of what that knowledge means to oneself as an individual and as a member of a community (faith-bound, or not). As a classroom teacher, my major concern is that I am less of a knowledge-dispenser and more of a knowledge-facilitator, who leads his student to make discoveries and articulate values and conclusions.

Flexibility, innovation, implementation, enthusiasm, and relevancy are characteristic of a good teaching methodology. The college classroom should not serve as a podium for intellectual exhibitionism or be a forum for undisciplined free-for-all ranting. Some information and delight may result from such activities but they are achieved at the expense of compromising student learning and scholarship. Instruction in the classroom ought to be student-oriented so that students are involved in comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation rather than becoming amen-sayers to classroom instruction.

My pedagogic philosophy in teaching the Hebrew Bible is infused with a binary *midrashic* model: *midrash `atsmi* (self-exegesis and eisegesis) and *midrash tsiburi* (explorations of others). In teaching the Hebrew Bible, for

[4] Factually, Midrash is biblical inquiry; an attempt to explain the biblical text in as many ways as seems possible to the inquiring mind of the Jewish sage. Here I mean the term to include ecumenical dialogue on scriptural texts in the context of doctrinal, ethical, religious, and social dimensions.

example, I encourage my students to engage the text as is (*p'shat*), and in return, the Scripture begs, *darshani* (*d'rash*; "expound me"); and by sharing research and by learning from class discussion, seeds of *midrashic* activity are planted. Furthermore, the student gains self-respect from such an exposure, his/her germane ideas are able to sprout, dialogistical learning commences, and a relaxed teacher-student symbiosis is created. Also, I have grown in stature as an educator. By playing the role of a class catalyst, I have opportunities to present my own contribution and refine it in light of class feedback to a greater degree than by the straight lecture method. My goal is to integrate teaching and learning, rooted in the way of Midrash, and the reward is in the participatory doing.

Encountering Natural Evil: An Audio-Visual Approach

In introducing a teaching unit on God and natural evil in the classroom, before text and theology, there is confrontation and impact. Not thought and theology but experiencing viscerally the void left by nature's wrath. Before the professor deconstructs the tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and the current coronavirus pandemic, let the students see and talk about them. Hence, several lectures, utilizing a photographic audio-visual approach, to illustrate what is the aftereffect of natural evil and who are Nature's innocent dead and victims. Pictures from before, during, and after the cataclysm are chosen for their emotional and aesthetic appeal. Selective readings from sacred and secular sources and impromptu dramatics by the instructor, complemented by photographs of despair, dispossession, fear, hunger, loss, etc., can illuminate in a dramatic way the psychology of annihilation and the urgency of *tikkun `olam* ("repairing/restoring the world").

The following steps are suggested in presenting a photographic presentation on "Natural Evil":

A. Select slides that impact value and are significant to class objectives and goals.
B. Run through frames with commentary.
C. Repeat frames more slowly, stopping at each one or selective ones and inviting discussion, ideas, "what do you see?," role-playing, etc.
D. Show frames without verbal commentary, but accompanied by other multi-media, e.g., music, tape recording, etc.
E. Exhibit two viewings of the same photograph, but for different purposes. That is to say, one viewing for the descriptive or factual information, and the second for a *midrash* on victimization, theodicy,

the scream from the screen, etc.

F. At the completion of the unit study (lectures, readings, discussions, activities, etc.), do a silent run through of the frames, shown with a half-minute to a minute interlude, leaving an unspoken but dramatic message. After the interlude, encourage dialogue to give words to the emotional happening and a semblance of reasoning. Why?

An audio-visual venture into the needle of the storm is making two points. First, what is needed in the classroom is effective teaching and creative exposition in addition to critical textual evaluation. A prevalent myth in the Humanities is that a good researcher is a good teacher. The reality is – and student surveys bear this out time and time again – that a good researcher becomes a good pedagogue only if he/she works at it. That is not to say that the conventional way of research and publication is not important in a professor's academic role, but to stress that his/her first responsibility is to be a competent communicator and facilitator in the classroom. This includes knowledge of alternate and innovative ways of teaching. Second, though students may absorb lectures sponge-like, they should be actively challenged. The audio-visual approach to understanding Nature's evil imprints experiential learning on the mind, images in the memory. The use of several senses (viz., kinesthetic, auditory, and visual) reveals, in this instance, human misery at its lowest common denominator: meaninglessness, hopelessness, and loveless. In sum, awareness of human tragedy and requisite responsibility are addressed appropriately by this alternative teaching methodology.

Encountering Teaching the Plain Sense of the Flood and the Fig Tree: P'shat and Midrash

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, with pictures of the dead, dying, and forlorn driven into global human consciousness, a fundamental faith-threatening question is asked by New York Times op-ed columnist, William Safire: How to explain the way of God when such evil and grief befell thousands of innocents and, its corollary, what did these people do to deserve such suffering?[5] To measure God's justice, Safire points to Job, but we look instead to Noah and the Flood narrative in Genesis 6–9.

A careful reading of the Flood story suggests composite sources, which are telling in the animal grouping, the period of the rain, and the ark rested. 1)

[5] William Safire, "Opinion: Where was God?" *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 2005. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/10/opinion/where-was-god.html

Animal Grouping: Two of all living animals, male and female (Gen 6:19, 7:15); *and* seven pairs of clean beasts, two pairs of unclean beasts (Gen 7:2), seven pairs of fowl (Gen 7:3). 2) *The Period of the Rain*: In the 600th year of Noah's life (Gen 7:6) on the 17th day of the 2nd month, the flood begins (Gen 7:11), and the waters maintained their crest for 150 days (Gen 7:12); *and* it rained for a period of 40 days and nights (Gen 7:4, 12). 3) *Ark Rested*: On the 17th day of the 7th month upon the mountains of Araret (Gen 8:4), the waters decreased continually until the tenth month when the peaks of the mountains were seen (Gen 8:5); in the 601st year on the first day of the month, the rains began to dry from the earth, and on the 27th day, the land was dry (Gen 8:14); *and* at the end of forty days, a raven is sent forth to see if the waters have dried and it does not return, then a dove is sent forth and returns (Gen 8:7–8); after a wait of seven days, the dove is sent out again and returns with a plucked-off olive leaf in its bill, and Noah waited another seven days and sent the dove out again and it did not return (Gen 8:10–12).

Properly understood, the Genesis Flood story invites comparison with the older "Great Flood of Enlil," after one of the greatest names of the Sumerian and Akkadian pantheon, which is transcribed on the eleventh of the twelve tablets that make up the Epic of Gilgamesh (see Thomas, 17–26). Here we see similarities: a hero is saved from the impending universal catastrophe; the ark is built to specific dimensions; elemental cataclysm leads to the annihilation of all life outside the ark; grounding of the vessel of deliverance on a mountain or hill country; release of birds at certain intervals to test the subsidence of the waters; lastly, when dry land has reappeared in the new desolate world, each hero offers a thanksgiving offering.[6] Dissimilarities include the named hero (Babylonian Utnapishti and Hebrew Noah); occupants of the ark; name and order of birds of release (Babylonian, raven-swallow-dove; Hebrew, raven-dove (twice); and the place where the ark rests (Babylonian, Mt. Nisir; Hebrew, Mountains of Araret). Literarily and textually, the two Flood accounts share much in common, but it is the raison d'être where they substantially differ. Moral implication is explicit in the Hebrew account; that is to say, "the earth is filled with violence (Gen 6:13), exhibited by an idolatrous sense of immortality (Gen 6:1–7). However, the mere whims of Ea (Earth), Shamash (the Sun-god), Adad (the Storm-god), and their celestial cohorts, are the reason for the Earthcide recorded in the Babylonian annals.

[6] The language of celestial acceptance is striking. Compare, "And the Lord smelled the sweet savor" (Gen 8:21) and "And the gods smelled the sweet savor, the gods smelled the sweet savor." See Winston, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, 23.

Archaeological evidence bears little to no testimony to flood layers in the Ancient Near East. The most important thing about the Flood story in Genesis, therefore, is not the factuality but the actuality of the happening. The Israelites use the ancient Near Eastern tradition to present the nature of God in Nature and the way God works in human affairs over and against the portrayal of similar scenarios in ancient Akkadian and Sumerian sources by combining justifiable condemnation and whimsical anger. And Utnapishti cries:

> For six days and [seven] nights the wind blew, and the flood and the storm swept the land. But the seventh day arriving did the rainstorm subside and the flood which had heaved like a woman in travail; there quieted the sea, and the storm-wind stood still, the flood stayed her flowing. I opened a vent and the fresh air moved over my cheek-bones. And I looked at the sea; there was silence, the tide-way lay flat as a roof-top – but the whole of mankind had returned unto clay. I bowed low: I sat and I wept: o'er my cheek-bones my tears kept on running. [Thom 22]

But Jesus does not cry in the curious story of the Fig Tree. In Mark, it is written:

> He was hungry; and seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, "May no man ever eat fruit from you again" … and Peter … said unto him: "Master, behold the fig tree which you cursed is withered away." (Mark 11:12–14, 21; Matt 21: 18–19)

Further in the text, the curse is explained to his followers as an admonition of faith in God. Set in the context of the Second Temple period, however, Christian exegetes address Jesus 'caustic words to the Temple authorities, which, in the course of Church history, are extended to the whole Jewish nation in Jesus' name. In Christian creedal faith, it is affirmed that Jesus the Christ and God the Father are united "unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably" (a la the Council of Chalcedon, 451 CE). If so, in light of the contribution of Christian "teaching of contempt" to the near-total destruction of European Jews in Hitler's Europe coupled with human disaster in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the current Corona pandemic I see no wisdom derived from the curse of a blameless tree ("it was not the right time of year for the figs") and in the destruction of innocent people.

Elsewhere I have written about the historical Jesus (Garber 1998, 2006, and 2020). Here I attempt to make sense of the Christ of faith in the context of

Jewish-Christian dialogue and informed by an admonition attributed to the Jewish Jesus, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses 'seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it" (Matt 23:2–3a).

Is the Jesus of the classic Christian belief real to Israel, the people, and the religion? Was he the Son of God, necessary for the belief in the atonement theory of redemption, or a member of God's firstborn son, Israel? (Exod 4:22) Was there one Christ? Was his mission false, failed, or fulfilled? Is belief in the death and resurrection of Christ reflective of Mosaic monotheism or expressive of the triune God of Christianity? Part of the problem stems from definition and intent. Some want to talk history, others theology. Some dance to Pan's lyre (Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon) and others to David's harp (Bethlehem, Galilee, Jerusalem). Still others want to focus on text in the context of time and clime. Consider the word "Christ" and its corollary, vicarious atonement sacrifice, used so frequently in discussions and depictions of Second Testament theology.

As a Jew, my assessment of the Easter faith is derived from critical scholarship in search of the historic Jesus, not faith affirmations (no matter how insightful). For me, Jesus did not teach the traditional negative teachings about the Jews derived from Pauline Christology, nor did Jesus ' teachings encourage the theology of Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformation, which have influenced acts of cruelty and persecution against them throughout the ages. Also, to say, Jesus our Lord points the way to God, means that the God-man of the hypostatic union is metaphorical and not the ultimate force called God. Christian believers and educators can benefit from Jewish/Hebraic hermeneutics in teaching about Jesus' love and compassion. That is to say, by focusing on Jesus as a Pharisee, the Christian soul properly recovers the oral traditions preceding and following from the Jesus way. More importantly, it places the moral and spiritual message of Jesus in a sound Jewish context, which underscores a salient message: demythologize the Jewish guilt in the death of Jesus and demystify dogmatic Christology. Short of this combined effort is assailing not advocating Christ in a post-Shoah cross-cultural world.

A basic component of interfacing between Jews and Christians is to respect and understand the revelatory assertions of the other but equality in dialogue does not mean ready acceptance of the other's religious doctrines and theology. There is no doubt that many Christians accept the proclamation of the Fig Tree as the Word of God as it is. I do not. I see in this enigmatic passage a deviation of "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof"

(Ps 24:1), and an aberration of the Lord's word to Adam and Eve's children, not to destroy Earth but "to till and to keep it" (Gen 2:15). And I suspect that the Teacher from Galilee would agree.

Midrash Hermeneutics: Unraveling Nature's Wrath

Interpreting the Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita by the stories of the Flood and Fig Tree, is the problem of relating fluid, constantly changing streams of natural phenomena, which some call "acts of God," to blocs of biblical thought and mythmaking. It is a question of applying ancient sacred texts to new challenges. It will continue to be so as long as Christians and Jews see the Bible as the fundamental authority in their religious view of the world. Sometimes, however, reading a biblical text does not relate cogently and directly to the disaster at hand. It is for this reason that I suggested a hands-on audio-visual impact to introduce an oft-conflicting and disturbing textual paradigm. The crucial problem in textual interpretation is to discover a suitable hermeneutic, one that is both fair to the plain meaning of the text and answerable to the wrenching question, "Where is God?" in our tragedies.

The hermeneutic selected should, I suggest, take seriously the four sequential steps of learning I described above. Arguably, the genre of Midrash combines real-life disaster with received biblical tradition and permits one to confront deep philosophical, religious, and theological ideas in a convincing pedagogical way, since it nurtures sensitivity and empathy, which lead to ethical decision-making and moral development. My class instruction on natural evil theologically begins by asking, "Where is God?," and ends with, "What Can We Do?"

The God of the Hebrew Bible and of Jewish liturgy reflects multiple characteristics. Genesis 1 states that God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth and responsible for all natural forces found therein, both for good and for evil (cf. Isa 45:7). God is viewed as the author of natural laws, explaining the world as is. Sunlight, raindrops, cool breezes, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, and drought all reflect this aspect of God. The second Creation story in Genesis 2 refers to God in a manner that, in rabbinic tradition, suggests attributes of care, compassion, and kindness.

My post-Shoah ethic cannot – dare not – explain Nature's tsunamis and hurricanes as "acts of God." To say that the sins of victims, among them, innocent children and babes in arms, warrant such punishments is obscene. Theologically speaking, God permeates nature and for many people of faith,

Nature's mean-spirited side is inscrutable, an enigma, beyond unraveling. This is suggested in the rabbinic epigram: "It is not in our power to explain the tranquility of the wicked or the suffering of the upright." However, it is in our power to be God-like: to respond to adversity by calling upon the divine powers within ourselves and within the human community. This God-created trait obligates humanity to do acts of generosity and love to ameliorate injustice on earth whether decreed by acts of nature or humankind. Nature's adverse call demands this, and by responding courageously and forthrightly, God's existential presence, "I will be that I will be" (Exod 3:14) is experienced in the present, "I am."

In discovering the Midrash hermeneutic, the interpreter becomes a listener as well as a questioner. The process of asking and listening constitutes a circle – the *midrashic* circle. It is the time-tested way to question God's inscrutable ways by biblical insight, which need not undermine faith for "those who revered the Lord" (Mal 3:16).

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