

In an article in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* Jon Levenson asks the question, "Are there analogues to New Testament Anti-Semitism in the Hebrew Bible?" Is there demonizing and supersessionism in the Hebrew Bible? The answer he gives is "Yes." *So we have a problem together.*

The self-conscious distancing of the Christian communities from "Israel", that is, from the majority of the Jewish people, begins already in the New Testament, not only in its interpretations. That distancing, along with a prophetic anger, grew into glee after the fall of the temple. It grew from name-calling to contempt, pogroms, and finally Sho'ah. The Constantinian triumphalism of the fourth century can be blamed for much, but that triumphalism starts well before there was any secular power in Christianity. Triumphalist rhetoric is perhaps permissible if you do not have power, but when the power enters into the game, something goes very wrong.

So there is anti-Semitism in the New Testament. But that is not the issue. The question is what to do about it. Now, I welcome the Clarified New Testament and I welcome the Scholars Bible. But I know of no single way to get at the problem of translation. Somehow we have to develop a multi-faceted approach. We have to decide whether a simple retranslation of, say, the Gospel of John is a sufficient solution to the problem. Or is a more thorough interpretive treatment of the Gospel required in order to "demagnetize" and objectify it in a historical-critical manner. This is our problem.

One could reintroduce what the King James Version forbade in its translation of 1611: A full compliment of explanatory or exegetical notes. *We need notes.* We need to say that John used the word *Jew* in a pejorative sense. But my basic point is that simply retranslating in order to neutralize a dangerous text does not really neutralize it. Rather one is really smuggling out the difficult sense of the text by making it appear to be less dangerous than it really is. It is as if one buried that unwanted meaning in a winter's snow—it will inevitably appear with the thaw. Euphemism is not an option. It is important that we recognize our scripture for what it is, dangerous texts and all.

I am all for these new translation strategies, for language is the only means we have for consciousness-raising. And we *are* engaged in consciousness-raising, not just a bit of academic translation. Such an enterprise is both an adjournment and a confrontation, employing even jarring words to wake people up.

Another approach has been to narrow the gap between Judaism and Christianity in the New Testament. This is done to displace the tensions which are to be seen in scripture between these two groups. Hence one leans on the assertion that Pilate was the true agent of Jesus' crucifixion — not "the Jews." One holds that since the Passion Narrative was written within the context of the Gentile Roman empire, it was natural, but inaccurate historically, for its author(s) to have emphasized the guilt of the Jews, while deemphasizing the guilt of Pilate. We might also conclude that what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount could just as well have been said, and indeed was said, by the sages of the time. We have all engaged in this type of

interpretive strategy: narrow the gap, smooth out the differences. Yet this leads to problems.

Irving Greenberg once said that he thought that Martin Buber's understanding of Jesus was wonderful until he recognized how similar Buber's Christianity was to his Judaism. There is no difficulty in loving oneself in the other. Leveling differences, tensions, and conflicts certainly helps us to cultivate a strategy which we find in many forms in interfaith dialogue. But the time has come for us to avoid constructing special Christianities in order to smooth the way for dialogues with various other religious traditions.

The time has also come in Jewish-Christian relations, and especially with respect to our attempt to disentangle our questions concerning our mutual use of the Bible, to experience one another in our classical religious formulations, which are not confined simply to the first century in which our communities and our relations began to take shape. We have both traveled a long way from that point and we need to be digging at many historical and theological levels if true understanding is to be achieved. For example, Jacob Neusner as well as others have suggested that the proper points of departure for Jewish-Christian dialogue are the doctrine of Incarnation and the state of Israel. Though I would suggest that I would prefer the Trinity and the state of Israel as *the* issues at the heart of the Jewish-Christian encounter, I would whole heartedly agree with the assumption underlying Neusner's suggestion: we need to liberate ourselves from a historicism of the first century. In order to do that, it would be healthy for the words in the biblical dimension of this exchange to become more integrated as a part of a multilateral conversation within a wider historical and cultural context.

We must, in order to make such a conversation possible, avoid the most powerful impediment to the respect and understanding of the other: we must avoid triumphalism. As I said, triumphalism without power is perhaps a tolerable metaphor, but triumphalism with power is lethal. There is a highly dangerous root metaphor of adversarial strife in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Salvation is figured as victory, the fate of the "vanquished," problematic at best.

We must ask if there are other models and metaphors. Does Christianity *have* to identify itself as that which is *over and against* Judaism? Indeed, is this really the case? Are there models of living together instead of over and against each other that do more essential justice to both of our faiths? We must somehow modify our symbol systems so that we do not continuously engender trends of demonization and contempt.

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