

By Norman A. Beck

There are many ways in which we can responsibly repudiate the most defamatory anti- Jewish texts within our specifically Christian Scriptures without damage to our Christian theology and to the theology of the New Testament.

The first and least intrusive action we can take in the repudiation of this Christian "Teaching of Contempt" for Jews is to avoid using the most defamatory texts in our private and public devotions. The most effective way to avoid use of such texts in public workshop is to remove them from our lectionaries our lists of selections from the Scriptures to be read during the annual church year cycles, or to prepare new lectionaries in which such texts are not included. The lectionary selections have a significant impact on Christian worshippers within the confessional denominations in which they are used, and in such congregations (involving approximately 90% of all Christians) the selections from the lectionaries are the primary texts upon which sermons and homilies are constructed. Therefore, lectionary revision and the preparation of new lectionaries that are sensitive to this issue and result in a conscious reduction or elimination of the hateful anti-Jewish texts must have a high priority among us as responsible, mature Christians.

The second action, the task of education and sensitization of more than 1.8 billion Christians in hundreds of languages and nations is enormous, especially when most Christians do not want to be educated and sensitized about this issue.

The third action that we can is to sensitize and educate the relatively few persons who are making new translations of the Greek New Testament into modern vernacular languages. Here we have to reach only a few thousand persons, rather than 1.8 billion. If those who make new translations of the texts by their use of various methodologies repudiate the Christian "Teaching of Contempt" for Jews, we can be much more optimistic about progress. Perhaps at a later date I shall enter into a more extensive discussion of the education and translation actions. In this present article, however, I wish to concentrate on the importance of lectionary revisions.

According to *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abington, 1992), lectionaries have been used in the Church since the fourth century of the common era. The so-called "historic pericopes " were a one-year cycle of texts which included defamatory anti-Jewish texts in only one place, the lengthy reading from John 18:1-19:42 used each year on Good Friday.

After the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church produced a (three-year cycle of pericopes, published in English during 1969 as the *Lectionary for Mass*. Because it is a three-year lectionary, it includes more texts than had been used in the "historic pericopes." Unfortunately, numerous texts that contain defamatory anti- Jewish elements were selected. This lack of sensitivity with regard to the

defamatory anti-Jewish texts was continued a few years later when the Lectionary for Mass was adapted somewhat and introduced into Lutheran use.

The denominations that were involved in the Consultation on Church Union during the 1970s and 1980s developed their own adaptation of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran three-year lectionaries, and published it in 1983 as The Common Lectionary. It features semi continuous readings in various sections of the "Old Testament" and Epistles selections.

The Common Lectionary has recently been revised and reissued as The (Revised Common Lectionary, 1992, by the Consultation on Common Texts. The Revised Common Lectionary continues the basic structure of the Lectionary for Mass, in which the Gospel selection for each occasion is the dominating text, and "Old Testament" selections are chosen from wherever they can be found to provide a parallel, a contrast, or a prediction that is perceived as "fulfilled" in the Gospel selection. This provides a Christian interpretation of texts from the Hebrew Bible, with little regard for the meanings of the texts in their original context, a pattern of interpretation established already in the early Church and apparent in many places within the New Testament. This "prophecy- fulfillment" motif has been very influential in the Christian interpretation of the "Old Testament," contributing to the popular understanding of prophecy as "a prediction of a future event".

The reduction or avoidance of defamatory anti-Jewish texts was not high on the agenda of those who induced The Revised Common Lectionary. There is no significant avoidance of such texts in the 1992 publication. An important opportunity to replace the defamatory anti-Jewish texts with other texts was missed. There are many positive, constructive texts in the New Testament that proclaim Christ and provide excellent guidelines for the Christian life that are not in the three-year lectionaries that we are currently using. In order to provide a sample, a test case of what can be done, I have prepared a new four-year lectionary that I shall include as an appendix to my sensitive new translation-redaction of the New Testament from Greek to English. It is my hope that this four-year model will stimulate interest in further revisions of the lectionaries on the denominational, interdenominational and international levels, where such revisions should occur.

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