

THE ANTI-JEWISH NEW TESTAMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Jewish people, who have read the New Testament throughout the history of Christianity, became well aware of the numerous passages of vicious and defamatory anti-Jewish polemic within it. On the other hand, Christians, in general, have been insensitive to the offensive nature of these texts and to the damage that their usage has done to the Jewish people throughout the Common Era. When the Emperor Constantine became a Christian in the fourth century C.E. and installed Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire, Jewish people became a primary target of persecution by "The Church".

Although the Holocaust, which caused the murderous annihilation of two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population, was in some ways different from previous historical acts of mass persecution and genocide of the Jewish people, it shared the motive of its precursors, the Crusades and Inquisitions, and the many pogroms and expulsions. Each of these events was fueled by anti-Semitism, the hatred of Jewish people, and was aimed at their murder and plunder. The Holocaust distinguished itself from the other events in the scope of its genocidal goals and the fact that it did not offer its victims the "option" of conversion to Christianity – there was no escape from death.

An increasing number of Christian scholars and clergy have concluded that the root of anti-Semitism in the Christian world community is ultimately found within the New Testament.

In his book, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians*, the late Professor A. Roy Eckhardt [former Professor of Religion at both Lehigh University (PA) and Oxford University (UK), and an ordained minister] asserts that the foundation of anti-Semitism and the responsibility for the Holocaust lie ultimately in the New Testament.¹ In another book, *Your People, My People: The Meeting of Jews and Christians*, Professor Eckhardt insists that Christian repentance must include a reexamination of basic theological attitudes toward Jewry and the New Testament in order to deal effectively with the problem of anti-Semitism and its prevention.² The general message scholars such as Professor Eckhardt are trying to convey is that, using the New Testament as its authoritative source, "The Church" has stereotyped the Jewish people as an icon of unredeemed humanity; they became an image of a blind, stubborn, carnal, and perverse people. This dehumanization is the vehicle that formed the psychological prerequisite to the atrocities that followed.

¹ A. Roy Eckhardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians*, Schocken Books (1967)

² A. Roy Eckhardt, *Your People, My People: The Meeting of Jews and Christians*, Crown Publishing Group (1974)

In one of his sermons, the Reverend Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, Pastor of the Trinity Episcopal Church and Professor of Religion at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, describes how anti-Semitism grew out of a passage in the New Testament (Acts 13:44-52) that was to be read on that particular Sunday, as well as others like it.³ This passage proclaims that the Jews have brought damnation on themselves by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah, a belief that has caused Jews throughout the centuries to be persecuted, exiled, and which eventually brought on the Holocaust.

Rather than speculate about and explore the reasons as to why the New Testament contains the racist defamatory anti-Jewish rhetoric, this essay considers some examples of such New Testament passages that appear in Christian **lectionaries**. Lectionaries are collections of Scriptural passages from Christian Bibles that are read during regular weekly Catholic and Protestant church services, and which are repeated on some cyclical schedule. As such, these lectionaries are widely used by many millions of Church-going Christians, and they are somewhat similar to Jewish prayer books, such as a *Siddur*.

The material found in the lectionaries is, of course, only the "tip of the iceberg", but it suffices to demonstrate the plausibility of the assertion that the anti-Semitism among Christians is rooted in the New Testament.

II. ANTI-JEWISH POLEMIC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Much of the information in this essay has been extracted from an article by Professor Norman A. Beck, a New Testament scholar and Professor of Theology and Classical Languages at Texas Lutheran University.⁴ In his article, Professor Beck deals with texts found in six of the 27 books that comprise the New Testament, to which he refers as "... **the specific texts identified as most problematic ...**" in some of his published works. Professor Beck identifies the offensive passages in the New Testament and indicates the instances in which all or portions of these texts are included in major lectionary series.

A. The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew contains approximately 90 verses of defamatory anti-Jewish polemic. These are shown in Table II.A-1 with passages that appear in various lectionary series shown in **highlighted** format.

³ Sermon delivered on May 9, 2004, The Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C, by The Reverend Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick: *Why Jews Don't Need Jesus* - <http://www.trinityhartford.org/s050904.htm>

⁴ Norman A. Beck, *Anti-Jewish Polemic from our Christian Lectionaries: A Proposal* - <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/displayItem.php?id=737>; Professor Beck's credentials - <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/displayItem.php?id=1102>

Table II.A-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the Gospel of Matthew

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code*
3:7c	The Pharisees and Sadducees are called poisonous snakes	MLR
12:34a	The Pharisees are called evil poisonous snakes	---
15:3-9	Condemnation of the Pharisees for rejecting the commandments	---
15:12-14	The Pharisees are called blind guides leading the blind	---
16:6	Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees	---
19:3-9	The Pharisees are said to be hard-hearted	---
19:28	The disciples of Jesus will judge the twelve tribes of Israel	---
22:18c	The Pharisees are called hypocrites	HMLR
23:13-36	The scribes and Pharisees are repeatedly vilified as hypocrites	---
23:38	The house of Jerusalem is to be forsaken and desolate	---
26:59-68	The chief priests and council condemn Jesus as deserving death	MLR
27:1-26	The people demand that Jesus, not Barabbas, be crucified	MLR
27:62-66	The chief priests and Pharisees request a guard at Jesus' tomb	MLR
28:4	The guards tremble and become like dead when the angel appears	LR
28:11-15	The chief priest bribe the guards to lie about their actions	---

* Key to Lectionary Codes:

--- - Not included in a major lectionary series.

H - The "*Historic Pericopes*" used by the majority of Christians prior to 1969.⁵

M - The Roman Catholic *Lectionary for Mass* used during the 1980s.

L - Lutheran adaptations of the *Lectionary for Mass*, printed in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

R - *The Revised Common Lectionary*, 1992.

B. The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark contains approximately 40 verses of defamatory anti-Jewish polemic. These are shown in Table II.B-1, with passages that appear in various lectionary series shown in **highlighted** format.

Table II.B-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the Gospel of Mark

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code*
3:6	The Pharisees are said to have begun to plan to destroy Jesus	MR
7:6-13	Condemnation of the Pharisees for rejecting the commandments	MLR
8:15	Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees	---
10:2-5	The Pharisees are said to be hard-hearted	MLR
14:55-65	The chief priests and council condemn Jesus as deserving death	---
15:1-15	The crowd demands that Jesus, not Barabbas, be crucified	MLR

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⁵ A pericope is a selection or extract from a book (*The Random House College Dictionary*, p. 987 [1975]).

C. The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke contains approximately 60 verses of defamatory anti-Jewish polemic. These are shown in Table II.C-1, with passages that appear in various lectionary series shown in **highlighted** format.

Table II.C-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the Gospel of Luke

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code*
3:7c	The multitudes are called poisonous snakes	LR
4:28-30	The members of the synagogue in Nazareth try to kill Jesus	MLR
7:30	The Pharisees are said to have rejected the purposes of God	---
11:39-54	The Pharisees and Torah scholars are repeatedly condemned	---
12:1b	Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy	---
13:14-17	The ruler of the synagogue is condemned as a hypocrite	---
13:35a	The house of Jerusalem is to be forsaken	LR
22:63-71	The chief priests and council condemn Jesus as deserving death	LR
23:1-25	The people demand that Jesus, not Barabbas, be crucified	LR

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D. The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John contains approximately 130 verses of defamatory anti-Jewish polemic. These are shown in Table II.D-1, with passages that appear in various lectionary series shown in **highlighted** format.

Table II.D-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the Gospel of John

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code*
5:16-18	The Jews are said to have persecuted Jesus and wanted to kill him	---
5:37b-47	It is said that God's word and God's love is not in the Jews	---
7:19-24	It is said that none of the Jews do (what is written in) the Torah	---
7:28d	It is said that the Jews do not know the One who has sent Jesus	---
8:13-28	It is said that the Pharisees know neither Jesus nor the Father	---
8:37-59	The Jews are said to be descendants of their father, the Devil	H
9:13-41	The Pharisees and other Jews are condemned as guilty	MLR
10:8	The Jews are said to be thieves and robbers	MLR
10:10a	The Jews are depicted as those who steal and kill and destroy	---
10:31-39	The Jews are said to have picked up stones to throw at Jesus	---
11:53	It is said that the Jews realized that they would have to kill Jesus	L
11:57	It is said that the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to seize Jesus	---
12:10	It is said that the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus and Jesus	---
12:36b-43	It is said that most Jews loved the praise of men more than of God	---
16:2-4	(The Jews who) kill Jesus' disciples will think they are serving God	H
18:28-32	The Jews are said to have demanded that Pilate sentence Jesus to death	HMLR

18:38b-40	The Jews are said to be demanding that Jesus, not Barabbas, be crucified	HMLR
19:4-16	The Jews are depicted as insisting to Pilate that Jesus be crucified	HMLR

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E. Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles contains approximately 120 verses of defamatory anti-Jewish polemic. These are shown in Table II.E-1, with passages that appear in various lectionary series shown in highlighted format.

Table II.E-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the Book of Acts

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code*
2:23b	Peter tells the men of Israel that they crucified Jesus	MLR
2:36b	Again Peter tells the men of Israel that they crucified Jesus	MLR
3:13b-15a	Peter tells the men of Israel that they killed the originator of life	MLR
4:10a	Again Peter tells the men of Israel that they killed Jesus	MLR
5:30b	Peter tells the members of the Jewish council that they killed Jesus	MLR
6:11-14	Some Jews are said to have brought false accusations against Stephen	---
7:51-60	Stephen shown as condemning the Jews for betraying and killing Jesus	MLR
9:1-2	Paul is depicted as planning the arrest of disciples of Jesus	LR
9:23-25	Jews are said to have plotted to kill Paul	---
9:29b	Jewish Hellenists are also said to have tried to kill Paul	---
12:1-3a	It is said that the Jews were pleased when Herod killed James	---
12:3b-4	Herod is said to have seized Peter also to please the Jews	---
12:11	Peter is said to have realized that the Jews wanted to kill him	---
13:10-11	Paul is said to have condemned the Jew Elymas as a son of the Devil	---
13:28-29a	It is said that the Jews had asked Pilate to crucify Jesus	L
13:39d	It is said that Jews cannot be forgiven by means of the Torah	---
13:45-46	Jews are said to have spoken against Paul	ML
13:50-51	Jews are said to have encouraged persecution of Paul and Barnabas	ML
14:1-6	Many Jews opposing Paul and Barnabas and attempting to stone them	---
14:19-20	Jews are said to have stoned Paul, thinking that they had killed him	---
17:5-9	Jews are said to have incited a riot, looking for Paul and Silas	L
17:13	Jews are said to have stirred up turmoil against Paul	L
18:6	Paul said to have told the Jews, "Your blood will be on your own heads!"	---
18:12-17	Jews are said to have brought accusations against Paul	---
19:13-19	Jewish exorcists are shown to be condemned	---
21:27-36	Jews are depicted as seizing Paul and as trying to kill him	---
22:4-5	Paul says that when he was a Jew he had persecuted Christians	---

23:2-5	Paul is said to have condemned the chief priest for striking Paul	---
23:12-22	Jews are said to have plotted to eat nothing until they kill Paul	---
23:27-30	Paul is said to have been nearly killed by the Jews	---
24:9	The Jews are said to have accused Paul of many crimes	---
25:2-5	Jews are said to have plotted to kill Paul	---
25:7-11	Jews are said to have continued to bring accusations against Paul	---
25:15-21	Jews are said to have spoken repeatedly against Paul	---
25:24	All Jews are said to have shouted that Paul must be killed	---
26:21	The Jews are said to have seized Paul and tried to kill him	---
28:25-28	Paul is said to have condemned the Jews for never understanding God	---

* Key to Lectionary Codes:

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L - Lutheran adaptations of the *Lectionary for Mass*, printed in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.

R - *The Revised Common Lectionary*, 1992.

F. Paul's Letters & Epistles

Four verses, which constitute some of the most virulent anti-Jewish polemic present in the New Testament, are found within the seven letters written by Paul and the six Pseudo-Pauline and Deutero-Pauline epistles. These are shown in Table II.F-1.

Table II.F-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic from Paul's 1st Thessalonians

Source	Description of Context	Lectionary Code
2:13-16	Condemning the Jews for killing Jesus and the prophets, and celebrating the suffering of the Jews now that the "wrath of God" has come upon them	---

* Key to Lectionary Codes:

--- - Not included in a major lectionary series.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Some general observations may be drawn from the material presented above:

- An ever-increasing number of Christian scholars and clergy agree that the New Testament contains defamatory anti-Jewish polemic
- Regardless of how it found its way into the New Testament, can such defamatory anti-Jewish language be the "breathed word of G-d", as many Christians believe the New Testament is, or the "inspired word of G-d", as many other Christians believe?
- This defamatory anti-Jewish polemic within the New Testament, without a doubt, served to fuel anti-Semitism and its resultant atrocities against the Jewish people throughout the history of Christianity
- Based on quantity alone, the Gospel of John appears to be the most anti-Jewish book in the New Testament, with Acts of the Apostles being a close second

The following verses, which are from one of the passages in the Gospel of John listed among others in Table II.D-1 above [words in brackets were added for clarification; demonstrate this (highlighting added for emphasis):

John 8:44,47(KJV) – (44) Ye [Jews] are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye [Jews] will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (47) He that is of God heareth God's words: ye [Jews] therefore hear them not, because ye [Jews] are not of God.

- **Based on virulence and viciousness, some of Paul's Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles are the most inflammatory**

The one selection that may have been most responsible for the shedding of the blood of millions of innocent Jewish victims over the history of Christianity is from Paul's epistolary:

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16(KJV) – (13) For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (14) For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: (15) Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: (16) Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Table III-1 shows summary statistics on "... the specific texts identified as most problematic ..." anti-Jewish polemic found in the major lectionary series, which were previously listed in the various tables in Section II.

Table III-1 – Anti-Jewish polemic in the New Testament and in Christian lectionaries

Source	# of passages	% of total	# of verses	% of total	% of NT
H – "Historic Pericopes"	6	7.0	48	10.5	0.6
M – RC Lectionary for Mass	23	26.7	146	31.9	1.8
L – Lutheran Lectionary for Mass	32	37.2	203	44.4	2.6
R – The Revised Common Lectionary	27	31.4	181	39.6	2.3
Number of distinct passages	35				
Passages in NT but not in lectionaries	51				
Total distinct passages	86				
Number of distinct verses			220		
Verses in NT but not in lectionaries			237		
Total distinct verses			457		5.7
Verses in the entire NT (KJV)			7,959		100.0

The data shown in Table III-1 lead to several additional observations:

- **Although the "historic pericope" tradition may not have deliberately selected blatantly anti-Jewish texts, the tradition did not demonstrate sensitivity to this issue**

While there may not have been a conscious attempt to select large numbers of defamatory anti-Jewish texts, it does not appear that there was any directed effort to avoid their usage either.

- **The Roman Catholic Lectionary for Mass contains 23 selections that are blatantly anti-Jewish, as compared with the six in the "historic pericopes"**

It seems that the liturgical specialists who developed the Lectionary for Mass did not apply to their process of lectionary formation the principles and the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* (the Declaration on the Relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions approved by the Vatican Council II - 10/28/65). They were particularly insensitive in their selections of virulently anti-Jewish texts from the Acts of the Apostles, which are to be read during the important Easter Season.

- **The Lutheran Lectionary for Mass, thereby making it the most anti-Jewish lectionary analyzed by Professor Beck**

The Lutheran liturgists and the liturgists of other Christian denominations who took an interest in the (Roman Catholic) Lectionary for Mass and, with various modifications, adopted it for their own use, yet appear to have had no concerns about its expanded use of defamatory anti-Jewish texts. The liturgists from the Lutheran tradition even included additional viciously and blatantly anti-Jewish selections in their Lutheran Lectionary for Mass.

- **The Revised Common Lectionary also contains several additional blatantly anti-Jewish passages in its collection**

Although this is the most modern (1992) Christian prayer books examined by Prof. Beck, it seems that the Christian liturgists who developed it demonstrated the same lack of sensitivity as did the others.

Considering the many millions of churchgoing Christians who have read these liturgical collections in their regular church services, it is not surprising that anti-Semitism has flourished within "The Church" and Christendom. The New Testament has been very effective in poisoning the minds of those who study it and accept it as "the breathed word of G-d", or as being "inspired by G-d".

IV. SUMMARY

The "Christian love for the Jew", of which so much is heard these days, turns out to be conditional in an overwhelming majority of cases. Christians, evangelical Christian missionaries in particular, view the Jews as a blind people in need of being made into "believers". When their missionary efforts fail, or when their deceptions are exposed, their professed love for the Jew quickly turns into hatred and contempt. Today's hand-clapping Jew-loving "new Christians" are evangelical Christian fundamentalists in disguise, some of whom even profess to be "Torah Observant". They teach the same anti-Semitic doctrines as have been taught by "The Church" throughout the Common Era. And while their tactics may have changed, their agenda and message remain the same.

The number of Jewish people who have been adversely affected, maimed, and murdered in the name of Jesus throughout the history of Christianity significantly

exceeds the six million who were massacred by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Hans Küng, a leading Catholic theologian, wrote:

“Nazi anti-Judaism was the work of godless, anti-Christian criminals. But it would not have been possible without the almost two thousand years' pre-history of 'Christian' anti-Judaism.”⁶

Yet, there are Jews who, for various reasons, have chosen to overlook this fact and have joined themselves to "The Church" with its built-in anti-Semitism. Shmuel Golding, who founded the Jerusalem Institute of Biblical Polemics and directed it for many years, summarized his opinion on this in the following way:

“Any Jew who can pay homage to the New Testament or allow himself to believe in it, is, in my opinion in the same category as a Jew who tries to justify Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or, as one who covers up for the deeds of the Nazis.”⁷

Jews who are approached by Christian missionaries should realize that, in order to be "loved" by these Christians, they will have to embrace and accept the New Testament as part of their Bible. Therefore, whether still a member of the Jewish community or one who has already joined a Hebrew-Christian organization, a Jew must consider the following two important questions:

- ? Can the New Testament, which has led to the persecution and murder of millions of my Jewish ancestors throughout the Common Era, truly be the breathed word of G-d, or be inspired by Him?**
- ? Am I ready to embrace this New Testament, which spouts hatred and lies against the Jewish people and, therefore, against me as a Jewish person, and accept it as part of my Bible?**

The desired outcome is, of course, that the honest and objective answers to these questions will motivate the affected individuals to return to traditional Judaism.

The analysis presented above, for which only Christian scholarly sources were used, can be summarized in terms of the following question and answer:

Question: What is the source of the common thread of anti-Semitism that connects the historical acts of persecution of the Jewish people?

Answer: The New Testament.

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⁶ Hans Küng, *On Being A Christian*, p. 169, Doubleday, Garden City NY, (1976)

⁷ *Antisemitism in the New Testament* - <http://www.messianic-racism.mcmail.com/ca/antisem/g2.htm>

References for further study

[Selected material from some of these sources was used in preparing this essay]

Internet Websites:

The New Testament & Anti-Semitism (<http://www.messianic-racism.mcmail.com/ca/antisem/idx.htm>) - Several relevant articles may be found at this website.

Jewish-Christian Relations (<http://www.icrelations.net/>) - This website contains a wealth of scholarly materials that deal with all aspects of Jewish-Christian relations.

Books:

Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians, by A. Roy Eckhardt, Schocken Books (1973)

Your People, My People: The Meeting of Christians and Jews, by A. Roy Eckhardt, Crown Publishing Group (1974); ISBN 0-81290-4125

Antisemitism in the New Testament, by Lillian C. Freudmann, University Press of America (1994); ISBN: 0819192953

Removing the Anti-Judaism from the New Testament, by Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowsky, American Interfaith Institute, Philadelphia, PA