



**RECONCILING THE
ANTISEMITISM OF THE
CHURCH FATHERS
WITH THEIR DEVOTION
TO MESSIAH**

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RECONCILING THE ANTISEMITISM OF THE CHURCH FATHERS
WITH THEIR DEVOTION TO MESSIAH

A Research Paper

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Introduction

Throughout history, devout Christians have taken some very undevout positions. Many slave owners in America were not only born-again Christians but held services for their slaves. And after slavery, many white Christians continued to harbor racist sentiments against blacks. In the Middle Ages, the Bishops forbade the people from reading the Bible, *and felt they were right*. Many in the Roman Empire assumed that Rome was the eternal city—until it was sacked by the Visigoths in 410 CE. But what about how the Church viewed Israel? It is a fact that sometimes Christians justify the unbiblical with the Bible—like overturning an election through prayer.

There are two things we know about most of the Church Fathers. 1) They were very deeply devoted to Jesus and theology—even willing to die for him, and 2) they were extremely harsh in their theology and rhetoric towards the Jewish people. In this paper, I will seek to reconcile these two realities. Can you love Jesus and hate his people? Can you seek to save souls while demanding others be damned to death? Not all of the rhetoric went so far as *hate* or *calling for death*, but even mild anti-Jewish sentiment out of the mouths of those who are considered heroes of the faith is shocking. Will the Messiah return for an antisemitic Bride?

Disgracefully “for nearly two thousand years...the Christian world relentlessly dehumanized the Jew, enabling the Holocaust, the ultimate consequence of this dehumanization, to take place.”¹

¹ Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 108.

Abraham a Sancta Clara, the populist seventeenth-century Viennese Catholic preacher... claimed, "After Satan, Christians have no greater enemies than the Jews.... They pray many times each day that God may destroy us through pestilence, famine and war, aye, that all beings and creatures may rise up with them against the Christians." ...Abraham a Sancta Clara believed that Jews had changed God into the devil and were themselves devils. Thus, at the intellectual heights of European Christendom, as in its lower depths, *Jews ceased to be living human beings.*"²

These are feelings we can find in the writings of Luther, and they begin with the Church Fathers.

"Origen, St. Jerome, Chrysostom, and others argued that God was punishing the Jews with perpetual slavery for their murder of Jesus."³

How scholarship has dealt with this problem

Many of the books that deal with this subject simply demonize the Church Fathers. It is understandable that Jewish scholars are tough on them. As Dr. Michael Brown notes in his book, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood*, the history between the Church and the Jewish people is indeed *bloody*.

While negative Jewish reaction to 2,000 years of antisemitism from Christian theologians is understandable, what is not is how many books on Church history completely whitewash any references to this embarrassing truth. In 1985, as a Bible school student, I read about the men we will examine here, and not one word was written about their antagonistic feelings toward the Jewish people/religion. Even in the books for this graduate-level course for which I am writing this paper, there is not even a hint of the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the Church Fathers.

For example, in Charles McGrath's tome, *Christian History* (an amazing book despite this example), he explains Justin's argument about why God moved Sabbath to Sunday in the most benign way: "Justin explains that the community gathers on Sunday, or the first day of the week,

² Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession*, (New York: Random House; First Edition 2010), 215-216.

³ Robert Michael, *A History of Catholic Antisemitism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 47.

both because it was the day of creation and because this was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.”⁴ Sounds innocent enough until you read Justin’s actual words.

The custom of circumcising the flesh, handed down from Abraham, was given to you as a distinguishing mark, *to set you off from other nations and from us Christians. The purpose of this was that you and only you might suffer the afflictions that are now justly yours; that only your land be desolated, and your cities ruined by fire, that the fruits of your land be eaten by strangers before your very eyes; that not one of you be permitted to enter your city of Jerusalem. Your circumcision of the flesh is the only mark by which you can certainly be distinguished from other men...As I stated before, it was by reason of your sins and the sins of your fathers that, among other precepts, God imposed upon you the observance of the Sabbath as a mark.*⁵

In reality, Justin saw the Jewish Sabbath and circumcision much like the “Jewish Badge”⁶ (the yellow armband with the star of David) that Nazis, and the French and British before them, forced Jews to wear. People could distinguish Jews from non-Jews to persecute them. And why was this distinguishing mark given to the Jewish people? “Because of your sins,” says Justin.

McGrath does not mention the murdering of Jewish communities by Catholic crusaders or the torching of the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem:

It is even reported that, when the Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, the Jews fled to the Great Synagogue, which the Crusaders then set on fire, burning the Jews alive. David Rausch provides a vivid account: “They burned the Jews alive in the chief synagogue [of Jerusalem], circling the screaming, flame-tortured humanity singing ‘Christ We Adore Thee!’ with their Crusader crosses held high.”⁷

This was during the First Crusade when many of the Crusaders were actually devoted, zealous Catholics, not mercenaries. Why are such scenes left out of Church history?

⁴ Alister McGrath, *Christian History*, (Hoboken: Wiley and Blackwell, 2013). 24.

⁵ Justin Martyr, Thomas Falls, *Dialogue with Trypho*, The Fathers of the Church, Volume 6, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 172.

⁶ “Jewish Badge during the Nazi Era,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, accessed on June 12, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/jewish-badge-during-the-nazi-era>.

⁷ Michael Brown, *Our Hand are Stained with Blood*, (Shippensburg: Destiny Image: 2019), 136.

Antisemitism versus anti-Judaism

Let me make a brief note here about the term antisemitism. It was a term that was coined only in the late 1800s by Wilhelm Marr, and I see it as slightly different than anti-Judaism.

Wilhelm Marr, a German journalist who was a Jew-hater, popularized the term in the late nineteenth century. He contended that Jews, *including those who had converted to Christianity*, were incapable of assimilating. Once a Jew, always a Jew. According to Marr, Jews were dangerous because their goal was “to harm Germanic identity” and to destroy “the Germanic.” Nothing could alter their foreign-ness, including changing their religion. Consequently, Marr rejected the term *Judenhass*, Jew-hatred, because even Jews who now considered themselves Christians were still objects of his hatred. Seeking a word that had a racial and “scientific” connotation rather than a religious one, he chose *Antisemitismus* (capitalized because all nouns are capitalized in German). For him and the legions of people who adopted this word, it meant one thing and one thing only: hating members of the Jewish “race.”⁸

In other words, Marr didn’t want to merely hate Jews for their religion but for their existence. The Church Fathers did not believe that Jews were irredeemable. They wanted the Jews to *convert* and find peace with God. By definition, antisemitism is more connected to race than religion; it believes there’s something defective genetically with the Jew. Hence, Hitler was deeply worried that his grandfather might have been Jewish. If true, it was something irreparable. Hitler referred to it as “blood poisoning.”⁹ While Encyclopedia Britannica does say that antisemitism is about religion as well as race, it goes on to say that antisemitism “targeted Jews because of their supposed *biological characteristics*.”¹⁰ It would be unfair to accuse all the Church Fathers of being antisemitic, but rather very much anti-Jewish/Judaism.

⁸ Deborah Lipstadt, *Antisemitism*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2019), 24.

⁹ David Crowe, *The Holocaust*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 81.

¹⁰ Michael Berenbaum, “anti-Semitism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 11, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anti-Semitism>.

The devotion of the Fathers

We will begin by showing that the Fathers had relationship with God—at least their rhetoric would lead us to conclude that. Next, we will view comments by the same men regarding the Jewish people. Lastly, we will ask ourselves and others how to reconcile that which seem to be polar opposites. Jacob, the brother of Yeshua, asks, “Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring?” (Jam. 3:11). We will limit our survey to the words of Justin Martyr, Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.

Justin Martyr

One of the great early apologists of the Christian faith was Flavia Neopolis, known to most by his Christian name, Justin Martyr (100-165). He “described himself as a philosopher seeking the truth who became convinced that Christianity was the true philosophy.”¹¹ He traversed through various Pagan religions until he became a Christian. While he was born in Palestine, he eventually moved to Rome. He “became known as a debater for the faith, most notably through a disputation with the Jew Trypho.”¹² Some believe that he invented “Trypho” in order to debate a Jewish person regarding the faith. Others claim he was a real person.

In his two apologies, he pulls no punches in his assessment of Roman paganism. “Christianity promotes a better morality than Roman religion. Pagans desert their unwanted infants, who either die and make their parents murderers or are picked up by a passer-by and

¹¹ Robert Winn, *Christianity in the Roman Empire : Key Figures, Beliefs, and Practices of the Early Church (AD 100-300)*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2018), 57.

¹² Christopher Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions*. (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 143.

raised to become prostitutes in a temple. Christians, on the other hand, are commanded to care for all their children as an act of piety and justice.”¹³

Of course, such attacks on the Roman religion did not go unnoticed. One of the things that had attracted Justin to the faith was the courage of believers in the face of death. “When I myself took delight in the teachings of Plato, I heard the Christians slandered and saw that they were fearless in the face of death and everything thought fearful,”¹⁴ explains Justin in his second apologetic. Now it was his turn. “[A]fter debating with the cynic Crescens, Justin was denounced to the Roman prefect as subversive and condemned to death with six companions. Authentic records of his martyrdom, by beheading, survive.”¹⁵

Origen of Alexandria

Many think of Origen of Alexandria (185-254) as “undoubtedly the greatest genius the early Church ever produced.”¹⁶ Britannica calls him “the most important theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek church.”¹⁷ From an early age, his faith was tested. His father was beheaded as a Christian in the early part of the third century. He wanted to join his father in prison, to boldly confess faith in Jesus, but as the eldest of seven children, he had to now take care of his family.¹⁸ In order to give his all to service for the Lord, Origen embraced celibacy.¹⁹

¹³ Winn, 60.

¹⁴ Rowe, 163.

¹⁵ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “St. Justin Martyr—Christian apologist,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed June 16, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Justin-Martyr>

¹⁶ John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 25.

¹⁷ Henry Chadwick, “Origen—Christian Theologian,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed June 17, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Origen>.

¹⁸ McGuckin, 3.

¹⁹ McGuckin, 7.

Origen became a prolific writer and educator. "A stream of treatises and commentaries began to pour from Origen's pen. At Alexandria, he wrote *Miscellanies (Stromateis)*, *On the Resurrection (Peri anastaseos)*, and *On First Principles (De principiis)*. He also began his immense commentary on St. John, written to refute the commentary of the Gnostic follower of Valentinus, Heracleon."²⁰ His life's work was the *Hexapla*, a parallel edition of six translations of the Hebrew Bible, including the Hebrew itself. The goal was to assist those who would debate rabbis, who only trusted the original Hebrew.²¹

While Origen did not die a martyr, he withstood torture for his faith, the type of torture that makes you long for martyrdom.

Origen was a marked man. He had evaded previous persecutions by hiding in the houses of the faithful. This time he was deliberately sought out as the leading Christian intellectual of the age and was arrested. His treatment was specially designed to bring him to a public recantation of the faith. To this end he was tortured with special care, so that he would not die under the stress of his pain. He was chained, set in the infamous iron collar, and stretched on the rack dash 4 spaces, no less, as Eusebius tells his readers, who knew exactly what degree of pain that involved, and how many dislocations of bones and drippings of sinews it brought with it.²²

St. John Chrysostom

The next two Fathers came to be influential at a vastly different time than Justin and Origen. Christianity was not only legal; it had become the official religion of Rome in 380 by order of Theodosius. As a result, bishops no longer had to live in the shadows. There seems to have been a sharp increase in politics amongst the clergy.

²⁰ Chadwick, "Origen."

²¹ Cahdwick, "Origen."

²² McGuckin, 22.

I did not find many heroics in the life of Chrysostom (347-407). He is mostly known for his oratory skills. “The zeal and clarity of his preaching, which appealed especially to the common people, earned him the Greek surname [Chrysostom] meaning ‘golden-mouthed.’”²³ Despite this, he was not known as a great theologian. While he became the bishop of Constantinople, he is most known for the sermons he preached during the 12 years that he served as the bishop of Antioch.

Chrysostom was known to challenge the wealthy to be generous. “Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth, but theirs,”²⁴ exhorted *Goldenmouth*. “The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much.”²⁵ He spoke out against abuse as well:

Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: “This is my body” is the same who said: “You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,” and “Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me”... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.²⁶

He died an unspectacular death due mostly to the self-inflicted damage he did to himself when he lived an ascetic life as a hermit monk.²⁷

Augustine of Hippo

²³ Donald Attwater, “Saint John Chrysostom—Archbishop of Constantinople,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed on June 17, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-John-Chrysostom>.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Catharine P. Roth, *On Wealth and Poverty*, (Yonkers: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984) 55.

²⁵ Saint John Chrysostom. *AZQuotes*, accessed June 19, 2022, <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/536364>.

²⁶ John Chrysostom, *In Evangelium S. Matthaei*, homily 50:3-4, pp 58, 508-509

²⁷ Pauline Allen, Wendy Mayer, *John Chrysostom*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

Many consider Augustine the most influential theologian and thinker of the Church Fathers. His greatest works were *The City of God*, *On Christian Doctrine*, and *Confessions*.

In *The City of God*, he brings some context to the sacking of Rome. Many Christians considered Rome God's city. How could it fall? And many Pagans saw it as a sign that Christianity was not true. "Augustine set out a very different position, avoiding any suggestion that any human political system or structure was to be regarded as possessing divine sanction or ultimate authority." Rome's sustainability, or lack thereof, was neither a sign to Christians nor Pagans. "For so has God snatched us from the powers of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, that kingdom of which he said: My kingdom is not of this world; my kingly power does not come from here."²⁸

On the Jews

Now that we have established that all of these men, to greater and lesser degrees, display passion and conviction for the gospel, let's look at their comments regarding the Jews.

Justin Martyr

We've already read Justin's words regarding the Sabbath and circumcision. He did not see them as distinguishing marks of God's covenant with Abraham but rather as a result of Israel's sin. God makes a covenant with Abraham through circumcision (Gen. 17:9ff) and gives him wonderful promises of blessing. This was long before Israel was even a nation. The first time we hear about the Sabbath is in Exodus 16, where it is "a holy sabbath to the Lord." Ex. 16:23).

²⁸ Thomas Oden, *John 11-21*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 290.

Justin also explains to the Jew Trypho that he is actually no longer an Israelite: “The true spiritual Israel, and descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham...are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ.²⁹ We who are...of Christ are the true Israelitic race.”³⁰ This is classic replacement theology, and Tim Horner considers this “one of the central texts of second-century Christianity,”³¹ thus shaping theology on Israel for generations.

Origen of Alexandria

Origen echoes Justin, believing that “the old economy is surpassed in the new,”³² meaning supersessionism; Israel has been replaced by the Church.

We may thus assert in utter confidence that the Jews will not return to their earlier situation, for they have committed the most abominable of crimes, in forming this conspiracy against the Savior of the human race...hence the city where Jesus suffered was necessarily destroyed, the Jewish nation was driven from its country, and another people was called by God to the blessed election.³³

He blames the entire Jewish race for the death of Jesus, though Jesus says, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18). And while we will not argue that the destruction of Jerusalem was not prophesied as a judgment by the Messiah himself, he ignores the prophecies that speak of the Jewish people returning to God before the end. (Ez.

²⁹ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter XI—The Law Abrogated; The New Testament Promised and given by God.” *Warily Christian Writings*, Accessed on June 18, 2022, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html>.

³⁰ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter CXXXV—Christ is King of Israel and Christians are the Israelite Race.” *Warily Christian Writings*, Accessed on June 18, 2022, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html>.

³¹ Tim, Horner, “Dialogue with Trypho,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 2, 2004, 245-246, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/dialogue-with-trypho/docview/215202564/se-2?accountid=40702>.

³² McGuckin, 27.

³³ “Anti-Semitism of the ‘Church Fathers,’” *Yashanet*, accessed on June 18, 2022, <http://www.yashanet.com/library/fathers.htm>.

36:25ff, Matt. 23:39, Rom. 11:23-26). Origen “formulates a negative judgment against the Jews of his time, who are, he says, ‘entirely abandoned, having nothing of what they formerly held sacred, not even a sign that there is anything divine among them’ and are ‘punished more than others’ for their failure to recognize the one their prophets had foretold.”³⁴

John Chrysostom

The most vicious rhetoric, however, comes from the Golden-Mouth himself. Christians from his congregation in Antioch were attending synagogue. “Christians would often celebrate Jewish holidays in the company of members of the Jewish community and, reciprocally, Jews were invited to participate in the celebrations of the Christian community.”³⁵ These seem right in line with Paul’s exhortation in Romans to “provoke Israel to jealousy” (11:11) through “kindness” (v.22). But Chrysostom was threatened. It is understandable that a preacher might be concerned that his congregants are going to the temple of another religion—they could be swayed. However, the rhetoric that Chrysostom employs goes far beyond the crime.

“The synagogue is worse than a brothel, it is the den of scoundrels and the repair of wild beasts...the temple of demons devoted to idolatrous cults... the refuge of brigands and debauchees, and the cavern of devils. It is a criminal assembly of Jews...a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ, a house worse than a drinking shop...a den of thieves, a house of ill fame, a dwelling of iniquity, the refuge of devils, a gulf, an abyss of perdition...I would say the same things about their souls... As for me, I hate the synagogue... I hate the Jews for the same reason.”³⁶

³⁴ McGuckin, 27.

³⁵ Rabbi Leo Michel Abrami, "The Roots of Antisemitism," *Academia*, accessed on June 18, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/34036868/The_Roots_of_Antisemitism.

³⁶ Quoted in Malcolm Hay, *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism* (New York: Liberty Press, 1981), 27-28.

Chrysostom delivers a series of homilies “Against the Jews.” We don’t have space here to show how far removed it was from the spirit of the gospel. Of the homilies, James Parkes writes that Chrysostom preaches that “God hates them, and indeed has always hated them. But since their murder of Jesus, He allows them no time for repentance.”³⁷ Here are some direct quotes:

- God hates the Jews, and on Judgement Day He will say to those who sympathise with them: “Depart from me, for you have had doings with My murderers!” (Sermon VI)
- How dare Christians have the slightest doings with Jews, those most miserable of all men! They are lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits, pests of the universe. (Sermon VI)
- Why are the Jews degenerate? Because of their hateful assassination of Christ. (Sermon VI)
- I hate the synagogue and abhor it. (Sermon I)
- We must hate both them and their synagogue. (Sermon I)

Augustine

The effects of Augustine on Christian anti-Judaism were massive. He used theology to shape “the Jew.” Jeremy Cohen calls this *the hermeneutical Jew*. “The Christian idea of Jewish identity crystallized around the *theological purpose* the Jew served in Christendom.”³⁸

“Augustine and many of the other Christian theologians who will increasingly build upon a Christian theology of Judaism, or more properly: *anti-Judaism*, never encountered actual Jews. They were responding to an image, a hermeneutical Jew, a Jew that was conjured up in their minds based upon primarily their reading of Scripture.”³⁹

Augustine says:

³⁷ James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*, (New York: JPS, 1934) 163-166.

³⁸ Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 2.

³⁹ Jennifer Rosner, “Antisemitism, Week 2,” *YouTube*, accessed on June 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jj0AkpIQOQ>.

By the evidence of their own scriptures, they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ... It follows that when the Jews do not believe in our scriptures, their scriptures are fulfilled in them while they read them with blind eyes... It is in order to give this testimony which, in spite of themselves, they supply for our benefit by their possession and preservation of those books [of the Old Testament] that they are themselves dispersed among all nations, wherever the Christian Church spreads.⁴⁰

In short, Augustine sees the Jews as a “witness people” who, through their wretchedness, testify to the truth of Scripture. Augustine implores the Church not to harm the Jews (such a thought never entered the mind of New Testament writers), but it is not from love. Augustine scholar Paula Frederiksen explains how the survival of the Jews testifies for the Church.

First of all, their dispersion and subjugation would serve to authenticate the triumph and truth of Christianity and the displacement of the synagogue by the Church. Second, in preserving their Scriptures the Jews would unintentionally also preserve the prophecies contained within them concerning the advent of Christ, in this way proving to pagan critics or recent converts that the Church had not fabricated those prophecies. By thus serving as custodians of the books that both proved the messiahship of Christ and attested prophetically to their own blindness, the Jews had a continuing place in the drama of divine salvation.⁴¹

David Reagan puts it this way, “[Augustine] asserted that the Jews deserved death but were destined to wander the earth to witness the victory of the Church over the synagogue.”⁴² Michael Brown adds, “It was Chrysostom who first coined the term ‘deicide’ (theoktonian in Greek), which means ‘killing God.’ This is because when the Jews killed Jesus, they were literally killing God,”⁴³ according to Chrysostom.

⁴⁰ Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 158.

⁴¹ Kevin J. Madigan, “Augustine and the Jews by Paula Fredriksen,” *Commentary*, November 2008, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/kevin-madigan/augustine-and-the-jews-by-paula-fredriksen>.

⁴² David R. Reagan, “Anti-Semitism—Its Roots and Perseverance,” *Lamb and Lion Ministries*, accessed on June 18, 2022, <https://christinprophecy.org/articles/anti-semitism>.

⁴³ Brown, 26.

Seeking to Reconcile

How can we reconcile such clearly anti-Jewish and, in the case of Chrysostom, antisemitic statements with the reputations of these Fathers as men of great devotion to the Church? It would be too simplistic to simply condemn them as unbelievers masquerading as theologians.

In the case of Origen⁴⁴, Justin⁴⁵, and Augustine, they all held out hope that the Jewish people would embrace Jesus—albeit, their version of Christianity meant severing all ties with their Jewishness, as the Jewish religion had been superseded by Christianity.

Saint Augustine and later Pope Gregory the Great enunciated a rationale for Christian protection of Jews, based loosely on Romans 11: 1-29, that stressed the historical importance of Jews as living witnesses to the Old Testament prophecies that confirmed Jesus' messiahship and that foresaw the Jews' eventual conversion to Christianity as a harbinger of the end of days.⁴⁶

Justin wants Trypho and his companions to embrace Jesus. "I can wish you no greater blessing than this..., that realizing that wisdom is given to every person through this Way, you also may one day come to believe entirely as we do that Jesus is the Messiah of God."⁴⁷

I asked several Messianic Jewish colleagues how they reconcile this conflict. There seemed to be a consensus that Chrysostom was the worst of the lot. He was not merely anti-Jewish, but antisemitic. Pauline scholar David Rudolph shares:

⁴⁴ McGuckin, 138. Origen sees Romans 11:26 being fulfilled in the Jewish people.

⁴⁵ Jon Olson, "Reflections On Michael Wyschogrod's Critique Of Jewish Christianity," Keshet Journal, Issue 18, January 10, 2005, <https://www.keshetjournal.com/article/reflections-on-michael-wyschogrods-critique-of-jewish-christianity/?highlight=justin%20martyr>. "Justin Martyr...held to the visible and material character of Israel's redemptive hopes. Thus the kingdom was awaited in the future. The kingdom was visible but not present."

⁴⁶ Robert C. Stacey, "The Conversion of Jews to Christianity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Speculum*, vol. 67, no. 2 (April 1992): 263.

⁴⁷ Rowe, 169-170.

If we go by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition, Chrysostom was antisemitic. The IHRA working definition states, “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.” Chrysostom preached to his congregation that “we must hate both them [the Jews] and their synagogue” (*Discourses Against Judaizing Christians* 1.5.4). The IHRA definition also states that “demonizing” Jews is a form of antisemitism. Chrysostom preached that “the Jews themselves are demons” (*Discourses* 1.6.3) and “demons dwell in the synagogue, not only in the place itself but also in the souls of the Jews” (*Discourses* 1.6.6.). By both counts, Chrysostom was antisemitic.⁴⁸

Dr. Daniel Juster says, “the vile speech of Chrysostom is some of the worst in history.”⁴⁹

But there was also consensus that we mustn’t judge harshly. Dr. Michael Brown points out that the great evangelist George Whitefield owned slaves.⁵⁰ Juster explains that we can be loyal with bad theology. “A person is saved when they pledge allegiance, but that allegiance can be combined with great error. Other writings of this Church Father show amazing loyalty to Yeshua.”

Professor Jennifer Rosner says we need to look at the “historical context. There are numerous historical factors that went into patristic anti-Judaism, and what was quickly becoming dominant Gentile Christianity read these factors as some kind of divine condemnation and rejection of the Jews.”⁵¹ Brown agrees. They must have been thinking: “After all, didn’t God repeatedly speak against Israel in the OT, calling His own people stiffnecked and hardhearted and rebellious? Didn’t Jesus and Stephen and others continue in this tradition, even calling their leaders a brood of vipers? Didn’t they show their guilt by crucifying the Messiah? And didn’t they receive the just punishment for their ways by being scattered around the world with their

⁴⁸ David Rudolph, email to author, June 13, 2022.

⁴⁹ Daniel Juster, email to author, June 13, 2022.

⁵⁰ Michael Brown, email to author, June 14, 2022.

⁵¹ Jennifer Rosner, email to author, June 13, 2022.

own Temple destroyed?” We have the benefit of living in the -post-restoration-of-Israel era. All they saw were signs of God’s judgment, and they missed the promises of reconciliation.

Dr. Seth Postell remarked, while clearly not justifying their rhetoric, “We live in a politically correct age of respect for those with whom we don’t agree. The Church Fathers lived in very different times than our own.”⁵² Rudolph points out that even Billy Graham⁵³ said some horribly antisemitic comments, and we must constantly “renew our minds” to protect ourselves from bad doctrine. “We learn a ton, not just from good theology,” said Postell, “but also from bad theology. How can we ever refute replacement theology and anti-semitism if we don’t understand its own inherent (albeit twisted) logic.”

Many of the Fathers did not have social intercourse with Jews. “And when there is little social contact between groups (in the case of Luther, it has been argued that he knew almost no Jews personally, so they became the personified enemies of the faith), it is all too easy to demonize them in the name of God. This is what often happened with these Church leaders, especially when the contact they did have was largely negative.”⁵⁴ Certainly, Origen and Justin knew Jews, but as Rosner argued above, Augustine developed his theology on Jews without having met any Jews.

Conclusion

There can be no mistake that much of the rhetoric in theology regarding the Jewish people amongst the Church Fathers bordered on hate speech, and in this case of Chrysostom was

⁵² Seth Postell, email to author, June 12, 2022.

⁵³ Debbie Lord, “Billy Graham-Richard Nixon tapes: The one-time Graham’s image was tarnished,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, accessed June 18, 2022, <https://www.ajc.com/news/national/billy-graham-richard-nixon-tapes-the-one-time-graham-image-was-tarnished/DCj06gfORZJLYa30cLawWL>.

⁵⁴ Brown, email.

absolutely racist and antisemitic. But Christians can have blind spots. Many German believers were absolutely convinced that it was not their place to enter the realm of politics and confront Nazism. We must appreciate the Church Fathers for defending the faith at a time when there was no agreed-upon Canon. They have given us a treasure in the Nicene Creed. Many of them, particularly before Constantine, willingly and joyfully died for their faith.

Ariel Blumenthal points out that when Paul is rebuking the Romans for embracing a form of replacement theology, he still refers to them as “brothers,” even as he warns them that such harsh treatment of the Jewish people could result in them being broken off (Romans 11:21-22, 25). It appears that just as the Jewish people have been blinded to Yeshua, many in the Church have been blinded to God’s plan for the Jewish people. Paul challenged the Romans to not judge the Jews but to provoke them to jealousy. We, too, must not judge the Church Fathers too harshly but show kindness and mercy while unashamedly and zealously correcting the record.

For all we know, we too passionately embrace doctrines that we will one day come to reject. Certainly, we desire mercy now. “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). While we can confront the anti-Jewish sentiments of the Church Fathers, we can at the same time appreciate their invaluable contribution to the body of Messiah.

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