

**ANTI-JUDAISM IN JOHN'S GOSPEL: CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVES AFTER  
VATICAN II COUNCIL (1962-65 CE)**

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**Submitted to the University of Wales in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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## DECLARATIONS

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed Tom Norton (candidate)

Date ..25 September 2023.....

### STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## ABSTRACT

Five research questions form the framework of this thesis: Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish? Who are ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel? Does John’s Gospel reflect conflict between the Johannine community and ‘the Jews’? Is there a supersessionist Christology in John? And can certain hermeneutical reading strategies contribute to an understanding of anti-Judaism in John?

In chapter 2 historical contexts underpinning anti-Judaism are discussed. Catholic biblical scholarship before Vatican II Council is outlined, followed by a discussion of Vatican II Council, and a discussion of key Council documents: *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* and *Dei Verbum/Word of God*, which influenced attitudes to the Jews and biblical scholarship respectively.

On anti-Judaism, positive or negative answers depend on interpretation of particular contexts and the approach of commentators to the text. The declaration at John 8:44 that the devil is the father of the Jews can be read as part of standard rhetorical language of the time and not as modern hate speech. Examples of negative Jewish characterization from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century are therefore given in chapter 3. Leading Catholic scholars, Brown, Moloney and Schnackenburg commented negatively on the Jews in their early works but Brown changed his stance in later years. The identity of ‘the Jews’ is explored and, again, context is important. Catholic commentators, particularly Brown, distinguish between the various referents of the term.

Chapter 4 then considers the existence of a Johannine community and its contribution to anti-Judaism. Supersessionism and its vestigial presence today, and the contribution of hermeneutics to an understanding of John’s Gospel are discussed.

Conclusions are presented in chapter 5 of the dissertation. Catholic exegetes are now part of mainstream biblical scholarship and there is no particular Catholic angle to their contributions to anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel.

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I also wish to acknowledge the inspiration I received from Eric Hayot's *The Elements of Academic Style*, an inspiring monograph, whose sage advice I have tried to follow in matters of style and structure in academic writing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

‘The past is, by definition, a datum which nothing in the future will change. But the knowledge of the past is something progressive which is constantly transforming and perfecting itself.’<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 Introduction

John’s Gospel has been a key biblical source for anti-Judaism throughout the history of the Christian Church, while antisemitism is a matter of continuing significance in our times.<sup>3</sup> Attempts at shining a light on the biblical, especially Johannine, origins of both anti-Judaism and antisemitism are therefore significant. How scholars investigate the interpretation and later reception of John’s Gospel plays an important role in current biblical scholarship. The wider context of this study is the connection between John’s Gospel and Jewish-Christian relations, and the ways in which they have changed substantially during the twentieth century owing to new sensibilities brought about by the impact of the Holocaust, the foundation of the state of Israel, the development of ecumenism, and the work of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65 CE). While nearly all exegetes on John’s Gospel were aware of possible anti-Jewish sentiments in the text until the mid-1960s, it was not debated as an ethical issue of perceived anti-Judaism or as a modern concern until sometime between then and the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> More specifically, the Roman Catholic Church has attempted to be fully reconciled with Judaism after many centuries of enmity.<sup>5</sup> The origins of anti-Judaism are traditionally traced back to the canonical gospels, including the Gospel of Matthew, but particularly the Gospel of John, where many anti-Jewish statements have been identified, including the *locus classicus* of John 8:39-56, in particular the reference to the Jews as the children of ‘your father the devil’ (Jn 8:44). Moreover, one of the most acute expressions of

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<sup>2</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Anti-Judaism’ and ‘antisemitism’ are sometimes used synonymously, but Edward Kessler usefully distinguishes between them as follows: the former describes the religious and theological defamation of Judaism, while the latter is a post-Enlightenment designation, referring to the denigration of Jews on racial grounds and associated with the emergence of European modernity and involves a deep-seated dislike of Jews and Judaism. See Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p.226 (glossary). An alternative, controversial, view is that a distinction between Christian theological anti-Judaism and racist antisemitism allows the Catholic Church to escape full responsibility for its role in the history of antisemitism. See Marianne Moyaert, ‘Understanding the Difference Between Antisemitism and Anti-Judaism’, *Antisemitism Studies*, vol 6 (2022), pp.373-93.

<sup>4</sup> Sonya Shetty Cronin, *Raymond Brown, ‘The Jews’, and the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p.4.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Roman Catholic Church’, hereafter abbreviated to the ‘Catholic Church’.

Catholic (and wider Christian) anti-Judaism has been the accusation that the Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus (*deicide*).

This study examines some of these key issues by focusing specifically on Catholic biblical scholarship on John's Gospel and anti-Judaism, considering how Catholic biblical scholarship has been influenced by Vatican II Council pronouncements, principally in two publications. The first, 'Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions' is popularly known by its opening Latin words *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* (28 October 1965). This document was among the Council's most revolutionary declarations, in particular its pronouncements about the Church's relationship to Judaism in the aftermath of the Second World War and the rise of antisemitism in Europe. The document highlights the symbiotic relationship between Christianity and Judaism, particularly their common spiritual heritage through shared sacred texts. The second publication is, 'The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation', also popularly known by its opening Latin words, *Dei Verbum/The Word of God* (18 November 1965), in which the principles for scriptural interpretation are set out. The document gives its approval to contemporary biblical scholarship, the historical-critical approach in particular, and declares that sacred Scripture should be more widely available to all the faithful. The two documents are broadly related in that a new respect towards Judaism is reflected in sensitive interpretations of perceived anti-Judaism in John.

This chapter is arranged as follows. After this introduction (1.1), the approach and methodology adopted in this dissertation are presented (1.2), followed by an outline of the structure and content of the central chapters of the study (1.3).

## **1.2 Approach and Methodology**

The purpose of the thesis is to evaluate the contribution of Catholic biblical scholarship to contemporary debates on perceived anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John. The thesis focuses on Catholic scholarship since 1965 in the wake of Vatican Council II pronouncements and the issuing of the two key documents mentioned above. The approach adopted in this dissertation involves the examination and evaluation of the Gospel of John and relevant commentaries, while bringing



historical-critical, and narratological approaches, including discourse analysis, as well as hermeneutical reading strategies, to the discussion of scholarly interpretations of anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel.

### 1.3 Chapter Outlines and Structure

Chapter outlines and structure are as follows:

**Chapter 2: Vatican II Council (1962-65): Contexts.** This chapter discusses and analyses the background contexts which underpin discussions of key issues on anti-Judaism in John's Gospel and Catholic perspectives on the matter. After some introductory remarks the chapter begins with an overview of Jewish-Christian relations including discussion of key topics that provided a legacy of anti-Judaism by the Christian/Catholic<sup>6</sup> Church during the past two thousand years, namely: the genre of writings known as *Adversus Iudaeos/Against the Jews* and, from the twelfth century, the Blood Libel, supersessionism (replacement theology), and in more recent times, the Holocaust and the role of Pope Pius XII during that period. The discussion then moves to an overview of Catholic biblical scholarship before Vatican II Council, followed by a brief examination of the Council with a discussion of the context and antecedents for its establishment, and details of the world-wide composition of the delegates. This is followed by a discussion of the preparations for the four sessions of the Council, as well as its distinctive pronouncements. The chapter then offers an analysis of the *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* and *Dei Verbum/Word of God* policy documents, as well as the implications, as set out in these documents of changed Catholic attitudes to Judaism and for Catholic biblical scholarship, respectively.

### **Chapter 3: Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel, Part 1: Anti-Judaism and identity.**

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<sup>6</sup> The designation 'Christian/Catholic' is sometimes used in this study as there is some uncertainty as to when the 'Catholic Church' was founded. Catholics would claim that it originates in the New Testament itself and that it is a continuation of the early Christian community established by Jesus' disciples. Alternatively, its institutional foundation can be dated from 380 CE when it became the state religion of the Roman Empire. Another possible date is 590 CE during the papacy of Gregory I (590-604 CE), with the consolidation of territory controlled by the Pope into what became known as the Papal States. The designation also refers to the fact that other Christian churches were involved in anti-Judaism from the Reformation onwards.

The scholarly literature on John and Judaism is vast. An anthology of contributions on the subject published in 2017 listed over 800 titles in its ‘Works Cited’ section.<sup>7</sup> This thesis makes no attempt to form a *status quaestionis* on the subject and some limiting or controlling framework for the discussion is therefore needed. Bieringer<sup>8</sup> suggests an interrogatory framework of five broad research questions for discussion of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel:

1. Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish? Were John’s intentions anti-Jewish or were its content subsequently used to promote anti-Judaism?
2. Who are the ‘Jews’ in John’s Gospel.? Does the designation refer to the Jews collectively in an ethnic or national sense, or, to those living in Judea (‘Judaean’), or is it a generic reference to the religious authorities?
3. Does John’s Gospel reflect conflict between the Johannine community and ‘the Jews’ and, if so, what lies behind that conflict? Was such a conflict the beginning of the ‘parting of the ways’ between Judaism and Christianity?
4. Is there a supersessionist Christology in John? What are the arguments for and against this proposal?
5. Can hermeneutical reading strategies of the text contribute to the understanding of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel? Can the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed in certain passages be qualified or even deconstructed by reference to the pro-Jewish expressions found in other passages within the text?

Chapter 3 deals with the first two of the above issues namely, perceived anti-Jewishness and the identity of the ‘Jews’, from the perspective of both non-Catholic and Catholic biblical scholarship. The examination of Catholic perspectives, in the wake of Vatican II Council pronouncements on Catholic-Jewish relations and biblical interpretation, will focus on the contributions of three

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Works Cited’, in R. Alan Culpeper and Paul N. Anderson, *John and Judaism: a Contested Relationship in Context* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), pp. 355-412.

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from R. Bieringer, D. Pollefeyt, and E. Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds, *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p.5.

leading Catholic exegetes who have published numerous studies and commentaries on John's Gospel, namely Raymond E. Brown, Francis J. Moloney and Rudolf Schnackenburg. Brown is acclaimed beyond Catholic circles, and monographs have been written about his scholarship.<sup>9</sup> He has also played a key role in pontifical committees. The Catholic approach to biblical interpretation has historically rested on the twin pillars of Scripture and Tradition and the extent to which they are still relevant is considered in this study in the light of Vatican II pronouncements in the document *Dei Verbum/Word of God* and actual practice.

**Chapter 4: Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel, Part II: The Johannine Community, supersessionism, and hermeneutics.**

The main topics analysed in this chapter are the third, fourth and fifth topics of the framework, namely, the conflict between the Johannine community and 'the Jews' and the possibility that this was a pointer to the 'parting of the ways' between Christianity and Judaism; next is the Catholic/Christian doctrine of supersessionism (replacement theology). For the fifth topic the chapter considers how overarching hermeneutical reading strategies might contribute to an understanding of the other four topics and thus anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. As in the previous chapter both non-Catholic and Catholic perspectives and scholarship are considered together.

**Chapter 5: Conclusions.** The arguments of the thesis are summarised and the contribution of Catholic biblical scholarship to scholarly debates about John's Gospel is evaluated. The chapter then considers the question of what may be distinctively Catholic about Catholic biblical scholarship.<sup>10</sup> One aim is to determine whether a unique Catholic perspective on perceived anti-Judaism in John's Gospel can be discerned and to what extent Catholic scholarship may differ from non-Catholic counterparts. In short, does Catholic scholarship provide any added value to interpretations of the question of anti-Judaism in relation to the Fourth Gospel?

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<sup>9</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*. Donald Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Luke Johnson, 'What's Catholic about Catholic Biblical Scholarship?', in Luke Johnson and William Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), pp.3-34.

## CHAPTER 2: VATICAN II COUNCIL (1962-65 CE): CONTEXTS

‘I am Joseph your brother.’<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

Pope John XXIII (1881-1963 CE) caused widespread comment when he publicly greeted Jewish visitors to the Vatican with the above words in 1960. In the previous year he had changed the words of the Good Friday liturgy in which Catholics prayed for the Jews with the words: ‘Let us pray also for the perfidious Jews,’ by removing the word ‘perfidious’ from the prayer.<sup>12</sup> In the Latin form of the prayer *perfidis Judaeis*, the word *perfidus* means ‘unbelieving’ rather than ‘perfidious’ or ‘treacherous.’ The deletion of this word by Pope John was an implied rejection of supersessionism (2.2.3 below). These actions may have been minor in the larger scheme of things, but they were indicative of profound changes in the Catholic Church’s attitude towards the Jews, changes which were consolidated in the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65 CE), specifically in the document *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* (2.5 below).

As noted by Gaillardetz: ‘The Second Vatican Council was an event of unparalleled significance in the history of modern Catholicism. One has to go back to the Protestant Reformation to find an event that matches Vatican II’s impact on Roman Catholicism.’<sup>13</sup> It was a largely successful attempt to update some of the doctrines and rituals of the Church for the twentieth century and beyond. Some decisions of Vatican II have had a dramatic impact on the life of ordinary believers. For example, less than a year after the Council, the form and content of the Mass changed, so that it could now be celebrated throughout the world in vernacular languages instead of exclusively in Latin; also, the celebrant now faced the congregation instead of facing the altar.<sup>14</sup> Less dramatically, but also implemented swiftly, was the abolition of the Index of

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<sup>11</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.141; Edward Kessler, ‘“I Am Joseph, Your Brother”: A Jewish Perspective on Christian-Jewish Relations Since *Nostra Aetate* No. 4’, *Theological Studies*, 74 (2013), pp.48-72.

<sup>12</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.141.

<sup>13</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), p. ix.

<sup>14</sup> Personal observation.

Forbidden Books, which originated in the aftermath of Martin Luther's 95 theses in 1517.<sup>15</sup> Other issues such as supersessionism are the subject of continuing debate in the present day. For the purposes of this study – Catholic perspectives on perceived anti-Judaism in John's Gospel – there are two outcomes of Vatican II that are most significant: a new proclaimed attitude to Catholic-Jewish relations, and a new impetus and respect for biblical studies, both of which are examined below.

This chapter is organised as follows: after this introduction (2.1), the following topics are discussed: a consideration of some key concepts and events which have influenced Jewish-Catholic/Christian relations over the centuries (2.2); an overview of Catholic biblical scholarship before Vatican II Council (2.3); an overview of Vatican II Council (2.4); a discussion of a key Council document concerning relations with Judaism (*Nostra Aetate*) (2.5); and a key Council document on scriptural interpretation (*Dei Verbum*) (2.6). Finally, the discussion is summarised and conclusions are presented (2.7).

## **2.2 Jewish-Catholic/Christian Relations**

It is difficult to appreciate the extent of the changes in attitude by the Catholic Church towards the Jews as manifested at Vatican Council II, without some discussion of the history of Jewish-Christian relations over the previous centuries. Many examples of egregious anti-Jewish actions by the Christian, including Catholic, churches could be cited, but it is probably more useful to focus on the legacy of a few key ideas and developments in the early Christian Church and beyond which have influenced the shape of Jewish-Christian relations over the centuries and led to changed relations in recent times. The following section, therefore, will focus on the following issues: *Adversus Iudaeos/Against the Jews* writings (2.2.1), the Blood Libel (2.2.2), supersessionism (replacement theology) (2.2.3), and in recent times, the Holocaust and the controversial role of Pope Pius XII during that period (2.2.4). These four topics have been selected

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<sup>15</sup> Jolanta N. Komomicka, 'The Index of Forbidden Books: is it an index?', *The Indexer*, vol.41, No. 2 (June 2023), pp.191-98 (here, p.194).

because, in my opinion, they have been particularly influential in shaping and sustaining Christian/Catholic hostility to Jews over the centuries and culminating in the Holocaust.

### ***2.2.1 Adversus Iudaeos/Against the Jews writings***

An early manifestation of anti-Judaism in early Christianity with lasting consequences, is the *Adversus Iudaeos/Against the Jews* genre of writing of theologians belonging to the Early Church. The genre may refer to particular treatises that concerned real or imagined Jewish accusations against Christ, Christianity and Christians. *Adversus Iudaeos* texts are written by or attributed to Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Theodoret of Cyprus, and John Chrysostom.<sup>16</sup> These writings use common arguments and show a tension that continues to modern times. It is acknowledged that Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew, but there was the problem that Jews did not recognise Jesus as the Messiah; God's disavowal of the Jews as the chosen people; and a rejection of Jewish Law in the light of a new, spiritual revelation. The designation *Adversus Iudaeos* may also refer more broadly to any genre of writing (letters, biblical commentaries etc) that distinguish Christianity from Judaism in order to establish the superiority of Christianity.

Celsus (c. 180 CE), an anti-Christian pagan polemicist accused Christians of promoting Christology as the basis of the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition and that anti-Judaism was deep within the Christian tradition, or as Ruether puts it: 'Anti-Judaism developed theologically in Christianity as the left-hand of Christology. That is to say, anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian claim that Jesus was the Christ.'<sup>17</sup> One of the most prominent *Adversus Iudaeos* writers was John Chrysostom (c.350-407 CE), bishop of Antioch, a city where there was a Jewish community, as well as being the birthplace of Gentile Christianity: '...and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians' (Acts 11:26). Antioch was a melting pot and bridge between Judaism,

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew S. Jacobs, 'Adversus Iudaeos', *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed by Roger S. Bagnall and others (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp.111-13.

<sup>17</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), cited in Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, p.11.

Jewish Christianity, Gentile Christianity and paganism.<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom wrote eight polemical sermons called *Adversus Iudaeos*, whose principal target was the relationship between his Christian congregation and the local Jewish community which he feared might undermine his authority. Many Christians in Antioch took part in Jewish festivals and attended the synagogue, while Chrysostom was concerned that such hybridism would undermine the distinctiveness of Christianity. Jews, moreover, did not participate in Christian rituals. His sermons and homilies attacked Jews and Judaism but in the context of the time, according to Kessler, Chrysostom's invective, became part of his rhetorical toolkit and was aimed at holding the attention of his audience and to win back 'Judaizing' Christians. It would seem that his sermons did not lead to unrest at the time, but the real effects of his words can be seen in their use by the Church to justify their oppression of the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

It can be argued that *Adversus Iudaeos* writings helped to form negative images of Jews that provided racialised stereotypes. These, in turn, contributed to the antisemitism of the modern era. As some scholars have demonstrated, Nazis used patristic writings and in particular, Chrysostom's sermons to justify the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup> For Christianity, *Adversus Iudaeos* writings fulfilled a need for Christian self-affirmation and they are undoubtedly attempts to establish a distinctive Christian identity, separate from a Jewish one.<sup>21</sup>

At this stage it is worthwhile to defining the concept of identity underpinning the discussion in this part of the study. Many references to identity take its meaning as self-evident and do not bother to define it in any detail, particularly in the context in which the term is used. The concept of 'identity' is ultimately derived from the Latin *idem*, the 'same' or 'sameness'. But sameness is only one aspect of identity. Woodward suggests that identity is marked by both sameness and difference.<sup>22</sup> Or to put it another way: 'identities are the products of exclusion, because they are

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<sup>18</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.57.

<sup>19</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, pp.58-9.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Steven Katz, 'Ideology, State Power and Mass Murder/Genocide', in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed by Peter Hayes (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), p.50.

<sup>21</sup> Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p.181.

<sup>22</sup> Kath Woodward, *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge,2004), p. 151.

constructed through difference and in relation to the “Other.”<sup>23</sup> In my opinion, these two linked elements are the twin pillars on which any discussion of identity in a particular context should be based and they offer some conceptual clarity amidst the confusing fog of contributions on the particular issue of identity. Identity is thus forged out of the melding of sameness and difference. In the present context the ‘sameness’ pillar is represented by the fact that Jesus and the disciples were Jewish, and, in evolving from Judaism, Christianity adopted many Jewish beliefs and practices. The ‘difference’ pillar is demonstrated by the fact that the early Christian communities found it necessary to lay claim to exclusivism in salvation, the belief that salvation can only be achieved through Jesus Christ, as indicated by the following representative scriptural pronouncements: ‘There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). Likewise, the Johannine Jesus claims in the Farewell Discourse: ‘I am the light, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (Jn 14:6). This exclusivism enabled some early Christian writers (from second century CE onwards) to brand Judaism as the ‘Other’ in order to establish a separate identity. It could also be said that, as a religion, Christianity was defined and defined itself by its hostility to Jews and Judaism and, arguably, contributed to ensuring the survival of the new faith community in its early years of development and expansion. By the Middle Ages the *Adversus Iudaeos* corpus of writings helped to establish the image of the Jews as ‘intransigent, murderous, misanthropic, diabolical and deicidal’ and this ‘had hardened into the chilling stereotype that would eventually feed into the racialized anti-Semitism of the modern era.’<sup>24</sup>

### **2.2.2 The Blood Libel**

Moving forward in time, under medieval canon law restrictions were placed on the Jewish community in economic, political, social and religious spheres. In Europe, large-scale violence by Christians against the Jews began with the Crusades, beginning in 1096 CE. Accompanying it

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<sup>23</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Who Needs Identity’, in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. by P. du Gay et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1966), pp. 5-30 (here, p. 20).

<sup>24</sup> Jacobs, ‘Adversus Iudaeos,’ *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, p.113.



came an increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric, particularly in the Blood Libel (or ritual murder libel) canard, which arose in the twelfth century CE in order to accuse Jews of replaying Jesus' crucifixion by murdering a Christian boy and using his blood in rituals that mocked the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup> The biblical basis for the Blood Libel is an interpretation of the declaration of the Jews at the trial of Jesus: 'His blood be on us and on our children!' (Mt 27:25). This has been interpreted as a self-curse by the Jews, with reference to Jews of all time.<sup>26</sup> The first known accusation was made in Norwich when a boy named William was found dead in a wood and his death was attributed to Jews. The false charge resulted in the retaliatory murder of a Jew. The Blood Libel was emphatically denounced and rejected by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church on numerous occasions, typically by Pope Gregory X (1210-76 CE) in his 'Letter on Jews' (1271 CE): 'Most Falsely do these Christians claim that the Jews have secretly and furtively carried away these children and killed them... We order that Jews seized under such a foolish pretext be freed.'<sup>27</sup> But in spite of such official denunciations the Blood Libel became locked into the Christian imagination (the murdered boy was revered as Saint William of Norwich). This period also saw the expulsion of Jewish communities from large parts of Western Europe, notably the exile of ancient Jewish communities from Spain in 1492. The Protestant Reformation moreover did not try to ameliorate Christian animosities towards Jews, nor did the Enlightenment era change matters.<sup>28</sup>

The Nazis revived the Blood Libel in their party paper *Der Stürmer*, in a special issue entitled *Ritualmord-Nummer* or 'Ritual Murder Issue' (May 1934). In this issue Jews were defamed in general and, in particular, accused of ritually using gentile blood obtained through murder.<sup>29</sup> The editor of *Der Stürmer* was Julius Streicher who was responsible for its popularity and social impact at a time of national economic and demographic crises. The immigration of

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<sup>25</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: : The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), p.272; Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.104.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Wansborough, 'The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable', *European Judaism*, vol 50, no. 1 (Spring 2017), pp. 81-91 (here, p.82). An alternative interpretation is that it refers to the atrocities of the siege of Jerusalem, a generation after the death of Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p.273.

<sup>28</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p.309.

<sup>29</sup> Damon T. Berry, 'Blood on the Tongue: Reading Abjection in Nationalist Blood Libels from Nazi Germany to Hamas and the British National Party', *Journal of Hate Studies*, 10 (2012), pp 99-122 (here, p.105).

Ostjuden/Eastern Jews into German cities was particularly significant, with its fear of alien influence in time of hardship and insecurity resulting from financial distress. The stereotypical Jew in *Der Stürmer* was an abstraction and became the focus of the many prevailing anxieties in Germany whereby Jews were caricatured as a corrupting and powerful influence in Germany's national life. Jewish Germans were demonized as internal aliens and were caricatured as embodying everything negative from a failing government system to the financial vicissitudes of everyday life.<sup>30</sup> In short, the mythic Jew was presented as a powerful and corrupting influence in German national life. The special ritual murder issue of *Der Stürmer* recounts specific instances of Jewish ritual murder and is bolstered with antisemitic excerpts from Voltaire, von Moltke and Martin Luther's *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen (The Jews and their Lies)*. Also included were reproductions from European history and geography of images of ritual murder from woodcuts and postcards.

### **2.2.3 Supersessionism**

An overarching key idea in anti-Judaism is the Christian teaching of supersessionism or replacement theology. This concept has had a variety of connotations. It is sometimes used by Christian theologians to signify any aspect of traditional Christian relations to Israel which they believe can no longer be sustained. For some theologians this means that the belief that Jesus is Israel's promised messiah is in itself a form of supersessionism and must be repudiated if the church is to have a proper relationship with Judaism. Others believe that supersessionism must be renounced but without including the traditional Christological claim among those elements to be renounced.<sup>31</sup> To say that one thing supersedes another is to claim that the one replaces the other because of the deficiency of the latter, thus making it obsolete. More specifically, the term is used to mean that as the Jesus movement evolved into the Church, it in effect replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God.<sup>32</sup> Or, to put it another way, supersessionism is the belief that Christianity

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<sup>30</sup> Berry, 'Blood on the Tongue', p.107.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce D. Marshall, 'Christ and the Cultures: the Jewish People and Christian Theology', in Colin E. Gunton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp.81-100 (here, p.82).

<sup>32</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p.58.; Marshall, 'Christ and the Cultures', p.82.

improved on Judaism and thus supplanted it, a view implied in the Letter to the Hebrews, where Jesus is described as the ‘mediator of a new covenant’ (Heb. 9:15).<sup>33</sup> This view is also present in the Christian naming of the Hebrew Bible as the ‘Old Testament’, with the negative implication that the ‘old’ is superseded by the ‘new’, and, arguably, amounts to an adverse opinion on Judaism. The basis of supersessionism lies in challenging the assertion that the Jews are the elected or chosen people of God as the following scriptural citations indicate: ‘For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession’ (Deut. 7:6). This implies that the elect are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that this descent, ‘my kindred according to the flesh’ (Rom. 9:3) gives membership of the elect and indicates who the elect are. The supersessionist view of divine election is that the Christian Church has replaced Israel as the chosen people of God, that Christians are the true heirs of Abraham – ‘For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything!’ (Gal 6:15) - and that election is no longer a matter of biological descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but of baptism and faith. It is no longer a matter of being a Jew but of being a Christian, with old rules of divine election being superseded by new ones.<sup>34</sup> According to the Church’s traditional teaching on supersessionism, the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh no longer have any special favour with God. Quite the opposite in fact, since Jesus Christ, one of their own, was not only handed over to crucifixion but they continue to deny his messiahship.<sup>35</sup>

It has been argued by Marshall that supersessionism played a more positive role in that it kept the Hebrew Bible, in the form of its Greek translation (the Septuagint) in the Christian scriptural canon. Gentile Christians were now able to understand the Jewish scriptures by studying the election of Israel as a prelude to Christ’s salvific mission and provided the narrative context for his redemptive role.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> John Barton, *A History of the Bible: The Book and its Faiths* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), p.14

<sup>34</sup> Marshall, ‘Christ and the Cultures’, p.83.

<sup>35</sup> Marshall, ‘Christ and the Cultures’, pp.83-4.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall, ‘Christ and the Cultures’, p.84.

Another facet of supersessionism with far-reaching consequences has been a change in the calendar by which time is measured against the birth of Christ instead of the foundation of Rome, or instead of the Germanic system based on the reigns of kings. The Venerable Bede (c. 673-735 CE) popularized the designation of years as *anno domini* and this was observed throughout the Christian world by the tenth century CE.<sup>37</sup> It would seem that both past and present were being defined, with the ‘year of the Lord’ signifying that the Lord, with his dominion over time, is as present now as when he was on earth.

Supersessionism was used until the nineteenth century as a positive aspect of Christianity, but now it is used in a derogatory sense to denote traditional Christian self-definition over and against Judaism.<sup>38</sup> One of the few Christian opponents of supersessionism before the modern era was John Calvin (1509-1564 CE), who emphasised that the entire Reformation confession, *Sola Gratia/By Mercy Alone*, was based on God’s covenant with Abraham, and on promises to share the blessings of Israel with all people.<sup>39</sup> The *Nostra Aetate* document of Vatican II, as we shall see, officially repudiated supersessionism and affirmed God’s continuing covenant with the Jewish people (see 2.5 below).

#### ***2.2.4 The Holocaust and the Role of Pope Pius XII***

In the twentieth century the Holocaust saw a systematic mobilisation of the resources of a modern technological state for the purpose of killing an entire people in the Nazi death camps. In the post-Holocaust period the Christian churches have reconsidered their relationship with the Jewish people. There is continuing controversy on the role of the Catholic church in this period, in particular, the perceived inaction of Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli), who was pope from 1939 to 1958 CE. There is considerable scholarship on the subject. Sánchez attempted to present an objective study of the controversy and to allow readers to make up their own minds.<sup>40</sup> Carroll’s study is also

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<sup>37</sup> Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, p.254.

<sup>38</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp. 20-21.

<sup>39</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.121.

<sup>40</sup> José M. Sánchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

scholarly but written for a non-specialist audience and presents his argument with less hedging than Sánchez. He criticises Pius XII for his indifference to the fate of unbaptized Jews and for his cancellation in 1939 of his predecessor's (Pius XI) encyclical condemning Nazi antisemitism; for not speaking out against the Nazi invasion of Poland; for his silent acceptance of Nazi and fascist anti-Jewish legislation; for his failure to refer to the Jews, or even the Nazis, by name in his Christmas message of 1942; for his failure to excommunicate Hitler, Himmler, Bormann, Goebbels, or other Catholic Nazis. His most egregious act of omission, according to Carroll, was his silence at the rounding up by the Nazis of Jews living in Rome and their subsequent transfer to Auschwitz in 1943.<sup>41</sup>

An authoritative Catholic source, the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, gives, as might be expected, a less hostile assessment of the wartime actions of Pius XII.<sup>42</sup> It admits that he was an admirer of German culture and German Catholicism, and that he signed a concordat with Germany at the beginning of Hitler's chancellorship in 1935 and that this boosted Hitler's international prestige. The matter of the attitude of Pius XII toward the Nazi persecution of the Jews did not arise until after his death in 1958 and is still a point of controversy. His allies claimed that he tried to rescue Italian Jews by giving financial help and that he decreed that Jews could be hidden in church institutions, including monasteries. But his critics accused him of not denouncing atrocities but rather speaking only in bland, general terms. Popes are traditionally canonised but controversy continues to attend his path to sainthood, pending the release of Vatican archives from World War II. In 2007, the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Franco, threatened not to attend the annual Holocaust Memorial Day at Yad Vashem, the main Holocaust museum in Israel, as he objected to a caption about Pius XII that he considered offensive. It described Pius XII as one who did not oppose the Nazis and who did not act to save Jewish lives. The Archbishop changed his mind about attending

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<sup>41</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, pp. 523-24.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas F. O'Meara, 'Pius XII', in *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), pp.1005-06. A similar, non-controversial account of Pius XII's actions is given by James Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), pp. 384-5. This book carries the imprimatur of the Catholic Church.

after the matter became public knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The issue has surfaced again in a book by David Kertzer who claims that Pius XII gave limited help to Jews, namely those who converted to Catholicism. The author bases his argument on his interpretation of Vatican archives of the period that have now been made publicly available online.<sup>44</sup>

It should also be noted that it was not only the Catholic Church that failed the Jews in Germany, but Christian churches in general for example, by supplying genealogical records that enabled the Nazis to show the extent of a person's Jewish ancestry and provide material for the antisemitic and racist Nuremberg Laws of 1935.<sup>45</sup> On the eve of the Vatican II Council Catholic-Jewish relations were therefore at a low ebb and it was one of the objectives of the Council to repair this position. This was attempted through discussions and pronouncements in the *Nostra Aetate* document (2.5 below).

### **2.3 Catholic Biblical Scholarship before Vatican II Council**

'From the time of Leo XIII (1878-1903 CE) Catholic biblical scholars had experienced what might be described as trial by traffic light.'<sup>46</sup>

The Catholic Church's changed position towards relations with Judaism was enshrined in the document *Nostra Aetate*. However, it was not the only major attitudinal change that emerged from the Vatican II Council. New attitudes toward biblical scholarship were encouraged through the *Dei Verbum* document (2.6 below). Before discussing this document and, specifically, Catholic perspectives on anti-Judaism in John's Gospel, it is useful to contextualise them with an outline and analysis of the evolution of Catholic biblical scholarship before Vatican II.

The history of Catholic/Christian Bible translation effectively begins with Saint Jerome (347-420 CE) whose Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments from the original languages, the Vulgate, was made between 384 and 406 CE.<sup>47</sup> The authority of Jerome's Vulgate was affirmed

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<sup>43</sup> Kessler, *An Introduction*, p.156.

<sup>44</sup> David Kertzer, *The Pope at War: The Secret History of Pius XII, Mussolini and Hitler* (London: Random House, 2022); 'Vatican only saved Jews from Nazis if they converted to Catholicism', *The Times*, 25 June 2022, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, p.532.

<sup>46</sup> AnthonyTowey, 'Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?', *New Blackfriars*, vol 90 (1026), 2009, pp. 206-218 (here, p.210).

<sup>47</sup> 'Vulgate', in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, ed by Scott Hahn (London: Doubleday, 2009), p.944.

by the Council of Trent (1545-63 CE) and a new edition was mandated. This edition appeared in 1592 and became the basis for many translations into other languages. The Vulgate remained authoritative for Catholics until Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943 CE).<sup>48</sup> One of the key principles of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation was the appeal to Scripture (*Sola Scriptura* / *Scripture Alone*) in reaction to the perceived excesses of the Medieval Church, including its concentration on church structures and authority and appeal to tradition.<sup>49</sup> Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE) and other reformers declared that the Bible alone was the locus of authority.<sup>50</sup> The Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* was a direct attack on the Catholic Church's authority and forced a re-evaluation of its core beliefs. *Sola Scriptura* was a relatively new idea in the history of Christianity and only become prominent after the Protestant Reformation. The slogan gradually separated biblical exegesis from the interpretative tradition of the Catholic Church and paved the way for historical-critical approaches to the Bible and the view that it may be read like any other text.<sup>51</sup> Although Luther was a proponent of *Sola Scriptura* he appears to have also leaned on tradition, as Gustav Freytag's engraving of him translating the Bible into German would appear to show.<sup>52</sup> Since then the relationship between Scripture and Tradition has been a matter of controversy within the Catholic Church, with one side claiming that Scripture and Tradition are distinct sources of revelation, with the other claiming that they are not different sources of truth but different modes of expression.<sup>53</sup> There is further discussion of Scripture and Tradition in the *Dei Verbum/Word of God* section below (2.6). At the Council of Trent the Catholic Church staged a 'counter-reformation' by which it recognised the need to repel the Protestant appeal to *Sola Scriptura* and re-emphasise the role of Tradition and the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church's teaching arm, the Magisterium.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> 'Vulgate', in *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, p.1320.

<sup>49</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.xv.

<sup>50</sup> James Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, p.257.

<sup>51</sup> Jens Zimmerman, *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p.90.

<sup>52</sup> Freytag's engraving shows Luther surrounded by books, suggesting his use of other exegetes. [Martin Luther translating the Bible \(engraving\) \(#936707\) \(meisterdrucke.uk\)](#) [Accessed 15 December 2022].

<sup>53</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, 'Revelation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed. by Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), pp.155-74 (here, p.161).

<sup>54</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown and the Catholic Biblical Renewal*, p.xvi.

For about two hundred years, until well into the twentieth century, English-speaking Catholics relied on the Douay-Rheims-Challoner version of the Bible, the first English translation of the complete Bible approved by the Catholic Church. It was first published in two parts. The New Testament part was issued in Rheims, France, in 1582, as a single volume with commentary. The purpose of this production was to help English Catholics to support the Counter-Reformation. The Old Testament was issued in two volumes in 1609 and 1610 by the University of Douay. Much of the text used a dense Latinate vocabulary that made it difficult to read and understand. An extensive revision was undertaken in 1750 by Richard Challoner, vicar apostolic of London.<sup>55</sup>

In the nineteenth century critical analysis of the Bible that questioned the historical reliability of the Gospels and offered a more rational study of the Jesus of history, one that differed from the theological one in the Gospels, caused alarm in the Catholic hierarchy as it appeared to undermine the sacred and historical reliable character of the Bible. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the Catholic Church regarded with suspicion Catholic scholars who adopted historical-critical methods of biblical scholarship. For example, Alfred Loisy (1857-1940 CE) wrote a two-volume exegesis on the Synoptic Gospels that was considered to be too radical and was denounced by church authorities and for which he was excommunicated in 1908. Loisy suggested that Church doctrines, dogmas and traditional beliefs were not infallible, but were always evolving and needed to be reassessed by succeeding generations.<sup>56</sup> There was strong resistance from the Church to modernist thinking, as it was contrary to traditionally held beliefs. Pius X (1903-14 CE) considered Modernism to be, ‘the synthesis of all heresies’, and proclaimed Thomism to be the principal Catholic system of thought.<sup>57</sup> Modernism manifested itself in intellectual relativism, the assertion that there were no truths as such, just ideas that seemed true in particular times and places.<sup>58</sup> This conservatism was bolstered by the decrees of the

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Versions of the Bible,’ in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, ed by Scott Hahn (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2009), pp.941-2.

<sup>56</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.16; Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, p.371.

<sup>58</sup> Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, pp.361-2.



Pontifical Biblical Commission, which was established in 1902 to defend the integrity of Catholicism in biblical matters and promote a traditional view of the Bible against the views of modern biblical scholarship. For example, it declared that Moses was the real author of the Pentateuch, though it was admitted that he may have used other sources and was helped by co-authors.<sup>59</sup> The Commission also asserted the literal historical character of the early chapters of Genesis, including the creation account. It also asserted that the apostle John was the sole author of the Fourth Gospel and that the words of Jesus were his actual words and not the evangelist's compositions.<sup>60</sup>

This position could not be maintained and later in the twentieth century these conservative views were officially overturned. An early straw in the winds of change was the publication of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu/Inspired by the Divine Spirit* of 1943 by Pope Pius XII (1939-1958 CE) that gave the papal imprimatur for Catholic scholars to use scientific study methods in biblical scholarship and approved of the use of historical-critical methods in the study of the Scriptures. A notable feature of the encyclical was that it called for the use of the original languages of the Bible in biblical scholarship, rather than the centuries-long dependence on the Latin or Vulgate translation.<sup>61</sup> Such was the prestige of the *Vulgate*, bolstered by its official endorsement at the Council of Trent, that translations of all subsequent Catholic Bibles were based on it.<sup>62</sup> The lack of Catholic Bibles has been explained, in an officially approved publication, by the fact that until the 1960s Catholics were not avid Bible readers. Before the modern era the majority of Christians were illiterate and reading and studying the Bible would be rare among ordinary Catholics. The Church feared that private interpretation of the Bible might lead to false interpretation. Catholics were meant to rely on the Mass, the sacraments, the catechism, the Virgin Mary and the saints for spiritual nourishment and the Church should teach Catholics what they

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<sup>59</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.xviii.

<sup>60</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.xix.

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel Flynn, 'Theological Renewal in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Vatican II*, ed by Richard R. Gaillardetz (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), pp.19-40 (here, p.34).

<sup>62</sup> Suspicion of biblical scholars was still prevalent among some Church leaders and it was not until 1966 that the first Catholic Bible based on the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts, the *Jerusalem Bible*, was published.

need to know.<sup>63</sup> All of this started to change in about the mid-1960s as a result of the Vatican II Council and the *Dei Verbum* exhortation for Catholics to rediscover the Bible (further discussion at 2.6 below). Another result of the 1943 encyclical was that it inspired a generation of Catholic biblical scholars, among whom were Raymond Brown who will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4 in connection with his commentary on John's Gospel.

## **2.4 Overview of Vatican II Council**

Councils of the Catholic Church can, arguably, trace their origins to the meeting of the 'apostles and the elders' who met in Jerusalem to decide what would be required of converts to the new way (Acts 15:6).<sup>64</sup> The first general Council of the Church was held at Nicaea in 325 CE at which the main topic was the resolution of the doctrinal controversy of the Arian heresy that denied the full divinity of Christ. The council was also notable for the profession of faith, the Nicene Creed. As a result of the Great Schism of 1054 by which the Greek-speaking and Latin-speaking churches excommunicated each other, the West took a separate path and held its own councils, notably the nineteenth general Council, the Council of Trent (1545-63 CE), in response to the Protestant Reformation.<sup>65</sup> The Vatican II Council was held from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965, and was the twenty-first general Council of the Church and the first since Vatican Council I was held in 1869-70 CE. A key event for this latter Council, following the loss of the papacy's temporal power to Italian nationalists, was the extension of the Church's spiritual power over the whole Catholic Church by promulgating the doctrine of papal infallibility in matters of faith and morals.<sup>66</sup>

Before discussing the details of the Council and its pronouncements, it is worthwhile outlining the background and contexts in which the Council took place. According to O'Malley there are three contexts that need to be considered.<sup>67</sup> The first context is about the continuing influence of events that occurred several centuries earlier. Some of the Council discussions only

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<sup>63</sup> Stephen J. Binz, *Introduction to the Bible: A Catholic Guide to Studying Scripture* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), p.ix.

<sup>64</sup> John W. O'Malley, *When Bishops Meet: An Essay Comparing Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2019), p.6.

<sup>65</sup> O'Malley, *When Bishops Meet*, pp.6-7

<sup>66</sup> Tanner, Norman, ed, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts* (New York: Random House, 2012), p.15.

<sup>67</sup> John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2008), pp.3-5.

make sense in the context of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation and the Catholic response to it. Some scholars accordingly describe Vatican II as the end of the Counter Reformation, with several references to the Council of Trent (1545-63 CE) made during the proceedings. Another way of looking at Vatican II is that it represents reforms that were not done from within the Church in the sixteenth century.<sup>68</sup> Lateran Council V which was called in 1512-17 CE seems to have been a missed opportunity for a Catholic Reformation.<sup>69</sup> A more recent context is ‘modernity’ or the ‘long nineteenth century,’ which for the Catholic Church extends from the French Revolution until the death of Pius XII in 1958. The French Revolution and its underlying philosophy was disturbing to Catholic officialdom during much of the long century and Vatican II was an attempt to heal some aspects of the Church’s history during that period.<sup>70</sup> There were other aspects of that long century that the Council needed to take on board such as: competition with Protestants in foreign missions, the rise of Socialism and Communism and, significantly for this study, developments in biblical scholarship (see 2.6 below). The third, and more specific context is the period from the end of World War II up to the opening of the Council in 1962, and although this overlaps with the long nineteenth century, when viewed from a non-ecclesiastical standpoint, it covers significant worldwide political and cultural changes and needs to be considered as a separate and distinctive context. This was the time of the Cold War, which intensified during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, a few days after the Council opened. This period also marked the beginning of the end of colonialism and its consequent influence on the missionary activities of all the churches. Most significantly, this context covers the occurrence and implications of the Holocaust (or Shoah).

Vatican II Council consisted of four separate sessions, all held in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The scale of the event can be judged from a review of the number and variety of attendees.<sup>71</sup> It was attended by more than 2,600 bishops from all over the world, while the number of

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<sup>68</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p.113.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, p.112; Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, pp.248-49.

<sup>70</sup> O’Malley, *When Bishops Meet*, pp.69-70.

<sup>71</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, pp.21-2.

participants exceeded 3,000, including theologians and other experts. These experts (*periti* in Latin) numbered between 200 and 500, depending on the various sessions of the Council. The Council was not only the largest in terms of numbers but also the most ecumenical in terms of cultures and nations. Vatican I (1869-70 CE) consisted mostly of Europeans but because the Church had developed native clergies in mission-countries between Vatican I and the mid-twentieth century, most of the bishops were natives of those mission countries. The majority of the attending bishops there were from Europe. The ecumenism of the Council is also shown by the attendance of non-Catholic and lay observers.

The Council was unique in that it was a multi-media event and was covered by magazines, newspapers, television and radio from all over the world. The Council was also significant in its stated purpose. Unlike many previous councils it had not been summoned to fight heresy or to deal with threats to the unity of the Church. On the contrary, its stated purpose was to promote peace and unity of all humankind and not to repeat traditional doctrinal formulations or to denounce errors. The preparations for the Council were extensive and intensive. Agenda items were sought from all bishops, from heads of clerical religious orders, from Catholic universities, as well as from members of the Roman Curia.<sup>72</sup> Over 9,000 proposals were collected, collated and distributed to 11 preparatory commissions appointed by Pope John XXIII (1881-1963 CE) in June 1960 to prepare draft documents for discussion. The commissions produced 70 documents which were, in turn, reduced to 20, each of which were revised by a Central Preparatory Commission and submitted to the Pope for approval. Finally, 7 of these documents were sent to the bishops of the world in preparation for the opening of the Council in October 1962. The documents covered the following topics: sources of revelation, the moral order, the deposit of faith, the family and chastity, media, liturgy and unity. The documents were conservative in outlook, as the Curia had ensured that only the safest theologians were appointed to the preparatory commissions.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The central body that acts in the Pope's name and conducts the affairs of the Catholic Church.

<sup>73</sup> Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council*, p.32.

The first session of the Council in October 1962 proved to be the most important and dramatic of the four sessions. A new mood among the bishops was evident when they rejected many of the Curia's recommendations. Pope John XXIII in his opening speech emphasised the opportunities for the Church and explicitly rejected the advice of those close to him who advised that the Council should simply reaffirm the traditional doctrines of the Church and condemn errors that undermined those teachings. John XXIII died in June 1963 and was succeeded by Paul VI who continued with his predecessor's liberalising tendencies. The following are distinctive pronouncements of the Council that contrast with those of the pre-Vatican II era:

- a. The Church is a sacrament or mystery and not principally an organization or institution.
- b. The Church is the whole People of God, and not only the hierarchy, clergy and religious.
- c. The Church includes all Christians and is not limited exclusively to the Catholic Church.
- d. The Church is an eschatological community. It is not yet the kingdom of God.
- e. There is a hierarchy of truths, and not all official teachings of the Church are equally binding or essential to the integrity of Catholic faith.
- f. God uses other Christian churches and non-Christian religions in offering salvation to all humankind; is not the only means of salvation.
- g. The dignity of the human person and the freedom of the act of faith are the foundation of religious for all, against the view that 'error has no rights.'<sup>74</sup>

The above pronouncements are extracted from deliberations of the Council that resulted in the publication of 16 policy documents, two of which are of particular relevance to the subject of this study. They are *Nostra Aetate* and *Dei Verbum* and will now be discussed.

### ***2.5 Nostra Aetate/In Our Time***

The shortest of the 16 policy documents issued by the Council is *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time*, so named from the first two words of the Latin text, consisting of 1141 words, and 41 sentences that

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<sup>74</sup> 'Error has no rights' (*error non habet ius*) was the traditional Catholic principle that Catholics or non-Catholics ought not to express erroneous opinions. It was rejected by Vatican II Council.

make up the 5 articles of the English text.<sup>75</sup> The origins of the document can be traced to a meeting in June 1960 between Pope John XXIII and the Jewish scholar, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972 CE). Heschel's role in shaping *Nostra Aetate* has been somewhat downplayed in subsequent Vatican II historiography but, according to Furnal, it is doubtful that, without his input, the document would have taken the shape that it did; for example, the final version omitted earlier proselytizing remarks concerning the conversion of the Jews as the Christian goal. Heschel insisted that such proselytizing claims were incompatible with the integrity of the common spiritual heritage of Christianity and Judaism.<sup>76</sup>

Rabbi Heschel presented the Pope with a long note detailing Catholic discrimination against the Jews. He urged the Pope to use the Council to move beyond this history of discrimination and establish a new relationship with Judaism. John XXIII was already minded to do so and thus began the process by which the final version of *Nostra Aetate* emerged.<sup>77</sup> Before the issue of this document, there had been no official rejection of antisemitism by a Council of the Church. The document was the outcome of lengthy discussions and several drafts. Its full title is 'The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions'. The document had a long gestation, marked by many debates and five major drafts spread over a three-year period. It was finally promulgated on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1965. The core message of the document is that the Church intends to improve its relations with other religions, Judaism in particular, and that 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions' (Annex A, article 2), while at the same time asserting one of the key messages about Jesus Christ: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (Jn 14:6). Muslims are to be esteemed for their belief in one God and for regarding Jesus as an important prophet, though not as God. Mary, the mother of God is also honoured in Islam (article 3). Article 4 is the longest

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<sup>75</sup> The full text of the document is reproduced at Annex A.

<sup>76</sup> Joshua Furnal, 'Abraham Joshua Heschel and *Nostra Aetate*: Shaping the Catholic Reconsideration of Judaism during Vatican II,' *Religions*, 7(6), 2016, p.5.

<sup>77</sup> Norman Tanner, ed., *Vatican II*, p.319; Furnal, 'Abraham Joshua Heschel and *Nostra Aetate*', pp.1-12.

in *Nostra Aetate* and is devoted to the Jews and Judaism. It acknowledges the origins of the Church in Judaism and declares that: ‘the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage.’ For the future, the Council therefore: ‘wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.’ Article 4 goes on to say that although the Jewish authorities pressed for the death of Christ, this cannot be attributed to all Jews without distinction, neither at that time nor to the Jews of today. Antisemitism is roundly condemned.

*Nostra Aetate* represented a profound change in the attitude of the Catholic Church to other religions and to the Jews in particular. The fierce opposition to the document had a positive result in that it obliged the Council to consider new possibilities. One of the cardinals, when presenting the revised document to the Council, used a parable to illustrate the point: ‘what began as a small mustard seed – a brief statement on the right attitude of Christians to the Jewish people – had grown to become a tree in which all religions could build their nest.’<sup>78</sup> The influence of this new attitude towards the Jews on Catholic biblical scholarship and, in particular, on Catholic perspectives on anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel, will be examined in chapters 3 and 4.

## ***2.6 Dei Verbum/Word of God***

Another key Council document whose contents are directly relevant to this study is *Dei Verbum/Word of God*, and, like *Nostra Aetate*, so named from the first two words of the Latin text. The title was significant in that it demonstrated the Council’s emphasis on the centrality of the Bible in the theology and devotional life of the Church.<sup>79</sup> Its full title is ‘The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation’ in which it sets out the principles of scriptural interpretation.<sup>80</sup> *Dei Verbum* had a difficult gestation. When the draft document was presented to the Council for debate, it drew a storm of criticism which had been gathering for some time before its formal introduction.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Tanner, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, p.322.

<sup>79</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p.277.

<sup>80</sup> The full text is at Annex B.

<sup>81</sup> Tanner, *Vatican II*, pp. 79-80.

Leading theologians, including Joseph Ratzinger (later to be Pope Benedict XVI), published critical comments on the draft text. The critics claimed that the draft was too involved in sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation defensiveness, counter-ecumenical in approach and suspicious about the work of biblical scholars. For most of the first millennium of Christianity there was little distinction between Tradition and Scripture; Tradition was the faith of the church, as testified in Scripture; it was only in the Middle Ages that that Tradition began to assume a separate status as a body of church teachings and customs distinct from Scripture.<sup>82</sup> As remarked at 2.3 above, the question of a formal relationship between Tradition and Scripture only came into focus during the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther (1483-1546 CE) and other reformers emphasised the supremacy of Scripture, *Sola Scriptura*, in its relation to the Word of God and that the authority of popes and theologians is subordinate to that of Scripture.<sup>83</sup>

Catholic theologians defended Church tradition in order to safeguard Catholic doctrine, sacramental practice and Church structure against reformers' claims that these were unbiblical. This defence had the effect of elevating Tradition as a separate and quasi-independent source of revelation alongside the Bible and this defence was repeated in the preparatory draft of *Dei Verbum*, which warned of the danger of reading the Bible without regard to the authoritative teaching of the Magisterium.<sup>84</sup>

Tradition was presented as containing truths that Scripture did not contain and acted as the interpretative key for understanding Scripture.<sup>85</sup> The draft document treated Scripture and Tradition as equals but implicitly elevated Tradition to the more privileged status in the Church. There was precedent for such an approach in that the Marian dogmas proclaimed by Pius IX in 1854 CE and the Immaculate Conception and Assumption dogmas proclaimed by Pius XII in 1950 CE, had virtually no scriptural warrant but relied on traditional interpretation and teaching.

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<sup>82</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, 'Revelation', in Gaillardetz, *The Cambridge Companion*, pp.155-74 (here, p.161).

<sup>83</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp.98-9.

<sup>84</sup> The Magisterium is the teaching office and authority of the Catholic Church.

<sup>85</sup> 'Tradition' in the Catholic Church may be usefully compared with the hadith tradition in Islam, whereby authoritative reports of the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions form the basis of Qur'anic interpretation. 'Hadith', in Gordon D. Newby, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), pp.69-70.



Chapter 1 of the draft dealt with these two sources of revelation: Scripture and Tradition and suggested a mutual independence between the two with an emphasis on the precedence of the latter.<sup>86</sup> The draft document was, however, withdrawn on the intervention of John XXIII who ordered a complete revision. Months of argument and redrafting occurred before a new version was approved by the Council and promulgated in November 1965. Revelation was characterised as a personal communication between God and humans, shown in deed as well as in word (Annex B, para 2). The Magisterium was placed not above the Word of God but as its servant (Annex B, para 8). Scripture and Tradition were not to be two sources: ‘For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end’ (Annex B, para 9). But the authority of the Magisterium was nevertheless to be constrained: ‘This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully...’ (Annex B, para 10). There is, in my opinion, room for creative ambiguity here. Who is to interpret the ‘word of God’ and to hand it on, if not the Magisterium? The way in which Scripture and Tradition played out in Catholic biblical interpretation of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel is examined in chapters 3 and 4.

After a lengthy discussion of this vision of revelation and its transmission, *Dei Verbum* also gave its approval to contemporary biblical scholarship, including the historical-critical method of exegesis and declared that sacred Scripture should be more widely available to all the faithful. The vote on the final text of *Dei Verbum* on November 18, 1965, as presented by the new Pope, Paul VI, resulted in 2,344 in favour, with 6 opposed.<sup>87</sup>

In summary, for the purposes of this study, the most significant statements that were made in *Dei Verbum* are:

- a. Revelation was characterised as a personal communication between God and humans, shown in deed as well as in word.

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<sup>86</sup> Towey, ‘Dei Verbum: Fit for Purpose?’, p.208.

<sup>87</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p.282.

- b. Rejection of the ‘two source’ theory of revelation: Scripture and Tradition, in favour of a more nuanced position.
- c. Approval of the historical-critical method of exegesis was characterised as a personal communication between God and humans, shown in deed as well as in word.

An enduring legacy of *Dei Verbum* was to inspire a new generation of Catholic biblical scholars and the fruits of this will be examined in the following chapters.

## **2.7 Conclusion: From Rancour to Reconciliation and Respect**

This chapter analyses some contexts that have influenced the contributions of Catholic scholarship on anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel. Section 2.2, Jewish-Catholic/Christian Relations, charts a journey of two millennia of Christian/Catholic rancour towards the Jews, a journey that ends in attempts at reconciliation and respect in the twentieth century in the tangible shape of pronouncements at the Vatican II Council. The chapter begins with some general introductory remarks about attempts to improve Catholic-Jewish relations, followed by an overview of the rest of the chapter. Next, there is a presentation and analysis of some overarching ideas and events which have influenced Catholic-Jewish relations over the centuries namely *Adversus Iudaeos/Against the Jews* writings, The Blood Libel, Supersessionism (replacement theology) and the Holocaust and the controversial role of Pope Pius XII during that period. The *Adversus Iudaeos* genre writings (2.2.1 above) arose among early Church theologians, the most prominent of whom was John Chrysostom, bishop of Antioch, with his polemical homilies. Antioch was host to a mixture of religious beliefs and the bishop’s concerns seems to have been about the danger of nascent Christianity losing its identity in such a melting pot, as many of his flock continued to observe Jewish feasts and fasts. To counteract such tendencies he portrayed Judaism and the synagogues in a negative light, arguments which the Nazis used to legitimize the Holocaust. In addition, Brustein claims that Chrysostom’s writings were used to promote the idea that Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus.<sup>88</sup> The Blood Libel canard (2.2.2 above) accused

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<sup>88</sup> William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Antisemitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.52.

Jews of replaying the crucifixion of Christ by murdering Christian boys and using their blood in rituals mocking the Eucharist. Although the Blood Libel was repudiated long ago by the Christian churches, it was replayed by the Nazis in the 1930s with *Die Stürmer* newspaper as the main vehicle of propaganda and was a contributory factor to the Holocaust. Supersessionism (or replacement theology) (2.2.3 above) is the belief that Christianity has replaced Judaism and has its origins in the New Testament. The doctrine was active for many centuries and was used to justify anti-Judaism. It was not officially repudiated by the Catholic Church until Vatican II Council. Both supersessionism and *Adversus Iudaeos* writings served the purpose of establishing a Christian identity, distinctive from Judaism. The perceived inaction of the Catholic Church, in the person of Pope Pius XII, in responding to the Nazi persecution of the Jews and the Holocaust (2.2.4 above) is still a matter of controversy. *Adversus Iudaeos* writings, the Blood Libel, Supersessionism and the Holocaust and the role of Pius XII have all in varying degrees provided contexts that shaped the attitude of the Christian/Catholic churches towards the Jews for two millennia.

Section (2.3 above) is an overview on Catholic biblical scholarship before Vatican II Council. For centuries Catholics relied on Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. The Protestant Reformation brought in the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura/Scripture Alone*, in opposition to the Catholic Church's interpretative tradition. Such was this reliance on traditional authority that the Protestant slogan of *Sola Scriptura* could, arguably, be juxtaposed with its Catholic antonym of *Sola Traditio/Tradition Alone*.<sup>89</sup> English Catholics had to wait until the mid-eighteenth century for the Douay-Rheims-Challoner for a complete English version of the Bible. Church opposition to non-traditional interpretations of the Bible continued until well into the twentieth century until the promulgation of *Dei Verbum* in 1965 (2.6 above), which initiated a new era in Catholic biblical scholarship. The issues discussed at sections 2.2 and 2.3 above needed to be addressed formally by the Catholic Church and pathways to change and reform set out.

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<sup>89</sup> *Sola Traditio* is not used in any official Catholic texts.

The origins and background to Vatican II Council and the scale of the event are then presented, followed by discussions on two documents that are directly pertinent to this study, namely the *Nostra Aetate* and *Dei Verbum* pronouncements. While *Nostra Aetate* is unequivocal in its denunciation of antisemitism it makes no mention of the existence of the state of Israel or the Holocaust, possibly because so few leaders of Christian churches did very much to help Jews. The document demonstrated the Catholic Church's desire to improve relations with the Jews and it signalled an end to teaching of contempt for the Jews and Judaism and ushered in a new era in Jewish-Christian relations. The brevity of the document leaves room for different interpretations and it does not, in my opinion, go far enough in confessing Christian/Catholic responsibility for modern antisemitism; policy statements are one thing, actual practice is another and in the following decades there were many attempts to make a reality of worthy resolutions.<sup>90</sup> *Dei Verbum* is a much longer document than *Nostra Aetate* but also leaves room for creative ambiguity in its attempt to downplay the role of Tradition in the duopoly of Scripture and Tradition in Catholic biblical interpretation. Catholic scholars have attempted to reconcile the scholarly study of Scripture with Tradition. In my opinion, Tradition has the status of 'giants', as in the metaphor 'standing on the shoulders of giants,' meaning 'using the understanding gained by major thinkers who have gone before in order to make intellectual progress.'<sup>91</sup> Catholic biblical interpretation must have a basis in established interpretation, embodied in the teaching arm of the Church (the Magisterium) and in cumulative scholarship. If individuals are left to interpret the Bible in their own way, fundamentalist interpretations are likely to prevail. In sum, there are enough debatable points in *Nostra Aetate* and *Dei Verbum* to justify O'Malley's comment: '[The] committee documents forged in the heat of debate and disagreement, [are] filled with compromises, misleading euphemisms, and stylistic inconsistencies.'<sup>92</sup> In 2005, forty years after Vatican II closed, Pope Benedict XVI characterised the Council's teaching as being 'assimilated with

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<sup>90</sup> The matter is explored further in chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>91</sup> The Phrase Finder, <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/268025.html> (accessed 2 January 2023). The best-known expression of the metaphor is by Isaac Newton.

<sup>92</sup> John W. O'Malley, 'Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?', *Theological Studies*, 67 (2006), pp.3-33 (here, p.30).

difficulty' and referred to two different ways in which its teaching was being interpreted: some saw the Council as making a break with the past and argued for what Benedict called a hermeneutic of rupture, while others argued for renewal in continuity with the past, a hermeneutic of reform, 'a combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels.'<sup>93</sup> Clearly, the documents with the more controversial outcomes of the Council were designed to appeal to both conservative and reforming wings of the Church and provide a creative tension between the two. Time would tell which of these wings would prevail. To sum up: anti-Judaism leading to antisemitism was part of the Catholic Church's DNA for centuries. Or, in Diarmuid MacCulloch's graphic phrase: 'Anti-Jewish rhetoric is *baked into* (my emphasis) parts of the New Testament, as one might expect from the writings of a sect in rebellion against the Jewish establishment.'<sup>94</sup> Following Vatican II Council resolutions, contempt for the Jews was to be replaced by reconciliation and respect, which was intended to underpin new approaches to biblical interpretation. This chapter is a bridge to chapters three and four in that it has sought to explain the background and contexts to Catholic perspectives on anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. We will now turn to these matters.

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<sup>93</sup> Roderick Strange, 'Why I give thanks for the pontificate of Benedict XVI', *The Times*, 4 March 2023, p.82.

<sup>94</sup> Diarmuid MacCulloch, 'Antisemitic lament', Letters, *The Times*, 12 May 2022, p.34.

## CHAPTER 3: ANTI-JUDAISM IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, PART 1: ANTI-JUDAISM AND IDENTITY

'You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires' (Jn 8:44).<sup>95</sup>

'The devil is in the detail.'<sup>96</sup>

### 3.1 Introduction

The first quotation above is part of a declaration of Jesus to a group of Jews that their unwillingness to understand him stems from the fact that:

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. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God' (Jn 8:44-7).

This is, arguably, among the most disparaging of some 70 references to Jews in John's Gospel; its negative interpretation has helped to fuel Christian enmity against Jews in Western art, literature and theology.<sup>97</sup> Even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it is being used as part of antisemitic rhetoric. Two such examples are as follows: it was partly quoted in a Nazi propaganda book of children's short stories in 1936, in Elvira Bauer's *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath. And no Jew on his Oath*;<sup>98</sup> there are also echoes of this rhetoric in director Mel Gibson's 2004 American epic biblical film, *The Passion of the Christ*, which has been described as, 'an incredibly graphic and relentlessly violent depiction of the last twelve hours of the life of Christ', but more significantly for present purposes as, 'polemical stereotyping of the Jews', and 'Gibson's own quite idiosyncratic pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic version....'<sup>99</sup> The film is particularly significant in that the intensity of the images on the cinema screen seem more relevant and certainly reach a wider audience than biblical scholarship.

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<sup>95</sup> Scriptural citations are from *NRSV*.

<sup>96</sup> A common saying meaning that something may seem simple, but the details are complex and may cause problems, as famously exemplified in interpretations of Jn 8:44.

<sup>97</sup> Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, eds, *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p.99.

<sup>98</sup> Elvira Bauer, *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud auf seinem Eid* (Nuremberg: Stürmer Verlag, 1936). My thanks to Professor Catrin Williams, my supervisor, for this reference.

<sup>99</sup> Judy Yates Siker, 'Anti-Judaism in the Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Mel', *Pastoral Psychology*, vol 53, No 4, March 2005, pp.303-12 (here, p.309).

Chapter 2 of this study focused on contexts underlying Christian/Catholic perspectives on anti-Judaism in John's Gospel, namely, historical enmities between Christians/Catholics and Jews but also new attitudes towards Jews and biblical scholarship, fostered by changes in official pronouncements by Vatican II Council with the promulgation in 1965 of two key official documents: *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* and *Dei Verbum/Word of God*. The former officially encouraged better relations with Judaism and sought to ensure that Catholic scholars (and others) were less likely to let a traditionally negative view of Judaism affect their perspectives on biblical scholarship, while the latter encouraged Catholic biblical scholars to adopt modern scholarship methods, historical-critical approaches in particular, and thus make the word of God more readily available to the faithful.

This chapter will focus on the first two of the five issues presented for investigation at section 1.3 above, namely: 'Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish?' (3.2 below) and, closely related to that question, the issue of identity: 'Who are 'the Jews' in John's Gospel?' (3.3 below). Each section will open with a brief statement of the issue, followed by some interpretations by non-Catholic and Catholic scholars, with the focus falling on the latter group.

### **3.2 Is the Fourth Gospel Anti-Jewish?**

The first question is, arguably, the most important of the five selected for discussion (1.3 above) and provides an overarching perspective for the other four. Possible answers would seem to lie on a spectrum ranging from the two extremes of outright denial or outright affirmation, with a range of more nuanced opinions in between.<sup>100</sup> In short, it is potentially a large question and there are no answers that would appear to command universal agreement among scholars. There are possible answers that depend on one's point of view and include taking account of the context of first-century CE realities. One way of approaching the question is suggested as whether the question is addressed in the context of modern sensibilities, or as suggested by Reimund Bieringer, is to consider the various levels on which anti-Judaism in John may be viewed: the level of the

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<sup>100</sup> Adele Reinhartz, 'The Jews of the Fourth Gospel,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed by Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: OUP, 2018), pp.1-18 (here, p.12).

individual interpreter or collective interpreters, the level of the text, and the level of the author.<sup>101</sup>

An individual interpretation of the text can mean projecting one's contemporary anxieties and perceptions onto historical texts. Anti-Judaism is certainly to be found in some interpretations of John, as the hostile use of the lead citation at the heading of this chapter would suggest. And collectively, a number of such individual interpretations have resulted in groupthink in the Christian/Catholic traditions and have persisted until modern times. In reception theoretical terms, the history of interpretation can contribute to the meaning-making of the text itself. Concerning the level of the text, it can be useful to distinguish between the text and the author in that the text can engender anti-Judaism even if it was not the author's intention to do so. Readers intent on finding anti-Judaism meanings in the text can interpret John selectively to find what they are looking for; it surely cannot be the author's entire responsibility if negative interpretations and their effects are drawn from the text. But if we focus on the level of the author, some scholars consider that a certain degree of responsibility must be attributed to John for anti-Jewish sentiments in his Gospel, particularly on account of his negative references to 'the Jews'. These three levels of interpretation are useful for analysis, but are not mutually exclusive, and frequently overlap. An example of the interplay of these levels is in the interpretation of the occurrence and use of the language of vilification in John's Gospel, which will now be examined.

We will begin by focusing on the wider context of John 8:44-47 where Jesus declares that the devil is the father of the Jews and goes on to say that he was a murderer and a liar and the father of lies and that they, the Jews, are not from God. All this appears to be superficially, in modern parlance, hate speech, but closer examination shows that the matter is more complex than at first appears: 'the devil is in the detail'. The historical-critical method of interpretation assumes that the meaning of a text can be elucidated through understanding the historical context and reference of the text, and that the real meaning is the one that the author intended. The historical critic therefore needs to discern the origins of a text and the issues to which it refers.<sup>102</sup> If such a

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<sup>101</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>102</sup> John Kysar, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), p.7.



perspective is applied to the language of rhetoric and denunciation exemplified above, then the text needs to be considered in its first-century social and historical contexts rather than being criticised through the lens of modern mores.<sup>103</sup> The language of vilification was a common trope in ancient rhetoric and was used to rhetorically stereotype or label opponents negatively and to construct identity.<sup>104</sup> Vindictive rhetoric was a feature of the Graeco-Roman world of John with the aim of not so much as making a literal claim or a hate speech about one's opponent, but rather criticising them or defending oneself from them.<sup>105</sup> Some examples occur in the Book of Revelation where Jews, Christian leaders and the Roman Empire are attacked with strong language.<sup>106</sup> With reference to the Jews, at Revelation 2:9-10: 'those who call themselves Jews' are described as a 'synagogue of Satan', and this may be a reference to the local Jewish community whose right to be called 'Jew' is being challenged; some scholars claim that they are Judaizing Christians.<sup>107</sup> In the context, such vilification may be interpreted as social conflict between Christians and Jews, and such conflict was frequently in oral and written compositions through standard techniques of vituperation. Christian and Jewish groups may have had a common scriptural and messianic tradition, but they differed over its interpretation and application.<sup>108</sup> There is a similar derogatory reference to Jews at Revelation 3:9: 'I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying – I will make them come and bow down before your feet...' The function of such vilification appears to be to define who the Christians are and to reinforce their development as a distinct social group; in other words to establish their separate identity. It will be recalled from section 2.2.1 above that identity is created through the creative interplay between the two concepts of sameness and difference. So although Judaism and

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<sup>103</sup> James D.G. Dunn, 'The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel', in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.41-60 (here, p.51).

<sup>104</sup> Jan G. van der Watt, 'Is Jesus the King of Israel?: Reflections on the Jewish Nature of the Gospel of John', in R. Alan Culpeper, and Paul N. Anderson (eds), *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship* (Atlanta: SBL, 2017). pp. 39-56 (here, p.51).

<sup>105</sup> It will be recalled that John Chrysostom used invective for rhetorical purposes in his *Adversus Iudaeos* sermons (2.2.1 above).

<sup>106</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation,' *The Harvard Theological Review*, Jan-July 1986, vol 79, No. 1/3, pp.308-20 (here p.308).

<sup>107</sup> Collins, 'Vilification', pp.310-11.

<sup>108</sup> Collins, 'Vilification,' p.313.

Christianity spring from common roots, Christianity differentiates itself on one level by accepting Jesus as the Messiah. The development of a distinct Christian identity demarcates a clear boundary between those who accept Jesus as the Messiah and those who do not. This difference also serves to delegitimize the rival group and brands it as the ‘other’, defined by Kysar as: ‘the awareness of a person or group of people who appear in some way to be different from me and my group, and thereby may pose some sort of threat to me and the group to which I belong’.<sup>109</sup>

Other examples of vilification in the New Testament include Paul cursing those not proclaiming the true gospel (Gal. 1:8-9) and Jesus rebuking Peter as ‘Satan’ (Mk 8:33). Reference to the devil seems to be part and parcel of the common rhetorical vocabulary of denunciation. Vilification was also extensively used in later secular literature under the term ‘flyting’.<sup>110</sup> And so the diabolizing of ‘the Jews’ at 8:44, considered offensive by today’s standards of polemic, could more plausibly be interpreted as a standard rhetorical device in historical Christian and Jewish rhetoric of vilification and could, arguably, be considered more the language of intra-Jewish polemic, rather than anti-Jewish polemic.<sup>111</sup> The hostile language may therefore be considered to be a standard rhetorical trope.<sup>112</sup> And, as Reinhartz points out, the rhetorical intent of the Gospel was, ‘to encourage its audience to distance themselves from the label *Ioudaios* and from those non-believers to whom the label is applied’.<sup>113</sup> To sum up: there is a problem with projecting contemporary perceptions onto John’s Gospel, especially in a post-Holocaust context where there is such sensitivity to anti-Judaism that there is a risk of overinterpreting even mild negative references to Judaism. The risk is even more so when encountering the robust language of rhetorical vilification. A consideration of such language in its historical context gives an entirely different perspective, compared with a superficial appraisal overly based on modern sensibilities.

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<sup>109</sup> Kysar, ‘The “Other” in Johannine Literature’, in Kysar, *Voyages*, pp.227-35 (here, p.227).

<sup>110</sup> ‘Flyting’, *Oxford English Dictionary*. Vilification or ‘flyting’ was used as a rhetorical device, mostly in verse, until the seventeenth century.

<sup>111</sup> Dunn, ‘The Embarrassment of History’, pp. 51-2.

<sup>112</sup> Sonya Shetty Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.172.

<sup>113</sup> Adele Reinhartz, ‘The Jews of the Fourth Gospel’, p.2.

Contrariwise, there is only one apparently positive reference to ‘the Jews’, in John 4:22 where Jesus tells the Samaritan woman: ‘You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews,’ would appear to be a positive reference, though the meaning of the last five words is disputed. About half of the 70 references to ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel show some kind of mutual hostility between the Jews and Jesus, including the opening citation above, which is embedded within the most pejorative extended text of perceived Johannine anti-Judaism (8:31-59), which focuses on Jesus’s debate with the Jews about, ‘the significance of Abraham for their respective self-understanding’.<sup>114</sup> The Jews claim to be the ‘seed of Abraham’ as a response to Jesus’s assertion that they are enslaved (8:31-33), while Jesus warns them that even though they are Abraham’s offspring they are not children of Abraham, since they are trying to kill him (8:37) and do not do Abraham’s ‘works’ (8:39-40). Jesus suggests that he is superior to Abraham (8:53) because he pre-existed (8:56-58). Furthermore, Jesus tells the Jews that they neither ‘know’ (8:55) nor ‘see’ (8:58) God, and that they come ‘from below’ (8:23), are fathered by the devil (8:44), and will ‘die in their sin’ (8:24). Negative interpretations of the after-story of this reference to Jews as children of the devil (8:44) have had long and deleterious effects on the Jews in Western thought and culture.

Another part of 8:31-59 that has been interpreted as negative characterization of the Jews is 8:31-33, which begins with a discussion between Jesus and ‘the Jews who had believed in him’ (8:31). Jesus promises them that if they continue in his word they will ‘know the truth, and the truth will make you free’ (8:32). The Jews reply that ‘we are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, You will be made free?’ (8:33). Jesus’s response is, ‘Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’ (8:34). Some commentaries on this exchange raise the question of whether anti-Judaism is inherent at the level of the text or its interpretation.

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<sup>114</sup> Ruth Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham, Slavery, and Sin’, in Culpeper and Anderson, *John and Judaism*, p.314.

Anti-Judaistic interpretation was a feature of mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century commentaries on 8:31-33 as the following examples from Wescott, Hengstenberg, Barrett and Bultmann show.<sup>115</sup> Brooke Foss Wescott, Bishop of Durham (1890-1901 CE), in his comments on the text included the Jews claim to ‘religious privilege’ and shows their affinity to ‘the powers of evil’ and a ‘national boast’, and a ‘claim to sovereignty of the world’, and their response to Jesus arose solely from ‘their inveterate prejudices and most imperfect faith.’ Jesus’s words were ‘an annihilation of their high-minded pretensions’. In the same period Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869 CE), a German Lutheran commentator on 8:33, declared the Jews to be showing ‘empty pretensions’ since they ‘boasted of their freedom, whilst they found themselves in the vilest slavery – the slavery of sin.’ Furthermore, the Jews ‘had arrogated freedom to themselves’ because they were the ‘descendants of Abraham’. And so Jesus’s words to the Jews would have ‘greatly humbled’ them because they, as the supposed ‘lords of the world,’ needed to be ‘delivered from slavery by Jesus’. The comments of Wescott and Hengstenberg echoed political propaganda of the antisemitic theory of a *Weltjudentum* that was common at the time.<sup>116</sup> Another anti-Judaistic commentator was Charles Kingsley Barrett (1917-2011 CE), a British biblical scholar and Methodist minister. He concentrates on the Greco-Roman literary background to the text and commenting on John 8:32 distinguishes between what the Jews of Jesus’s time actually said or thought and what John attributed to the Jews. Barrett writes, ‘It is probable that the claim John puts into the mouth of the Jewish objectors is not that they have never been in political subjection (which would have been absurd) but that they have never lost their freedom of soul’.<sup>117</sup> But this is followed by a reference to Jewish pride, ‘this very claim, uttered in human pride over against the representative of God himself, is an instance of the bondage referred to in v.34’.<sup>118</sup> Commentaries

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<sup>115</sup> The following examples are drawn from Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham, Slavery, and Sin’, pp.317-19.

<sup>116</sup> *Weltjudentum* is a derogatory term implying a global network of influential Jews that allegedly ruled the world or aimed to do so.

<sup>117</sup> Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham, Slavery, and Sin’, p.319.

<sup>118</sup> Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham, Slavery, and Sin’, p.319.

on John written from about the middle of the twentieth century up until the mid-1960s continued with references to the pride and privilege of the Jews.

Prominent among these commentators was the German Lutheran theologian and biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976 CE).<sup>119</sup> One of his insights was that the biblical text must have present-day relevance and that this can only be achieved if its mythological wrapping is removed, and Jesus's message re-presented for a modern audience.<sup>120</sup> His approach is historical-critical and he emphasised the need to discover the historical words and deeds of Jesus. He mitigates somewhat the perceived anti-Jewishness of John's Gospel as he considers 'the Jews' symbolic of those who do not accept Christ's revelation. 'The Jews' are therefore symbolic representatives of unbelief and they represent the world that rejects the message of the Gospel:

The polemical situation manifests a considerable change from that pre-supposed in the Synoptic Gospels, admittedly in John, as in them, the Jews are in continual opposition to Jesus. But they no longer appear in the distinctions of Palestinian relations... [T]he Jews represent the unbelieving world and mirror the relations of all unbelievers to the Christian Church and its message.<sup>121</sup>

Bultmann refers to Jesus's offer of freedom at 8:32, which if refused, 'entails a judgment upon [the Jews]' and instead, the Jews 'hold that it [freedom] is the characteristic of the Jew, who already has it in his possession in virtue of his being a child of Abraham'.<sup>122</sup> Bultmann goes on to say that the Jews 'commit themselves to their lost condition' and that 'they are blind men who think that they see'. Bultmann stereotypes the Jews of John's Gospel, with the universal 'Jew' in his use of the singular noun, which echoes the propaganda idea of *Der ewige Jude/The Eternal Jew* in Nazi Germany.<sup>123</sup> Bultmann influenced many commentators including leading Catholic commentator Raymond Brown, whose contribution will be discussed below. Another of Bultmann's insights was the importance of self-understanding in theology and biblical interpretation and that, when we read and interpret a text we are at the same time reading and interpreting ourselves. This insight is

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<sup>119</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.25.

<sup>121</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. and trans. by G.R Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971). Cited in Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.27.

<sup>122</sup> Sheridan, 'Seed of Abraham', p.318.

<sup>123</sup> *Der ewige Jude* is a Nazi pseudo-documentary made in 1940 which foreshadowed the 'Final Solution'. At <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/der-ewige-jude> [Accessed 23 February 2023].

reminiscent of the common adage: ‘we do not see things as they are, we see things as we are’.<sup>124</sup>

Bultmann exercised a great influence on Johannine studies, to such an extent that some have described the history of Johannine studies in terms of ‘before Bultmann’ and ‘after Bultmann’.<sup>125</sup>

C.H. Dodd (1884-1973 CE) was another commentator who also influenced Raymond Brown. Dodd was a Welsh New Testament scholar and Protestant theologian who was brought up in the Congregational faith.<sup>126</sup> Dodd’s *opus magnum* (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*) was first published in 1953 and is of its time; he does not recognise the presence of anti-Judaism in John and the attention it achieved in later years. This prompts the thought that Dodd’s non-recognition of anti-Judaism in John was possibly in line with more modern interpretations where anti-Judaism in John is no longer automatically taken for granted. Dodd does not comment on anti-Judaism perhaps because he did not consider it to be an issue at the time or because anti-Judaism was assumed to be present in John’s Gospel and taken for granted by commentators, or more likely approved of at the time (1953). At John 8:44, therefore, where Jesus tells ‘the Jews’ that their father is the devil, Dodd does not attribute this text to possible anti-Judaism but to a melding of Hellenistic and Jewish cultures:

It is the assumption of Judaism that God is the Father of His people Israel, and they His sons; they are supposed to know him. The Hellenistic line is prominent. Those who do not know God do not know *alētheia* (*truth*) and consequently are not free men but slaves. In Greek thought, such knowledge brings freedom. Jews of the first century show that they do not know God by persecuting His people, like the Jews in the time of Jeremiah. Their father is the devil.<sup>127</sup>

### 3.2.1 Catholic Perspectives

We turn now to the way in which Catholic scholars have addressed the matter of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel, with the focus on three leading exegetes: Raymond E. Brown, Francis Moloney, and Rudolf Schnackenburg. Raymond E. Brown (1928-1998 CE) has been described as: ‘the most significant Johannine scholar in the English-speaking world in the latter half of the

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<sup>124</sup> There is no agreement on the origins of this saying. One suggestion is that it is a Talmudic idea about dream analysis.

<sup>125</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.28.

<sup>126</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.29.

<sup>127</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1953), pp.158-9.

twentieth century.’<sup>128</sup> He was born in the Bronx in New York City and was ordained into the Sulpicians, an order dedicated to training new priests.<sup>129</sup> Brown was the main proponent and practitioner of the historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation in the Catholic Church. He believed that this approach could reconcile historical methodology with Christian/Catholic doctrine and faith, and endorsed it and its implications for the Church in his monograph, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*.<sup>130</sup> Brown acknowledges the authority of *Dei Verbum* which points out that, ‘...books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation’ (Annex B, para. 11), but interprets this statement as containing ambiguities that arises from the compromise nature of *Dei Verbum*, in the matter of inerrancy that allows for a new interpretation by moving from a literal interpretation of the text towards an emphasis on, ‘the extent to which it conforms to the salvific purpose of God’.<sup>131</sup> Brown’s advocacy and use of the historical-critical approach gave his interpretations an ecumenical air and lessened any suggestion of sectarianism in his biblical scholarship, as distinct from theological and pastoral approaches to the meaning of the Bible.<sup>132</sup> He was therefore able to include Protestant, Jewish and Orthodox scholarship in his biblical writings. Brown’s non-sectarian approach to biblical scholarship meant that his work was used widely in Protestant circles and his leadership role was recognised in academic societies and resulted in honorary doctorates from Protestant and secular universities.<sup>133</sup>

Brown was a prolific author with nearly fifty books and three hundred articles and reviews to his name.<sup>134</sup> His work on the Fourth Gospel was strongly influenced by two scholars mentioned above: Rudolf Bultmann and C.H. Dodd. Both scholars wrote prolifically on the Fourth Gospel,

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<sup>128</sup> Tom Thatcher, ‘John and the Jews’, in R. Alan Culpeper and Paul N. Anderson, *John and Judaism*, pp. 3-38) (here, p.15).

<sup>129</sup> A brief biography of Raymond Brown is in Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, pp.9-12, and a more comprehensive one is in Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, pp.1-58.

<sup>130</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, p.ix.

<sup>131</sup> Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, p.18.

<sup>132</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.211.

<sup>133</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, pp.111-12.

<sup>134</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.1.

but it is their stance on anti-Judaism, described above, that is of interest here. Without a detailed comparison of texts it is not possible to be precise about the extent of the influence of Bultmann and Dodd on Brown, but a rough indication can be found in their entries in the author index to Brown's posthumous work on John's Gospel, where they have more entries than any other cited authors: Bultmann has 38 and Dodd has 30.<sup>135</sup> Raymond Brown's publication history covers 38 years, from 1960 to 1998. In 1966 he defended John's Gospel against accusations of perceived anti-Judaism, but by 1998, in the year of his death, he was apologising for John's statements against 'the Jews'. The trajectory of his scholarship has thus been characterised as going from *apologia*, a defence of John's Gospel, to an apology for it.<sup>136</sup> It is clear that Brown's perspective changed over the years and is an illustration of seeing things as we are now or have become, as noted above. Brown's most recent study of John's Gospel was published posthumously after his death in 1998. It was edited by his friend and fellow Catholic scholar Francis J. Moloney.

It is instructive to review Brown's pre-Vatican II views on anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel in order to identify the development in his approach to this particular topic. His earliest work was a short (102 pp.) reading guide written in 1960.<sup>137</sup> In his introduction Brown covers a number of topics such as, the text, date of composition, relation to the Synoptics and characteristics of the Fourth Gospel. At this early stage in his scholarship, and in common with other contemporary scholars, there is no apparent concern or explanation for John's hostile references to the Jews. For example, in commenting on the prologue to John's Gospel, Brown says:

The first half of the Gospel (1:1-12:50) shows us the rejection of Christ by the darkness (evil forces) and the Jews. Verses 9-11 sum up that rejection. The genuine light of the world came into the world he had created; and the world, directed to evil by man's sin, rejected him. He came to his own land, and the people that had been prepared for his coming by Moses and the prophets rejected him.<sup>138</sup>

Brown mentions three groups that reject Christ: the darkness (evil forces), the Jews and the world. This brief commentary, published six years before his magnum opus on John, appears to suggest

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<sup>135</sup> Author index, 'Bultmann, R'. and 'Dodd, C.H.', in Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. by Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 328.

<sup>136</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.2.

<sup>137</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of St. John and the Johannine Epistles* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1960).

<sup>138</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St. John*, pp.16-17.



that the darkness and the Jews are equated; they have been prepared for Jesus' coming by Moses and the prophets, and yet they have rejected him. Brown thus assumes that anti-Judaism can be found within the text and that it is deliberate, although it should be noted that this commentary was issued in 1960, that is before Vatican II and before the emergence of post-Holocaust sensibilities about potential anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. Brown's first major publication on the Fourth Gospel contains a further critical remark on the Johannine Jews: 'Just as a new creation replaces the old, a new covenant replaces the old covenant with Israel on Sinai, because the Chosen People rejected Christ'.<sup>139</sup> Again, Brown presents an unqualified statement and, different from his later work, does not distance himself from negative statements about the Johannine Jews. Furthermore, commenting on John 7:34-35, he observes:

Jesus warns the Jews that they have but a short time to accept him; like wisdom he can be found only by those who sincerely search. The sneering Jewish retort about going about going to teach the Gentiles [sic. 'Greeks' in NRSV] exemplifies Johannine irony, for that is precisely what Jesus will do in his Church.<sup>140</sup>

In describing the Jewish response as a 'sneering Jewish retort', Brown imports an anti-Jewish meaning where John is more ambiguous. The last sentence of the above excerpt from the 1960 commentary also suggests the replacement of the Jews by the Church.

In commenting on 8:44 where Jesus calls the Jews children of the devil, Brown opines:

When they [the Jews] retort that they are of God, Jesus denies it. He should know for he has come from God. Rather they are of the devil, who lied in the Garden of Eden and brought death into the world through sin; and they are liars like their father. That is why they cannot recognise the truth<sup>141</sup>.

Here, Brown heightens the negative view of the Jews that is implied in the text. Once again he calls the Jews' reply a 'retort' and associates their 'lying' with the Garden of Eden event. It could be argued here also that Brown is more severe on the Jews than what is actually attested in John's text: the Jews are said to be liars like their father and the implication is that they will bring death into the world through sin. This may be compared with Brown's comments on John 18:38 where Pilate asks, 'What is truth?' and Brown explains that 'Pilate's question is an

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<sup>139</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St. John*, p.17. This remark could be read as both anti-Judaistic and supersessionist.

<sup>140</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St. John*, p. 45.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St. John*, p.49.

example of misunderstanding, not cynicism'.<sup>142</sup> It would appear here that Brown's early commentary shows more sympathy to Pilate than he does to the Jews. In mitigation of Brown's views on the Jews, it should again be noted that he was not out of step with the opinions of other contemporaneous biblical scholars on the Jews and Judaism, and that in 1960 the Catholic Church was still considering, five years before *Dei Verbum/Word of God*, how historical criticism might be consistent with faith. Brown attended the sessions discussing *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* during Vatican II Council, and he did so in his capacity as a *peritus/expert advisor* to Joseph P. Hurley, Bishop of St. Augustine, Florida, the first American to become an ambassador for the Vatican.<sup>143</sup> Although his publications provide no concrete proof, it would be surprising if Brown's presence at the Council and its debates did not have some influence on his subsequent Johannine scholarship. The shift in argument and tone from his 1960 commentary to later (post-1965) publications strongly indicates that this was the case.

Brown's 1966 commentary on John 8 differs markedly from his earlier publication where, it will be recalled, he associated the Jews' lying with the Garden of Eden event. His later commentary states as follows:

The mention of Jesus's Father in vs 38 is countered with an implicit rejection by 'the Jews' in 39. This causes Jesus to harden his attitude. In vs 39, still insisting that they are children of Abraham...he says that their works betray a demonic descent. This variation in statement is trying to capture the same idea that Paul gives expression to in Romans ix.7: 'Not all who are descendant from Abraham are children of Abraham'. That spiritual characteristics were required to be truly worthy of Abraham is also found in roughly contemporary thought; pirqa Aboth v 22 says: A good eye, a lowly spirit, and a humble mind are the marks of the disciples of Abraham our father'.<sup>144</sup>

In this instance Brown does not associate 'the Jews' with the Serpent in the Garden of Eden and appears to suggest that Jesus's hardened attitude was in response to his rejection by 'the Jews'; he is not as hostile towards them as it might first appear, since he did not initiate the conflict. In addition, the reference to the 'children of Abraham' (8:38-39) is now recast, as a debate between first-century Christians and Jews, thereby mitigating the anti-Jewish import of the passage.

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<sup>142</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St. John*, p.87.

<sup>143</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.57.

<sup>144</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, vol 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p.362; *The Gospel According to John XII-XXI*, The Anchor Bible, vol 29a (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

Brown's awareness of anti-Judaism in John's Gospel, together with the hermeneutical challenges that it poses, undoubtedly develop between 1960 and 1966 and the intent behind *Nostra Aetate* and *Dei Verbum* appears to have been absorbed, reflected upon and acted on. This development in attitude is emphasised by Brown's further reflections on John 8 in his *magnum opus*, the Anchor Bible commentary on the Gospel of John:

Perhaps we should here re-emphasize that a chapter like John viii with its harsh statement about 'the Jews' must be understood and evaluated against the polemic background of the times when it was written. To take literally a charge like that of vs 44 and to think that the Gospel imposes on Christians the belief that the Jews are children of the devil is to forget the time-conditioned element in Scripture. Lest the picture seem too dark, we must remember that this same Fourth Gospel records the saying of Jesus that salvation comes from the Jews (iv 22).<sup>145</sup>

Here Brown emphasises the historical circumstances that influenced John's Gospel and he alludes to the language of vilification in the rhetorical conventions of the time (discussed in more detail at 3.2 above). He also attempts to mitigate the anti-Jewish force of John 8 by drawing on John 4:22 with its statement 'salvation is from the Jews', thus attempting to balance the hostile elements of John 8 against the more mollifying sentiment of John 4:22.

In his final work on the Fourth Gospel, Brown remarks that the mind of the writer must be distinguished from that which is described, and that there is no hostility towards much of the religious heritage of Judaism.<sup>146</sup> In support of his argument Brown quotes Pierre Grelot: 'No work of the NT is more profoundly Jewish than the Gospel of John'.<sup>147</sup> Brown also discusses the use of quotation marks to refer to 'the Jews'. Although he had already done so in his 1966 publication, he had not discussed its rationale, which he now addresses:

In order to alert hearers/listeners to John's peculiar understanding and that he is not thinking of all those who in the first century were Jews by birth, in commenting on hostile passages I have written "the Jews" with quotation marks. I would maintain strongly that, although the designation "the Jews" should not be eliminated if one wishes to understand John's mentality; it should be carefully explained.<sup>148</sup>

Brown did not discuss the influence of John's characterization of the Jews on subsequent Christian anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. He now puts the responsibility of rejecting this on preachers:

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<sup>145</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, p.368.

<sup>146</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.160.

<sup>147</sup> P. Grelot, *Les Juifs dans l'Évangile selon Jean*, p.187, cited by Brown, *An Introduction*, p. 160.

<sup>148</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.167.

Today, therefore, in proclaiming John preachers must be careful to caution hearers that John's passages cannot be used to justify any ongoing hostility to Jewish people...Regarding the Bible as sacred does not mean that everything described therein is laudable.<sup>149</sup>

The second leading Catholic scholar to be discussed is Francis J. Moloney (1940 -), who was born in Melbourne and ordained a priest in 1970. He has numerous theological degrees and honorary degrees to his credit and is a fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. He has published over 50 books and 100 journal articles.<sup>150</sup> In *Signs and Shadows* Moloney presents a close reading of John and declares that his approach is a blend of traditional historical-criticism and the more contemporary reader-oriented approaches to a narrative text, which: 'attempts to demonstrate unity at the level of the interplay between the author and the reader in a text whose present readership keeps it alive.'<sup>151</sup> Interestingly, unlike Brown or Schnackenburg (discussed below), he does not cite faith or tradition as elements in his investigation. Perhaps this is because he has absorbed them to such an extent that he exercises them unconsciously without the need to proclaim them. In any case, there is, in fact, nothing doctrinally disturbing for the Church in his commentaries. Moloney's principal commentary on John was published in 1998 in the *Sacra Pagina* series of commentaries on the New Testament.<sup>152</sup> He was a friend and colleague of Raymond Brown's, and he was chosen, as mentioned above, to edit the latter's unfinished commentary on John's Gospel, following Brown's untimely death in 1998. His approach is in many ways like Brown's.

In his introduction Moloney addresses the issue of anti-Judaism in John and notes that misunderstanding or uncritical reading has led to two dangerous consequences:

The Gospel of John has been accepted as the inspired and infallible Word of God that roundly condemns the Jewish people because of their rejection and eventual slaying of Jesus of Nazareth. For centuries this interpretation of the Fourth Gospel has legitimated some of the most outrageous behavior of European Christian people, including pogroms and the attempted genocide of the Holocaust.

He goes on to say:

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<sup>149</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.168.

<sup>150</sup> There is a brief biography of Moloney at [Francis J. Moloney | AustLit: Discover Australian Stories](#) [accessed 3 January 2023].

<sup>151</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12* (Augsburg Fortress, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p.ix.

<sup>152</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (College ville, MN: Liturgical, 1998).

It is also possible to come to a different, but equally damaging conclusion. It could be claimed that the language used to speak of the Jews is so violently anti-Semitic that the Fourth Gospel should not be used in today's Christian churches, that it is time to lay the Gospel of John quietly to rest.<sup>153</sup>

Moloney emphasises his first point: 'The Christian involvement in – or at best non-opposition to – the Holocaust, and a large part of European history and culture, including the European theological tradition, are but indications of the immeasurable damage that has resulted from the misreading of one of Christianity's foundational texts'.<sup>154</sup> Significantly, Moloney diffuses culpability more widely among the Christian churches, not just the Catholic Church, and avoids any mention of the much-criticised role of Pius XII in the Holocaust (discussed at 2.2.4 above).

On his second point – the possible abandonment of the Fourth Gospel – Moloney emphatically rejects this on account of its presence in Christian life and spirituality in Eastern and Western liturgical traditions. In addition, it has inspired paintings, statues and music about Jesus, Mary and the Beloved Disciple. Enmity towards the Jews, he claims, is based on an incorrect reading of the Gospel.<sup>155</sup>

Moloney therefore rejects both of the options presented above and asserts that the Fourth Gospel cannot be rejected outright as neither the condemnation and persecution of the Jews nor the elimination of the Fourth Gospel from Christian literature can lay claim to be securely founded on a correct reading of one of Christianity's foundational texts. Like Brown, Moloney insists that 'the Jews' must always be in quotation marks as it does not represent the Jewish people as a whole, and the Fourth Gospel should not be read as though this were the case.<sup>156</sup>

On Jesus and 'the Jews' and their conflict over their respective origins in John 8:31-59 Moloney, like Brown's first commentary, presents a negative view of the Johannine Jews but from a psychological point of view of their motivations: '[they are] unable to look beyond what they can control and understand'.<sup>157</sup> Moloney similarly describes Pharisees at John 8-12 who 'are not

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<sup>153</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.9

<sup>154</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, pp.9-10.

<sup>155</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.10.

<sup>156</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.11.

<sup>157</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.276.

prepared to move away from their traditions and their sense of self-righteous control'.<sup>158</sup> And, 'The Jews and the Pharisees are unable to go beyond external appearances because they stop at the fleshly Jesus, what their eyes can see'.<sup>159</sup> The Jews are associated with the Pharisees who are described as, 'close-minded', 'ignorant', and 'violent'.<sup>160</sup> On John 8:44 Moloney observes that 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel are never the Jewish people as such and that 'you are of your father the devil' reflects the Christological polemic that leads to the breakdown between the Johannine community and the local synagogue (see 4.2 below).

Moloney argues that the Fourth Gospel brings the biblical narrative to an end and that John's use of the word Scripture (*hē graphē*) shows that he regarded his written account of Jesus's life as both a fulfilment of the Old Testament and his gospel as another book in the sacred library of Judaism: Jesus was the fulfilment of the Scriptures and John himself was writing the last chapter in the Jewish Bible. According to Sandra Schneiders, an important contribution that Moloney makes to the corpus of Johannine literature is his collating, exemplified in the way he brings together existing theories and interpretations that have some prominence in scholarship in a critical manner that challenge and enrich his own views as well those of critics.<sup>161</sup>

The final member of our trio of leading Catholic exegetes to comment on anti-Judaism in John is Rudolf Schnackenburg (1914-2002 CE) who was a German Catholic priest, a contemporary of Raymond Brown, and New Testament scholar whom Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) referred to as 'probably the most prominent Catholic exegete writing in German during the second half of the twentieth century'.<sup>162</sup> His *opus magnum* is his monumental three-volume commentary on John's Gospel, originally published in German in 1965, which was published in English between 1968 and 1982.<sup>163</sup> In his preface to volume one he states that his commentary is a child

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<sup>158</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.255.

<sup>159</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.255

<sup>160</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, pp.267-8.

<sup>161</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, review of Francis J. Moloney, in *Johannine Studies 1975-2017* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), pp. 184-6.

<sup>162</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), pp.xii-xiii.

<sup>163</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, 3 vols (London: Burns & Oates, 1968, 1980, 1982).

of its times and that he wishes to make his contribution to Johannine studies without abandoning the scientific approach made by other New Testament scholars nor the Catholic tradition.<sup>164</sup> Like many other Catholic exegetes Schnackenburg attempts to balance the scholarly approach to Scripture with Tradition and to produce a satisfying and convincing synthesis: 'Every commentary on it [John's Gospel] represents a scientific decision and a personal confession of faith. My own effort claims to be no different'.<sup>165</sup>

In his introductory essay Schnackenburg discusses John's attitude to Judaism:

They [The Jews] continue to live as contemporaries of the evangelist in the unbelieving Judaism of his day which persecutes the disciples of Christ (cf. 16: 1-4) and which is led by the rabbinate of the Pharisees... One may, however, suspect that when the evangelist is dealing with Jesus's debates with "the Jews" (cf. ch. 8) which do not yet appear in the Synoptics as so sharp and continuous, he is also thinking of his own day, and hence making them more "transparent" and topical for his readers... Thus the presence of an anti-Jewish tendency in John, occasioned by the contemporary situation, can hardly be doubted...<sup>166</sup>

It is interesting to note in the above passage Schnackenburg's use of the term 'anti-Jewish', attributed to John, which anticipates Brown's use of the term a decade later. Schnackenburg gives other examples of similar usage to illustrate his main point: the frequent, unspecific references to various authorities as 'the Jews'.<sup>167</sup> A reasonable inference to draw from this is that such non-specificity gives scope for accusations of anti-Judaism in John. Schnackenburg, however, does not show any concern for contemporary ethical issues regarding anti-Judaism. His commentary was originally published in German in 1965 when there was little or no awareness of anti-Judaism in John's Gospel and the pronouncements of Vatican II Council had yet to be absorbed and acted on.<sup>168</sup>

Turning to Schnackenburg's comments on John 8:31-59, we find that his remarks are like the early views of Brown. For example, he makes a disparaging judgement on the Johannine Jews in commenting on the exchange between Jesus and the Jews in 8:31-34: 'The Jews immediately make an objection that depends on a misunderstanding and reveals their incomprehension. Jesus's

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<sup>164</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.3.

<sup>165</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.3.

<sup>166</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, pp.166-7.

<sup>167</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.165.

<sup>168</sup> Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.2.

words have wounded their religious and national pride'.<sup>169</sup> He goes on to say: 'they are not thinking of external, political freedom...but of the denigration of their sense of freedom. In spite of political oppression, they think of themselves as free sons of Abraham, who have never inwardly bowed to foreign rule'. But this is not the freedom as Jesus understands it: 'the Jews' pride and complacency are clean contrary to the attitude which would make them receptive' to Jesus's message of freedom'. As Schnackenburg further observes: 'To be descendants of Abraham was 'the Jews' pride, and one reason for their assurance of salvation'.<sup>170</sup> On the (in)famous 8:44 reference, Schnackenburg presents a largely linguistic analysis by emphasizing that the literal translation is: 'you are descended from the father of the devil' and focusing on whether the 'father' meant Cain.<sup>171</sup> Schnackenburg is, on his own admission, of his time and his scholarship has been supplemented by more recent and diverse interpretations of anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel.

In debates on Johannine anti-Judaism, a distinctive – and controversial– contribution was made by Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936-2022 CE), described by her publisher as 'a Catholic feminist theologian', with the publication of her monograph, *Faith and Fratricide*. This represents an uncompromising critique of what she perceives to be inbuilt anti-Judaism in Christian theology. Like other scholars, she asserts that 'the Jews' in John are of a type who represent 'unbelievers' but goes on to say that this does not ameliorate anti-Judaism in the Gospel but on the contrary, reinforces anti-Judaism.<sup>172</sup> She criticizes modern apologists' attempts to demythologize the text while arguing that the Evangelist intended to mythologize and polarize the two communities, with the Christians being the only ones who abide in the father and the Jews are the children of the devil and have never known Jesus or the Father.<sup>173</sup> Unlike Brown and other exegetes, Ruether does not attempt to mitigate anti-Judaism and ends her chapter on John with the following strong statement:

John gives the ultimate theological form to that diabolizing of "the Jews" which is the root of anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition. There is no way to rid Christianity of its anti-Judaism, which

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<sup>169</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.207.

<sup>170</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.207.

<sup>171</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.213.

<sup>172</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipe and Stock, 1995).

<sup>173</sup> Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p.113.



constantly takes social expression in anti-Semitism, without grappling finally with its christological hermeneutic itself.<sup>174</sup>

Most commentators, including Brown, Moloney and Schnackenburg, made hostile comments about ‘the Jews’ in their early works on John’s Gospel before the policies emerging from Vatican II Council became embedded in Christian/Catholic thinking and ameliorated anti-Jewish interpretations of John’s Gospel. Some commentators, however, persisted in using Jewish stereotypes. For example, derogatory remarks about ‘the Jews’ surfaced as late as 1993 in a commentary on John’s Gospel by Thomas Brodie, a Catholic Irish Dominican, in his monograph, *The Gospel According to John*.<sup>175</sup> It has been described as, ‘the most disparaging commentary on John 8’.<sup>176</sup> Brodie uses outdated Jewish stereotypes to characterize ‘the Jews who had believed’ in Jesus (8:31) as superficial believers, who claim to follow Jesus while ‘following the enslaved tradition of Judaism’. Brodie further interprets the Jews of 8:31 to represent ‘all those who abuse religion, and all who, in place of genuine believing, substitute some form of triviality, superstition, idol or lie’.<sup>177</sup>

Most commentators, including Brown, Moloney and Schnackenburg approach the text of the Fourth Gospel without trying to disguise its apparent anti-Jewish hostility. However, they do not diminish its importance as a Christian foundational text or suggest that it should be disregarded, even though it was the first text that linked the authorities who were responsible for the death of Jesus with Jews of a later era – a position that endured for over two millennia. A key question must be: Are readings of anti-Judaism in John a *creatio ex nihilo* that give expression and credence to a dangerous potential that is present in the text? Some scholarly opinion is moving towards a more nuanced perception of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel as exemplified by the titles of two Johannine studies mentioned above: Reimund Bieringer’s 2001 edited volume nails its colours to the mast with a clear statement in the title, *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel*, whereas Culpeper and Anderson’s book published in 2017 has the more ambiguous title of *John and Judaism: A*

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<sup>174</sup> Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p.116.

<sup>175</sup> Thomas Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literal and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

<sup>176</sup> Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham,’ p.322.

<sup>177</sup> Sheridan, ‘Seed of Abraham,’ pp.322-3.

*Contested Relationship in Context*, which avoids prejudging the matter and leaves scope for the possibility of anti-Judaism to be argued rather than assumed. In this section ‘the Jews’ have been mentioned on several occasions, without any clear statement as to their identification. The next section attempts to provide some answers.

### **3.3 Who Are ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel?**

The second key question to be examined in this chapter is therefore the identity/identities of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel. Reinhartz provides a succinct answer: ‘The *Ioudaioi* function as a corporate villain in John’s narrative. This is an unsavoury but necessary role, for it sustains the plot and moves it forward to its tragic conclusion’.<sup>178</sup> Tragically, it would seem that ‘the Jews’ had to sustain this ‘unsavoury but necessary’ role for a further two millennia before the ‘tragic conclusion’ of the Holocaust. But who are ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel? The question of the identity of ‘the Jews.’ in John’s Gospel is closely related to the previous question in that the attribution of anti-Judaism to the Fourth Gospel is, arguably, partly dependent on identifying the referents of ‘the Jews’. Who are ‘the Jews’ against whom a charge of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel might be levelled? Is the term a general ethnic designation or is it more specifically limited? Because there are ambiguities in this question, references to the Jews are usually enclosed in quotation marks in modern commentaries to indicate that it has multiple meanings and should not be taken to refer to the Jews as a whole or as an ethnic group in all contexts. Dodd acknowledges the various referents of ‘the Jews’ as follows: ‘they can be the Jewish people in general in so far as they are hostile to Christ, or the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, or Judeans. But whatever the meaning attached to a particular context, the overall meaning is that they are hostile to Christ and do not accept his revelation’.<sup>179</sup> His view is therefore similar to Bultmann’s on the matter. John’s Gospel is set within a Jewish framework and the main characters are Jewish who behave in Jewish ways. The question is: who are ‘the Jews?’ The referents of ‘the Jews’ has multiple meanings according to

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<sup>178</sup> Reinhartz, ‘The Jews of the Fourth Gospel,’ p.6.

<sup>179</sup> Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, p.242n2, cited in Cronin, p.32.

the context. This is a key question of identity with several possible answers, the main three of which are the following: it could refer to the Jews collectively in an ethnic or national sense, it could refer to those living in Judea, or it could be a symbolic reference to the institutions of religious authorities. The meaning attached to ‘the Jews’ is significant. It follows from this that the less specific the reference to ‘the Jews’ then the more culpability can be attached to John for anti-Judaism from negative inferences that can and have been drawn from his Gospel. On the other hand, the more specific the reference, the less John is culpable in this respect. John is the most Judeocentric of the Gospels with the expression ‘the Jews’ being used on multiple occasions, and about half of them could be perceived in a negative way, while there are 5, 6 and 5 such references in Matthew, Mark and Luke, respectively.<sup>180</sup> These latter references are more specific and thus less capable of generic anti-Jewish interpretation.

Scholars have differed in their identification of ‘the Jews’. Apart from the three possibilities mentioned, above it has also been suggested as a theological category that is symbolic for unbelief and enmity and not a hostile group of actual people.<sup>181</sup> In short ‘the Jews’ would appear to be stylized representations of those who reject Christ, part of the world of unbelief that is opposed to Jesus and God’s revelation. They would appear to have no clear ethnic characteristics. To put it another way: ‘They are... the negative pole of the dualistic scheme of the Gospel, the opposite of which is the Christian believer’.<sup>182</sup> But there is no clear answer if we try to discover to what historical group ‘the Jews’ refers to. It cannot be the whole Jewish people. This would make no sense as Jesus and the other main characters in the Gospel are themselves Jewish.<sup>183</sup>

### ***3.3.1 Catholic perspectives***

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<sup>180</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, p.15fn33.

<sup>181</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), p.37; also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, rev edn 1995), p.32. Both cited in Cronin, *Raymond Brown*, p.156-7.

<sup>182</sup> Kysar, *Voyages with John*, p.151.

<sup>183</sup> Kysar, *Voyages with John*, p.152-3.

Turning now to Catholic commentators on the identity/identities of ‘the Jews’, Raymond Brown makes it clear that the anti-Judaism issue is based on how John refers to ‘the Jews’ and uses the following descriptive categories to elucidate the various contextual meanings:<sup>184</sup>

- a. As an *ethnic* term, whereby those of Jewish birth are distinct from other ethnic groups in areas of mixed populations. For example, *Ioudaioi* refers to Jews, in contrast to Samaritans (4:9, 22) or Romans (18:35).
- b. As a *geographical* term, it can refer to those living in Judea. Jesus goes several times from Galilee to Judea so it is possible that John might wish to distinguish between the two places. John also distinguishes between Samaria and Judea (4:3-4). Possible examples of the Judean meaning are at 7:1 and 11:8,54, but Brown is not convinced that a Judean meaning of *Ioudaioi* is plausible.
- c. As *role* usage, it includes Jewish authorities (mostly in Jerusalem), including Temple chief priests, Pharisees, and Sanhedrin members. According to Brown: ‘Jewish authorities’ is not a usual linguistic meaning of *Ioudaioi*; supporting arguments therefore must be based on comparative Synoptic evidence and plausible history. The Synoptic Gospels ascribe to the Sanhedrin an important role in moving against Jesus: handing him over to the Romans and persuading Pilate to sentence him to crucifixion. Brown speculates that ‘the Jews’ who challenged Jesus’s behaviour in the Temple could be Temple authorities (2:18, 20), and ‘the Jews’ who criticised him about his behaviour on the Sabbath may have been Pharisees (5:10, 16). Brown, however, is not convinced by such explanations and asks why John would use the term ‘the Jews’ which has no implicit meaning of ‘authorities’ if he was thinking only of the authorities when there is a perfectly good term for them (*Archon/Archontes*), which he uses elsewhere in his Gospel, for example at 3:1 and 7:26. Brown’s conclusion on this issue is that John left the meaning of ‘the Jews’ ambiguous in order to indicate the combined opposition of the various referents to Jesus.

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<sup>184</sup> Brown, *Introduction*, pp.161-8.

d. *Religious* usage. This category follows on from the conclusion of *role* usage above and refers to those of Jewish birth who refused to acknowledge Jesus's divinity and were hostile to him and his followers, and plausibly denotes to many of the Johannine references. Although much of the conflict between Jesus and 'the Jews' takes place in Judea and the actors would be inhabitants of Jerusalem it makes little difference whether they are an amorphous crowd, pilgrims or authorities as John calls them 'the Jews.' The common factor is their rejection of Jesus as the Son of God. In Brown's opinion *Ioudaioi* is best rendered as 'the Jews' without substituting explanatory or mollifying qualifications; the intended audience of John's work probably lived in the Diaspora where there would not have been Jerusalem crowds, Temple authorities or many Judeans. They would understand *Ioudaioi* as pertaining to the Jews they knew at the end of the first century CE in their own areas and they would connect any hostility they met from those Jews with the hostility shown towards Jesus in John's Gospel.

Brown makes a considered exposition of the possible meaning of 'the Jews' in various contexts, as shown above. By 1966 Brown's attitude towards the Jews was changing and in his major commentary *The Gospel According to John I-XII* he now addresses 'the Jews' in quotation marks so as to differentiate the Gospel's use of the term from modern Jews and to indicate to the reader that it has to be considered in the context of the Gospel.<sup>185</sup> In contrast to his 1960 publication where 'the Jews' are the Jerusalem authorities, now 'the Jews' has various referents according to the context in which it is used, as detailed above.

Francis Moloney agrees with Brown that there is no single meaning that covers all the uses of 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>186</sup> Like Brown and others Moloney asserts that 'the Jews' must always be within quotation marks as it does not refer to the Jewish people as a whole. In his opinion it is clear that 'the Jews' are those characters in the narrative who have made up their minds about

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<sup>185</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

<sup>186</sup> Francis J. Moloney, 'Israel, the People and the Jews in the Fourth Gospel,' in *Israel und seine Heilstraditionen im Johannesevangelium*, ed Michael Labahn (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), pp.351-64 (here, p.358).

Jesus and represent one side of a Christological debate; this language was formed within the Johannine community, which represented the other side of the debate. The conflicts between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ thus reflects debate at the end of the first century, rather than encounters between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ during his own ministry. In short, according to Moloney, the narrative does not describe the experience of the historical Jesus. Moloney associates this antipathy between the Johannine Christians and ‘the Jews’ with the aftermath of the devastations caused by the Jewish War (66-73 CE),<sup>187</sup> and he highlights the following observation about the meaning of the term ‘the Jews’: the term does not represent a race; the term could be applied to anyone of any age and any nation who has made up their mind that Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah, but a sinner whose origins are unknown, citing John 9:24-29.

Moloney, however, broadens the basis of his discussions of ‘the Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel through a wider semantic framework. Drawing on previous underexploited research, he re-examines some related words and their occurrence in their literary and narrative contexts in John’s Gospel, namely, ‘Israel’ and ‘Israelite’, ‘people’ and ‘nation’ and the possible relationship between them.<sup>188</sup> He focuses on John’s infrequent use of these expressions, considers the relationship between them and draws some alternative conclusions about the theological and literary function of ‘the Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel. John, he argues, transforms the notion of ‘Israel’ into the more expansive and inclusive idea of ‘a people of God’ and the implications of such a notion.<sup>189</sup> Does the people of God, for example, also include Gentiles? Moloney suggests that greater attention should be given to the *narrative* context in which these expressions appear, rather than to their national-political implications through the use of historical-critical methods.<sup>190</sup> He questions the use of ‘Israel’ and ‘Israelite’ being confined to the national and political reality of the Jewish people and suggests rather that the use of ‘Israel’ indicates a larger audience than the national and

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<sup>187</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.10.

<sup>188</sup> Francis J. Moloney, “‘The Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel: Another Perspective”, in Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John: Text and Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp.20-44.

<sup>189</sup> Moloney, “‘The Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel”, p.22.

<sup>190</sup> Moloney, “‘The Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel”, p.25.

political reality of the Jewish people.<sup>191</sup> A similar situation emerges with John's use of the terms 'nation' and 'people', whereby the author envisages a development from the former nation and people of God to a new people of God by means of the gathering at the cross: '[Caiaphas]... being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God' (Jn 11: 51-52). According to Moloney, a synchronic reading of this passage in the light of the whole Gospel narrative, shows that John envisages an extension of the former people of God to include both Jew and Gentile:<sup>192</sup> 'there is a real sense in which a new nation and people emerges, gathered by the crucified Jesus'.<sup>193</sup>

The conclusion drawn by Moloney is not that 'the Jews' are no longer God's chosen people (Jn 4:22) and that this mantle now belongs to Jewish Christians who have been cast out of the synagogue, but that the Johannine application of these expressions, traditionally associated with the national-political reality of the Jews, reflect an emerging understanding of the new and universal community of Jesus, Jews and Gentiles gathered at the cross of Jesus.<sup>194</sup> The question that Moloney proceeds to address is this: does the more inclusive use of 'Israel', 'Israelite', 'people' and 'nation' throw further light on the meaning of the term 'the Jews' in John? Apart from hostile references to 'the Jews', there are a number of neutral and positive references that should also be taken into account when considering John's view of Israel as a political and religious nation, in particular the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: 'You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews' (Jn 4:22). Moloney queries whether salvation is limited to the Jews or perhaps the notion of 'Israel' has been extended to demonstrate that both Jews and non-Jews can be considered as belonging to Israel on the basis of their belief rather than their national heritage.<sup>195</sup> The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman ends in her leading her fellow Samaritans to Jesus and to their declaration: '...for we have

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<sup>191</sup> Moloney, "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel', p.26.

<sup>192</sup> Moloney, "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel', p.34.

<sup>193</sup> Moloney, "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel', p.35.

<sup>194</sup> Moloney, "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel', p.35.

<sup>195</sup> Moloney, "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel', p.38.

heard for ourselves and we know that this indeed is the saviour of the world' (Jn 4:42). If Jesus brings God's revelation to Israel, then the narrative suggests the conclusion that 'Israel' means more than a religiously and politically identifiable nation. Those believing in Jesus can claim to belong to an Israel that accepts this revelation, and that the boundaries of Israel exceed the limitations of the Jewish people, as exemplified in John 1:47-52:

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you'. Nathanael replied, Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these'. And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Moloney interprets this as a move from the nation of the Jews to a new people, a new nation, made up of the children of God. The notion of Israel has been expanded and encompasses both Jews and Gentiles, those who belong to a group of believers that have accepted the revelation brought by Jesus. In John's view of God's designs, the Jews belong to the new people of God, and the criterion is no longer national, religious or political identity, but belief in Jesus. Negative uses of the expression 'the Jews' has nothing to do with religious, political or national affiliation but with the rejection of Jesus as the revelation of God. The negative uses of the expression 'the Jews' have to be understood in its historical and literary context. Jesus has come for God's revelation to all in Israel, including Jews (Jn 1:31) and everyone else who comes to believe in him (Jn 1:7). Moloney, paradoxically, thus states that he uses citation marks around the designation 'the Jews' in negative contexts in order to show that 'the Jews' are not the Jews in an ethnic sense but form part of a closed religious system: 'We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from' (Jn 9:29). However, acceptance of Jesus' revelation of God unites people from all national and religious backgrounds, Jew and Gentile, to form a new Israel, a new people and a new nation (Jn 1:31, 11:51-52).

To sum up: by examining the designation 'the Jews' within a semantic framework that includes 'Israel', 'Israelite', 'people' and 'nation' Moloney suggests that the Fourth Gospel presents a universal call for Jew and Gentile to acknowledge Jesus as the unique and salvific



revelation of God (Jn 20:31) and that ‘Israel’ has been transformed into a new nation and people. Within Moloney’s discussion and conclusions, however, I discern a disguised form of soft supersessionism/fulfillment, which will be discussed at 4.3.1 below.

Turning now to Rudolf Schnackenburg: in a lengthy introduction (217pp) to the first volume of his three-volume commentary on John’s Gospel, he sets out a number of ‘topical interests’ which he defines as ‘practical interests at work, arising from the historical situation of the evangelist and of Johannine Christianity’.<sup>196</sup> These are never made explicit, he claims, but are embedded in the presentation which the exegete can recognise from certain emphases and phrases and from assertions that point beyond the historical level; it is a matter of drawing conclusions from the Gospel narrative and attempting to fit it into the historical situation when the Gospel was composed. Therefore, there is a measure of uncertainty in such judgements on the matter.<sup>197</sup> Among these ‘topical interests’ are: ‘Disciples of John the Baptist and baptist groups’, ‘anti-Gnostic tendencies’ and ‘Attitude to Judaism’.<sup>198</sup> It is the latter topic that is of most concern here.

Like other commentators, Schnackenburg remarks on the various shades of meaning of ‘the Jews’ and meticulously documents the various referents in the Gospels, though he does not do so as extensively as Brown. He notes that although ‘the Jews’ are spoken of frequently in John’s Gospel (71 times), often no distinction is made between the references to the various Jewish groups in the time of Jesus, unlike the Synoptic Gospels where ‘the Jews’ is used less frequently as a collective term – 5 times in Matthew, 6 times in Mark and 5 times in Luke – and more frequently refer to a specific referent: to the Pharisees (29 times in Matthew, 12 times in Mark, 27 times in Luke, compared with 19 times in John); to doctors of the law or scribes (22 times in Matthew, 21 times in Mark, 14 times in Luke, and never in John); to Sadducees (7 times in Matthew, once in Mark and Luke, never in John).<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.165.

<sup>197</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.165.

<sup>198</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, pp.165-172.

<sup>199</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.165.

Noting therefore that John's Gospel makes infrequent distinctions between the various referents, Schnackenburg addresses the question of the identity of 'the Jews' in his prefatory material by distinguishing between what he believes happened historically and what the author tried to communicate theologically. Thus regarding 'the Jews' he says:

But the generalising description of the leaders as *hoi Ioudaioi* is remarkable, as is the relatively frequent mention of the Pharisees. The reason can hardly be lack of "historical" knowledge of the situation. But another suspicion springs to mind: that the evangelist is guided by a certain judgment he has formed of Judaism. Historically speaking, the leaders are made responsible for the unbelief of the Jewish people and Jesus's failure among them (cf. 11:47-53), but at the same time this circle is to appear, theologically, as the representative of the unbelief and hatred of the 'world' hostile to God.<sup>200</sup>

Schnackenburg here is surprised that John does not differentiate between the various referents of 'the Jews', given that he cannot be ignorant of these differences. He seems to be differentiating between what he thinks occurred historically and what John is attempting to say theologically. Like Brown and Moloney, he also regards 'the Jews' as representative of unbelief, a theological category that represents hostility itself as an abstract concept, rather than real people. He goes on to comment on the social milieu of the Fourth Gospel:

They [*hoi Ioudaioi*] continue to live as contemporaries of the evangelist in the unbelieving Judaism of his day which persecutes the disciples of Christ (cf. 16: 1-4) and which is led by the rabbinat of the Pharisees... One may, however, suspect that when the evangelist is dealing with Jesus's debates with "the Jews" (cf. ch. 8) which do not yet appear in the Synoptics as so sharp and continuous, he is also thinking of his own day, and hence making them more "transparent" and topical for his readers... Thus the presence of an anti-Jewish tendency in John, occasioned by the contemporary situation, can hardly be doubted..<sup>201</sup>

Schnackenburg here claims that historically John was referring to his own time when writing his Gospel and this accounts for some of his hostility towards 'the Jews'. While it was too early in twentieth-century Johannine scholarship for Schnackenburg to show much awareness regarding modern ethical issues of anti-Judaism in John, he does refer in the above citation to '...the presence of an anti-Jewish tendency in John', occasioned by the contemporary situation. In this respect he is among the early observers of such a tendency- he is ahead of Brown - although he does not follow this through with further critical commentary on the matter.

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<sup>200</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, pp.165-6.

<sup>201</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, pp.166-7.

Like Brown (3.3.1 above) Schnackenburg also finds the meaning of a role usage as one of the contexts for the designation ‘the Jews’ as the Jerusalem/Jewish authorities. For example, at John 1:19: ‘This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’. Schnackenburg comments that the envoys come from the ‘Jews’ of Jerusalem: that is from the central authority of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. The priests and Levites carry out the orders of the ruling party of the ‘high priests’ who were a special group in the Sanhedrin. The fact that they are spoken of simply as ‘the Jews’ is John’s way of using the term deliberately and indifferently, as appears on closer inspection to be the case.<sup>202</sup>

In summary: Schnackenburg recognises some of the various contexts in which the designation ‘the Jews’ occurs in John’s Gospel but, unlike Brown and Moloney, he does not explore them in detail. He is, however, percipient in detecting, ‘the presence of an anti-Jewish tendency in John’, even if he does not comment further.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter focuses on two of the five issues presented for investigation in chapter one of this study (section 1.3): ‘Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish?’(section 3.2) and, closely related to that question, the matter of identity: ‘Who are ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel?’ (section 3.3). There is no scholarly consensus on the answer to the first question, with possible answers lying on a spectrum of a range of opinions. The text of John’s Gospel has sometimes been treated as a salad bowl, with interpreters picking and mixing their individual preferences. There are many negative references to ‘the Jews’ and several referents of the term. With regard to negative references to ‘the Jews’, the language of vilification was examined in its first-century CE Graeco-Roman context and its intent was to establish identity by presenting one’s opponent as the ‘other’. The diabolizing of ‘the Jews’ at John 8:44 may therefore be considered as a standard rhetorical trope for its time, and this

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<sup>202</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 1, p.286.

in contrast to modern sensibilities. Several examples of anti-Judaistic interpretations from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century are discussed.

Catholic perspectives on the question were examined, mainly through the scholarship of three major Catholic exegetes: Raymond Brown, Francis Moloney, and Rudolf Schnackenburg. All three scholars published studies on John's Gospel both before and after Vatican II Council (1962-65) and their works reflect the changing attitudes to perceived anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. For example, Brown's earliest work on John's Gospel written in 1960 shows no awareness of the hermeneutical challenges posed by the possible anti-Judaism within the text and he also makes negative remarks about 'the Jews'. Brown attended Vatican II Council as a *peritus/expert* to a bishop in sessions where *Nostra Aetate* was discussed. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that his post-conciliar writings took account of new sensibilities towards the Jews, in particular, in his 1966 Anchor Bible commentary on John's Gospel. Moloney has also described the profound effect that *Dei Verbum* had on his work while he was in Rome during Vatican II Council.<sup>203</sup> He offers a wider linguistic perspective on 'the Jews' by incorporating references to 'Israel', 'Israelite', 'people' and 'nation' into his discussion. The influence of Vatican II on Schnackenburg is more tangential, though he does refer to an 'anti-Jewish tendency' in John. The 'Big Three' made hostile comments about 'the Jews' before Vatican II Council teachings became part of revised thinking on the matter became the norm in Christian/Catholic thinking. The term 'the Jews' has been mentioned on several occasions in this section of the dissertation, but without any clear statement as to their identification. Anti-Judaism is closely linked to the identity/identities of 'the Jews' in the Fourth Gospel – 'who are the Jews in John's Gospel?'. Various answers are given to the referents of 'the Jews', and there is no scholarly consensus.

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<sup>203</sup> Francis J. Moloney, 'The Word in the Church Tradition', at [Francis Moloney Vatican II – The Word in the Church Tradition – Catalyst for Renewal](#), no date. [accessed 24 April, 2023]

## CHAPTER 4: ANTI-JUDAISM IN SAINT JOHN'S GOSPEL, PART 2: THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY, SUPERSESSIONISM AND HERMENEUTICS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the final three issues listed at section 1.3 above, namely: 'Is there a conflict between the Johannine community and 'the Jews?' (4.2 below), including Catholic perspectives (4.2.1), 'Is John's Gospel supersessionist?' (4.3), also including Catholic perspectives (4.3.1); and finally, 'Can hermeneutics contribute to a reading of John's Gospel?' (4.4). In this latter instance, Catholic perspectives are not separated but blended into the analysis. As with chapter 3, each section opens with a statement of the issue, followed by some of the possible answers offered by non-Catholic and Catholic sources, with the focus on the latter.

### 4.2 Is there a Conflict between the Johannine Community and 'the Jews'?

'All we know about the Johannine community is what can be inferred from its writings'.<sup>204</sup>

John's Gospel contains some features that can be read as evidence of a conflict between Jesus and certain Jewish groups, as well as between the later followers of Jesus and Jews who decided not to follow him.<sup>205</sup> This conflict is, furthermore, theorised to be the basis of perceived anti-Judaism in John.<sup>206</sup> This assumed conflict has suggested that a Johannine community existed, a community of the early followers of Jesus, from which emerged and for which was composed a Johannine corpus of literature, defined as: John's Gospel, the three Johannine epistles and possibly, the Book of Revelation.<sup>207</sup> Hugo Méndez suggests the following definition of the Johannine community: 'a single close-knit network of churches sharing a distinctive theological outlook (the 'Johannine Community' or 'Johannine Christianity')'.<sup>208</sup> The theory of a Johannine community engaged scholars in particular in the late 1960s and 1970s notably by, J. Louis Martyn in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, who tried to link the growth of Johannine Christology to the

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<sup>204</sup> John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p.100.

<sup>205</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.20.

<sup>206</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.20.

<sup>207</sup> The focus of this discussion will be on John's Gospel.

<sup>208</sup> Hugo Méndez, 'Did the Johannine Community Exist?', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol 42(3), 2020, pp.350-74 (here, p.350).

experience of a particular Christian group finding its way through the final split between the synagogue and the emerging Christian church.<sup>209</sup> Martyn proposed a multi-stage development, similar – as will be demonstrated below (4.2.1) – to Raymond Brown’s *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.

The first stage of development, according to Martyn, covers the early period from before 70 until the 80s CE,<sup>210</sup> during which time the community can be described as ‘Christian Jews’. Stage two represents the middle period marked by two singular events: synagogue members demanded discussion and midrashic debate over the claims of Jesus and, eventually, they used the *birkat ha-minim*, a curse, euphemistically called the blessing on/of the heretics, to drive out confessing Christians from their midst. These processes, it is claimed, found particular expression in the account of the healing of the blind man in John 9. Some of the ‘Christian Jews’ stayed within the synagogue and hid their identity (Jn 12:42-3). The second event was caused by threats of persecution and death (Jn 1:11; 10:28-29; 15:18 and 16:2), and in this situation the community began to see itself as hated by the world (Jn 15:18-16:3; 16:33). Stage three is the late period in which the Johannine community gradually formed its separate identity and addressed itself to other Jewish Christians who had been dispersed because of the persecution. They were considered to be the ‘other sheep’ who were promised that they would be one flock under the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:16). Martyn thus sought to trace the historical, social and religious crises that underpinned the development of the Johannine community. His book has been described by John Ashton as ‘...probably the most important single work on the [Fourth] Gospel since Bultmann’s commentary’.<sup>211</sup> Martyn’s theory has, however, been largely abandoned in recent scholarship, especially his arguments about the *birkat ha-minim*.

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<sup>209</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). Subsequent editions were published in 1979 and 2003.

<sup>210</sup> Details are summarised from Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, pp.70-71. This section was in fact written by Francis Moloney who edited Brown’s manuscript, left incomplete on his death in 1998.

<sup>211</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p.107.

An alternative approach is advanced by Adele Reinhartz who suggests a context for the Johannine community based on the various narrative levels of John's Gospel. The primary narrative level is a surface one that situates Jesus within a particular historical setting. The second narrative level is more nuanced and provides a 'cosmological story' with a broader chronological, geographical and theological frame for the historical story; within these two stories is a third one, that of the Johannine community ('ecclesiological tale'). John's Gospel, argues Reinhartz, does not foretell the founding of a community. But it implies the existence of a community and it is necessary to read between the lines to discover some of the trials of this community as it tried to establish itself and forge its identity within the Greco-Roman environment.<sup>212</sup> A major event that moulded the experience of the Johannine community was the driving out of Johannine Christians from a synagogue community, as recounted in three places in John's Gospel: '...for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue' (Jn 9:22); and: 'Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue' (Jn 12:42). And finally: 'They will put you out of the synagogues' (Jn 16:2). It could be argued that expulsion from the synagogue was a formative event in the experience of the Johannine community (see Martyn above), though many scholars (including Reinhartz) do not agree that the separation can be specifically identified with the *birkat ha-minim*.<sup>213</sup> Pruszinski, however, makes a telling point that even if the events resulting in expulsion from the synagogue are not historically based, their recounting in John's Gospel must still have served as a shock to subsequent receiving generations.<sup>214</sup> There are other, more indirect, references to the existence of the Johannine community such as, the sheepfold reference at John 10 and the multi-branched vine

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<sup>212</sup> Adele Reinhartz, 'The Gospel of John: How "the Jews" Became Part of the Plot', in Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, eds, *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp.91-116 (here, p.101).

<sup>213</sup> For example, Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Mar., 1972), pp. 44-72 (here, p.55fn40).

<sup>214</sup> Jolyon G.R. Pruszinski, 'Trauma and TYPOI: The Fourth Gospel as Warning Not Example', *Religions* 14: 27, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010027> [Accessed 30 May 2023]

at John 15.<sup>215</sup> The healing of the blind man in John 9:1-34 is a local event in terms of John's Gospel but it has implications for the wider issue of the Johannine community.

Both Martyn and Reinhartz propose frameworks for analysing the existence of a hypothetical Johannine community in John's Gospel. Martyn suggests a three-stage chronological model for the emergence and development of the community. Reinhartz also has a tripartite approach to the matter, based on the various narrative levels of John's Gospel.

#### ***4.2.1 Catholic Perspectives***

Of the three leading Catholic commentators: Francis Moloney, Rudolf Schnackenburg and Raymond Brown, only the latter has written substantially on the Johannine community. His contribution has been described by Paul Anderson as: 'Among the paradigm-making contributions in Johannine studies over the last half century'.<sup>216</sup> Brown's principal work on the Johannine community is his monograph, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, in which he explores the possible evolution of the Johannine community in ways that bear some striking resemblance to the approach taken by J. Louis Martyn.<sup>217</sup> At the outset of his study he issues the following caveat: 'I warn the reader that my construction claims at most probability; and if sixty per cent of my detective work is accepted, I shall be happy indeed'.<sup>218</sup> With this in mind he goes on to posit four phases in the emergence of the proposed Community, only two of which are considered here, as the other two phases concern the Letters of John, rather than John's Gospel.

Phase One: Before the Gospel (mid 50s to late 80s CE). This phase, according to Brown, concerns the origins of the community and its relationship to mid-first-century Judaism. In the early period the Johannine community was made up of Jews who embraced a relatively low

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<sup>215</sup> Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, p.23.

<sup>216</sup> Paul N. Anderson, 'The Community That Raymond Brown Left Behind: Reflections on the Johannine Dialectal Situation.' (2013). Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies. 275. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/275> [Accessed 30 May, 2023]

<sup>217</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (Mahwah, N.J., Paulist Press, 1979).

<sup>218</sup> Brown, *The Community*, p.7.



Christology.<sup>219</sup> By the latter part of this period Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogues because of their claims about Jesus. This expulsion, it is proposed, reflects the situation in the final third of the first century CE at the Jewish teaching centre in Jamnia. Brown, like Martyn, suggests that the expulsions may be connected with the reformulation of the Twelfth Benediction concerning a curse on the *minim* (heretics), referred to above, who included Jewish Christians.<sup>220</sup> This position, as noted above, is disputed by other scholars.

Phase Two: When the Gospel was written (about 90 CE). This phase is probably the most important aspect of Brown's reconstructions. He claims that the expulsion from the synagogues belongs to the past but that persecution by 'the Jews' continues: 'Indeed an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me' (Jn 16:2-3). Brown concludes that this phase informs us about the context of the Johannine community in a diverse world of believers and non-believers at the end of the first century CE. While the Johannine community disappears into the various sects of heterodox Christianity or absorption into the Great Church,<sup>221</sup> Brown considers that it left a lasting legacy:

The ultimate victory for the original Johannine Community was to have its pre-existence Christology accepted by the Great Church and become Christian orthodoxy. And so it may not be too romantic to think that...[the Great] Church was accommodating itself to the Christology of the Johannine Christians.<sup>222</sup>

Francis J. Moloney deals more briefly than Brown with the theory of a Johannine community. He refers to the three passages in John's Gospel concerning the eviction from the synagogue of those who believed and confessed that Jesus was the Christ. On two of those occasions (Jn 9:22; 12:42) the reason for eviction from the synagogue refers explicitly to the confession that Jesus was the Christ, with the final breakdown between the Johannine community

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<sup>219</sup> Brown, *The Community*, p.25.

<sup>220</sup> Brown, *The Community*, p.22.

<sup>221</sup> Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.129.

<sup>222</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), p.112. Cited in Senior, *Raymond E. Brown*, p.129.

and the local synagogue being occasioned by a public recognition that Jesus was the Christ.<sup>223</sup> Moloney does not link the *birkat ha-minim* with eviction from the synagogue. Like Martyn and Brown, he points to the story of the man blind from birth (Jn 9:1-34) where there is a gradual increase of faith in Jesus as the Christ that ends in the blind man being evicted from the synagogue: ‘you were born entirely in sins...And they drove him out’ (Jn 9: 34). The experience of the man born blind is considered by Moloney to reflect the experience of the Johannine Christians.<sup>224</sup> The history of the process whereby Christians were evicted from the synagogue is complex but signs of separation between the two communities began to appear, it is claimed, between 80 and 90 CE and are reflected in John’s Gospel. Moloney does not produce any new arguments of this own for the existence of a Johannine community. He accepts the scholarly consensus that it may have existed and that it helps to explain polemical exchanges between Jesus and ‘the Jews’, particularly at John 8: 31-59. Outside of his commentary on John’s Gospel Moloney does not seem to have written anything on the existence and/or reconstruction of the Johannine community. Perhaps he felt that Brown’s monograph had covered the main arguments and that further exposition was unnecessary. It is therefore surprising that he does not cite Brown’s monograph on the Johannine community in the bibliography to his commentary. The conclusion may reasonably be drawn that he considers the matter to be received wisdom and needing no further comment.

Schnackenburg, like Moloney, also deals briefly with the question of a proposed Johannine community. His main reference point is also the healing of the blind man in John 9:1-34.<sup>225</sup> In his opinion this individual event has wider implications: ‘The expulsion of the healed man for becoming a believer stands for the exclusion from the synagogue operated against dissident Jews in that city’,<sup>226</sup> and: ‘the intention to relate the story to the situation of the evangelist’s readers is unmistakable’.<sup>227</sup> The parents of the blind man are reluctant to say how their son was healed

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<sup>223</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.2.

<sup>224</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.2; and p.298n34.

<sup>225</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, (London: Burns & Oates, 1980).

<sup>226</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.239.

<sup>227</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.239.

‘...because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue’ (Jn 9:22). Schnackenburg highlights the word for ‘put out of the synagogue’ (*aposynagōs*), remarking that it occurs three times and only in John, and that it is such a general statement that it is reasonable to infer that the evangelist is thinking of the circumstances of his own time.<sup>228</sup> He also considers that the curse on heretics in the twelfth of the Eighteenth Benedictions (*birkat ha-minim*) was proclaimed about 90 CE, and that from that date measures were taken to enforce social segregation between ‘the Jews’ and the ‘Nazarenes’ and *Minim* (heretics).<sup>229</sup> As noted above, this position is a matter of controversy among more recent Johannine scholars, particularly on issues of dating of the available evidence. Schnackenburg does not, nevertheless, make any explicit linkage between these reference to ‘the Jews’ and the hostile exchanges with Jesus at John 8:31-59.

Schnackenburg speculates whether the Johannine community represents a localized concept of community or whether it points to the perspective of a universal Church, albeit without providing a definitive opinion.<sup>230</sup> The theoretical existence of a Johannine community, he claims, provides a plausible context for the polemical debates between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ in John’s Gospel, particularly the exchanges in John 8:31-59. Indeed, the views of the three Catholic exegetes, under consideration in this dissertation show a tendency to accept the existence of a Johannine community and are in line with a post-Vatican II convergence of views towards a mainstream trend in Johannine scholarship at the time to pay due regard to post-Holocaust sensibilities. The theory can also provide a coherent link in the chain of events leading to the final separation between Christianity and Judaism in the late first century CE.

Knowledge about the existence of a Johannine community is based on a blending of the factual evidence, such as there is, with a paradigmatic hypothesis to enable a picture of the nature and history of the community to be drawn. In this respect Raymond Brown has presented the most

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<sup>228</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.250.

<sup>229</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.250.

<sup>230</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 3, p.205.

developed reconstruction, while Moloney and Schnackenburg deal with the matter briefly. There are, however, a number of dissenting scholarly voices who doubt the existence of such a community. In particular, they are not convinced by the specificity of the community's reconstruction, and especially the *birkat ha-minim*, or that it really existed. Contrary to Brown, Moloney and Schnackenburg, they regard its existence as purely hypothetical, with scant evidence within the Johannine corpus and little or no available external evidence; that it is a *creatio ex nihilo*. Kysar, for example, doubts the existence of the community and even whether the theory of the Johannine community can survive; in particular, that the references to expulsions from the synagogue necessarily refer to actions that had already taken place. But, according to Kysar, the more significant reason for believing that the Johannine community was no longer attached to the synagogue when the Gospel was written is the tone of the exchanges between Jesus and 'the Jews', particularly in John 8:31-59. Kysar concludes: 'simply because a hypothesis illumines the possible meaning of a passage does not necessarily prove that the hypothesis is true'.<sup>231</sup> Méndez has also recently claimed that it is not plausible to construct a Johannine community based on the evidence of the Johannine corpus; that most scholars assume genetic links between most or all of the Johannine texts: that the epistles presuppose the Gospel and clarify its teachings.<sup>232</sup> Other scholars, however, are sceptical about the authorial claims of these texts, and so it is implausible to reconstruct a Johannine community from such texts.<sup>233</sup>

From the viewpoint of this study, a key question is whether the existence of the Johannine community contributed to the anti-Judaism of the Fourth Gospel, or, more specifically, whether the theory of expulsion and persecution of Johannine Christians is an attempt at explaining away the Gospel's anti-Judaism. It may also explain, 'the strategies used by the Johannine side to define themselves over against a group with whom they shared a common Jewish heritage, but with whom there was profound disagreement about the significance of Jesus in relation to that

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<sup>231</sup> Robert Kysar, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community', in J.R. Donahue, ed. *Life in Abundance: Studies in John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (Collegeville, Minn, 2005), pp. 65-81.

<sup>232</sup> Méndez, 'Did the Johannine Community Exist?', p.352.

<sup>233</sup> Méndez, 'Did the Johannine Community Exist?', p.352.

heritage.<sup>234</sup> In short, the vicissitudes of the Johannine community could be seen as processes of identity formation (as discussed above, particularly in section 2.2.1). Inferences about a conflict between the Johannine community and ‘the Jews’ have added to the litany of Christian anti-Jewish perceptions by Christians through the ages. Martyn’ and Brown’s pioneering models of historical reconstruction on the existence of the Johannine community and its hypothetical nature therefore continue to inform approaches to, and to illuminate, the nature of the perceived anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel. The answer to the question posed at 4.2 above: is there is a conflict between the Johannine community and ‘the Jews’ is in the affirmative, provided the reconstructed existence of such a community is accepted.

We now turn to an issue that provides further scope for discussion on anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel, namely, supersessionism..

### **4.3 Is John’s Gospel Supersessionist ?**

Section 2.2.3 introduced the topic of supersessionism, or replacement theology, as one of the contexts in which to understand Catholic perspectives, following Vatican II Council, on anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel. Supersessionism was presented as a source of possible anti-Judaism with a discussion of its biblical origins and its persistence in Christian/Catholic doctrine until the mid-twentieth century. This earlier section of this study, however, made no reference to supersessionism in John’s Gospel and only indirect reference to Vatican II pronouncements and to subsequent discussions on the matter. The present section will address these aspects by considering arguments for and against supersessionism in John’s Gospel in general terms, and then it will examine Catholic views on supersessionism, including the views of the Catholic Church as an institution (4.3.1), before offering some concluding remarks (4.3.2).

The above discussion (4.2) on the Johannine community has shown that the troubled relationship between John’s Gospel and the Judaism of its time was complex and nuanced. It would

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<sup>234</sup> Catrin Williams, ‘The Gospel of John’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed by Michael Lieb et al., pp.104-118 (here p.110), at <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199204540.003.0009> [accessed 23 August 2023].

seem that the conflict was mainly based on John's Christology and its relationship to Jewish beliefs, including a difference of opinion over the identity of the people of God, with both Christians and Jews claiming to be *Verus Israel/the True Israel*. Signs of the conflict caused by John's high Christology can be identified in the following Johannine passages: 'For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God' (Jn 5:18); and, 'The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God"' (Jn 10:33); and, 'The Jews answered him [Pilate], 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the son of God' (Jn 19:7). The burden of the opposition of 'the Jews' to Jesus, according to the Johannine text, is because he claims to be God or the Son of God. This may be interpreted as high Christology and accusations of blasphemy, or as claims about Jesus that suggest he is replacing the structures and institutions of Judaism. Culpeper emphasises the point that the claim of supersessionism is due to the claim that Jesus fulfilled Judaism:

On the one hand, the Johannine retention of so many meaningful Jewish features is the highest compliment that the daughter faith could pay to the parent faith. On the other hand apart from all that is fulfilled in Jesus, very little is left in Judaism. The Gospel of John, therefore, does not dispassionately set forth the truth of the Christian faith. It claims the fulfilment of Judaism, and in the process, it strips Judaism of the validity of its faith and practice.<sup>235</sup>

This proposed attempt at the appropriation of Judaism by Johannine Christianity deprives the Jews of their religious identity and would point to Johannine anti-Judaism. There are a number of other references in John's Gospel that can be read as supersessionist: Jesus proclaims himself to be 'the light of the world' (Jn 8:12); he is also the 'lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (Jn 1:29), and, in particular, 'the true vine' (Jn 15:1); and 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.' (Jn 14:6). These references may also be interpreted as high Christology or supersessionism. Culpeper emphasises the point that Christian exclusivism is, paradoxically, based on Jewish exclusivism: 'For the Jews, loyalty to Yahweh

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<sup>235</sup> R. Alan Culpeper, 'Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters', in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.61-82 (here, p.69).

made every other religion idolatrous and worthy only of reprobation. For John, this exclusivism means that apart from confessing Jesus as the Messiah there is no hope for the Jews'.<sup>236</sup> Reinhartz reinforces the notion of Christian exclusivism in John: 'the Christology of the Fourth Gospel does not include salvation for nonbelievers such as the Jew'.<sup>237</sup> These aforementioned evaluations of John's Gospel could, arguably, be used as evidence to claim that it is supersessionist and thereby contributes to its anti-Judaism.

Some commentators, however, do not accept the proposition that Johannine Christology is supersessionist and propose alternative, mitigating interpretations, which emphasise 'the restoration of Israel' or 'fulfilment', whereby continuities between Christianity and Judaism existed regarding the person of Christ.<sup>238</sup> Steve Motyer, for example, refers to the situation after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans (70 CE) and to Jewish discussion about the need to rebuild it. He cites the famous exchange between R. Joshua and R. Johanan ben Zakki where the latter maintains that it was not necessary to rebuild the Temple because, as he maintained: 'we have another atonement as effective as this'.<sup>239</sup> For him another atonement was 'deeds of loving-kindness', while for John's Gospel it is Christ's death whose body is destroyed and resurrected which is the place where the people of God are reunited in worship and love.<sup>240</sup> Johannine Christology, according to Motyer, needs to be understood in the light of rabbinic discussion about how the Jewish Temple might be restored. Jesus is not regarded by John as a replacement for the Temple but as the 'real meaning of the Temple and the one who fulfils and brings to reality their inner essence'.<sup>241</sup> Motyer's position seems to be an attempt to mitigate and finesse the harshness of accusations of supersessionism in John's Gospel and this is in line with the wider context of mitigating interpretations of anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. Discussion about Johannine Christology and supersessionism turns a spotlight on the origins and basic message of Christianity.

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<sup>236</sup> Culpeper, 'Anti-Judaism', p.73.

<sup>237</sup> Adele Reinhartz, "Jews" and Jews in the Fourth Gospel", in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.213-27 (here, p.214).

<sup>238</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.26.

<sup>239</sup> Stephen Motyer, 'The Fourth Gospel and the Salvation of Israel: An Appeal for a New Start', in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.83-100 (here, p.92).

<sup>240</sup> Motyer, "Fourth Gospel", p.92.

<sup>241</sup> Motyer, "Fourth Gospel", p.91.

Culpeper suggests in this regard that the key issue is as follows: ‘The critical theological issues, therefore, revolve around the question of whether supersessionism, with its attendant rejection of Judaism, is essential to Christianity’.<sup>242</sup> This is a key issue, one that engages the Catholic Church today and will be discussed in the following section.

#### ***4.3.1 Catholic perspectives***

Turning now to Catholic perspectives on the issue of supersessionism,<sup>243</sup> it can be noted that Raymond Brown is unequivocal on replacement theology in his early work on John’s Gospel and Epistles:

Just as a new creation replaces the old, a new covenant replaces the old covenant with Israel on Sinai, because the Chosen People rejected Christ. A constant theme in the Gospel is Christ’s replacement of the institutions, Temple, and the feasts of the Jews. This is summed up poetically in verses 14-18. For the Word became flesh (flesh means human nature) and set up his Tabernacle in our midst... One of the signs of God’s pact with Israel in Sinai was the Tabernacle made in the desert. The Tabernacle and its later successor, the Temple, were the seat of divine presence among God’s people, the seat of God’s glory. In the new covenant, the humanity of the Word, his flesh, becomes the supreme localization of divine presence and glory.<sup>244</sup>

Brown’s statement on supersessionism is made without qualification and dates from 1960, that is, before the Vatican II Council, and it is therefore not surprising that it reflects the prevailing Catholic/Christian opinion of the time.<sup>245</sup> His statement also shows that he interprets John’s Gospel as undermining Judaism in order to replace it with Jesus. Brown’s final study on John, however, softens the harshness of his earlier statement on replacement theology, doing so with reference to John 19:28: ‘the hour of Jesus’s passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, is the culminating hour in the long history of God’s dealings, bringing “the Scripture to its complete fulfilment”’.<sup>246</sup> Brown’s use of the word ‘fulfilment’ here is significant and reflects his changed position on possible supersessionism in John’s Gospel. In other words, the Old Covenant is not replaced by the New Covenant, but ‘fulfilled’ by it. Such a term, however, may, arguably, be considered to be

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<sup>242</sup> Culpeper, ‘Anti-Judaism’, p.67

<sup>243</sup> ‘Supersessionism’ is not part of the modern Catholic exegete’s vocabulary; the more emollient and inclusive term is ‘fulfillment’.

<sup>244</sup> Brown, *The Gospel of St John*, p.17.

<sup>245</sup> Brown’s attitude to supersessionism is in tune with his early negative portrayal of the Johannine Jews discussed in 3.2 above.

<sup>246</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.237.



a form of ‘soft supersessionism’, by which the notion is retained but expressed by a more euphemistic term.

More specifically, Brown considers that ‘Jewish customs, feasts and religious institutions also find their fulfilment in Jesus’.<sup>247</sup> He notes that the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue had cut them off from the rich Jewish liturgical life, and to compensate for this the Johannine tradition strongly emphasised a fulfilment motif in that Jesus replaced many of the institutions of Judaism.<sup>248</sup> For example, using the imagery of the Tabernacle or desert tent where Jesus was present, the Prologue (Jn 1:14) announces that the Word became flesh and ‘tented’ among us.<sup>249</sup> The body of Jesus will be raised up to replace the destroyed Temple (Jn 2:19-22).<sup>250</sup> Other examples cited by Brown include the following: manna is associated with Passover, and Jesus, rather than the manna, is the true bread from heaven (Jn 6:4, 31-35); ‘Tabernacles’, moreover, was a feast of water and light, during which Jesus proclaims himself as the source of living water and light and as the light of the world (Jn 7:2, 37-38; 8:12).<sup>251</sup> Similarly, the hour of Jesus’ passion, death, resurrection and ascension culminates in bringing “the Scripture to its complete fulfillment” (Jn 19:28-30), whereas Jewish customs, feasts and religious institutions also find their fulfillment in Jesus.<sup>252</sup>

John 14.6 could also be interpreted as a supersessionist text: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me’. In fact, it was specifically asserted in *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* to be a positive, true statement (2.2 above). James Charlesworth, however, suggests that it can be re-interpreted as a misrepresentation of the basic message of Jesus Christ and that as it is unique in having no textual variants, it may be an un-Johannine interpolation (4.4 above). Brown, however, includes a few references to 14.6, one of which is under the rubric

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<sup>247</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.237.

<sup>248</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.76.

<sup>249</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.76. NRSV has ‘lived’ but the Greek has a form of *skēnein*, ‘to dwell in a tent’.

<sup>250</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.76. It is significant that Brown uses the word ‘replace’ rather than fulfilment in his commentary, showing some lingering supersessionism,

<sup>251</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.76.

<sup>252</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.237.

of ‘wisdom motifs’ in his commentary and suggests that he interprets it in a positive rather than a negative light.<sup>253</sup>

Moloney closely follows Brown in his commentary on the same passages. At John 2:19-22, for example, he understands the text to refer to both the tearing down and reconstruction of a building (the Temple) or the destruction and resurrection of the body of Jesus.<sup>254</sup> He also concurs with Brown that John emphasises that Jesus, not the manna, is the real bread from heaven,<sup>255</sup> and that Jesus is the source of living water and light.<sup>256</sup> On John 19:28-30, Moloney comments that the account of the death of Jesus indicates ‘fulfillment and perfection’.<sup>257</sup> On 14.6 Moloney merely observes that Jesus announces who he is and what he does, and that he is the only way to the father.<sup>258</sup> He does not add anything further in his commentary and, therefore, it is reasonable to infer that ‘fulfillment’ is implied.

Schnackenburg takes much the same approach as Brown and Moloney on Jewish festivals and institutions as finding their fulfillment in Jesus. He is more expansive in his commentary, and devotes eight and a half pages to commenting in minute detail on John 2:19-22.<sup>259</sup> In a section headed ‘The question of a deeper symbolism’, Schnackenburg looks for a deeper meaning in the temple episode and finds it in ‘abrogation of the Jewish cult, and its *replacement* [emphasis added] by himself and his community’, with Jesus as the ‘true temple’.<sup>260</sup> Schnackenburg offers no relevant comments on the bread and Tabernacles discourses. On the second part of John 14:6: ‘No one comes to the Father except through me’, Schnackenburg describes it as, ‘a culminating point in Johannine theology’, and ‘as a classical summary of the Johannine doctrine of salvation that is based entirely on Jesus Christ’,<sup>261</sup> and raises no questions. His silence suggests that, as with Brown and Moloney, ‘fulfillment’ is implied.

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<sup>253</sup> Brown, *An Introduction*, p.262.

<sup>254</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), p.82

<sup>255</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.213.

<sup>256</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, pp.255-257.

<sup>257</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.504.

<sup>258</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.399.

<sup>259</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2 (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), pp.349-357.

<sup>260</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 2, p.356.

<sup>261</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol 3, p.65.

In summary: the three Catholic exegetes in question follow Church doctrine as set out in *Nostra Aetate/In Our Time* and subsequent official pronouncements by reframing supersessionism as fulfillment, even though the occasional use of the term ‘replacement’ intrudes into their commentaries and studies on John. On 14:6 in particular, it not surprising that the official line is taken. To do otherwise would be to undermine one of the basic building blocks of Catholic Christianity. The debate continues and has been taken forward by the Vatican into more recent times, to which we now turn.

At the Vatican II Council, the Church formally abandoned centuries of anti-Judaism and re-evaluated traditional teachings, and supersessionism was indirectly rejected: ‘[God] does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues’.<sup>262</sup> It would seem, however, that supersessionism persists, albeit in a mild form, into the twenty-first century. A number of documents have been issued that paved the way towards the Catholic Church’s reappraisal of supersessionism . The starting point is a publication in 1974 by the Commission for Religious Relationships with the Jews (CRRJ): *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate*’.<sup>263</sup> It advocates better knowledge of Judaism, particularly the roots of Catholic/Christian liturgy in Judaism, for example Passover and the use of signs and symbols in the liturgy; also, the notion of sacrifice, use of oil and lights. Suggestions are made for joint social action. The next relevant document was *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*.<sup>264</sup> A key point in this document was that aspects of the Old Covenant concerning Israel alone have their own validity and legitimacy. It goes on to say, however, that it becomes clear in the light of the complete fulfilment in the New Covenant, thus recognising that there is tension when considering the comparability of the two covenants. The term ‘fulfilment’ is used but without explaining how this elucidates the relationship

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<sup>262</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, section 4. See Annex A for full text.

<sup>263</sup> CRRJ, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate*, 1974. At <https://www.smp.org/resourcecenter/resource/6962> [Accessed 17 March 2023].

<sup>264</sup> CRRJ, “[Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church](#)” ([christianunity.va](http://christianunity.va)) [Accessed 2 April 2023].



over the preceding decennia and looks to the future: ‘The following reflections aim at looking back with gratitude on all that has been achieved over the last decades in the Jewish-Catholic relationship, providing at the same time a new stimulus for the future’ (*Gifts*, Preface). More specifically, *Gifts* focuses on the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant; it affirms and clarifies the Pauline teaching in Rom. 11:29 on the irrevocability of the Jewish Covenant, despite the fact that for centuries Christian/Catholic theologies had been opposed to it in the shape of supersessionist theologies:

On the part of many of the Church Fathers the so-called replacement theory or supersessionism steadily gained favour until in the Middle Ages it represented the standard theological foundation of the relationship with Judaism: the promises and commitments of God would no longer apply to Israel because it had not recognised Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, but had been transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ which was now the true ‘new Israel’, the new chosen people of God (*Gifts*, para. 17).

This repudiation of the traditional approach by Church Fathers, medieval theologians and many other theologians until modern times was a much belated action. But what was to replace the traditional approach? The answer appears to be ‘fulfilment’. A semantic aspect on supersessionism is the relationship between ‘fulfilment’ and ‘replacement’. The two are not identical in meaning but the former has often been interpreted as the latter.<sup>267</sup> The word ‘fulfilment’ has Tennysonian resonance: ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfils himself in many ways’<sup>268</sup>. It appears seven times in *Dei Verbum*,<sup>269</sup> and twenty times in *Lumen Gentium/Light of the Nations*, which is, along with *Dei Verbum* and *Nostra Aetate*, among the sixteen principal documents issuing from Vatican II, and published on 21 November 1964.<sup>270</sup> In *Gifts* it appears ten times in relation to Catholic Christianity as the ‘fulfilment’ of the Jewish covenant.<sup>271</sup> In D’Costa’s pithy phrase, ‘Fulfilment apparently supersedes supersessionism’.<sup>272</sup> Fulfilment is still valid in that Jesus Christ fulfils the covenant given to Israel in his person, but

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<sup>267</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.26.

<sup>268</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, Morte d’Arthur, in *Alfred Lord Tennyson: Selected Poems*, ed by Aidan Day (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), pp.70-78 (here, lines 240-41).

<sup>269</sup> See Annex B to this study, *Dei Verbum*. ‘Fulfilment’ or variants appears in sections 4, 7 (thrice), 8, 18 and 20.

<sup>270</sup> See Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium/Light of the Nations*, in Norman Tanner, ed., *Vatican II: The Essential Texts* (New York: Image Books, 2012), pp.106-188. It was issued on 21 November 1964.

<sup>271</sup> ‘Fulfilment’ or variants appears in *Gifts* at paragraphs 14, 22, 23(twice), 27, 30, 32, 33, 35 and 36.

<sup>272</sup> D’Acosta, G., ‘Supersessionism: Harsh, Mild or Gone for Good?’ *European Judaism*, 50(1), 2017, pp.99-107 (here, p.101).

does not annul it; he is the saviour of the world: ‘The Church does not replace the people of the God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel’ (*Gifts*, para. 23). The promises made to Israel in the Old Covenant have a different status after Christ and the appearance of the New Covenant than they had before.<sup>273</sup> Some kind of progression has happened over time and something new has been achieved, and with the appearance of Jesus the New Covenant has achieved a point beyond that achieved by the Old Covenant. Or, to put it another way: the New Covenant has added value to the Old Covenant and transcended its limitations. This broader purpose achieved by the New Covenant means that: ‘the promise [of the Old Covenant] has been fulfilled that all peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God’ (*Gifts*, para 35, citing Isa 56: 1-8). This claim appears to be free of economic and punitive supersessionist implications. But the question arises as to whether it is possible to propose a theology of fulfilment that is not to some degree supersessionist. A Jewish perspective, cited by D’Acosta, holds that there are two positions for traditional forms of Christianity: harsh and mild supersessionism. Harsh means adhering to economic and punitive kinds of supersessionism, while mild supersessionism means maintaining the continuing validity of Israel’s covenant while at the same time holding that Judaism is ‘best’ properly ‘fulfilled’ in Jesus Christ. Christianity, ‘solves the problems of Judaism better than Judaism can do without Christianity because Christianity provides the savior to whom Judaism has always looked’.<sup>274</sup> This inevitable mild supersessionism is intrinsic to Christian orthodoxy. Not all Catholic and Jewish scholars would accept the idea of a mild supersessionism and would argue that fulfilment should exclude it for three reasons: firstly, if Jesus Christ is the fount of all salvation, including Jews who do not follow him, this will invalidate the salvific covenant of God with the Jews – it renders the Jewish covenant superfluous; secondly, if the perfection of the Jewish covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ involves its non-practice

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<sup>273</sup> *Gifts* uses the terms ‘Old Covenant’ and ‘New Covenant’. ‘Old Covenant’, as in ‘Old Testament’, might suggest that it is capable of being superseded.

<sup>274</sup> D’Acosta, ‘Supersessionism’, p.101.

by Jewish adherents of Jesus, then the original covenant is redundant; and thirdly if supersessionism is put aside there are no reasons for missions to the Jews.<sup>275</sup>

*Gifts* addresses these objections robustly: ‘Since God has never revoked his covenant with his people Israel, there cannot be different paths or approaches to God’s salvation’ (*Gifts*, para. 35), and this would undermine the foundations of Christianity. Judaism cannot be salvific on its own without reference to Jesus Christ. The problem with this statement is that the single way would be impossible for Jews to subscribe to, and no mainstream Jew would admit to salvation through Jesus Christ. The second objection, that fulfilment reverts to supersessionism, is that if the perfection of the Jewish covenant fulfilled through Jesus now means its non-practice when Jews follow Jesus Christ, this effectively renders the original covenant redundant. It is pertinent to look back here on the distinctions of Thomas Aquinas on the Old Covenant or Law.<sup>276</sup> He considered it to be made up of the moral, ceremonial, and judicial law. The moral law persists after the coming of Jesus Christ since it consists of natural and supernatural elements validated by Christ. It is not superseded, but transformed in its interpretation and the claim that it is realised in Christ’s life. The ceremonial law, however, the need for proper worship, is superseded, as Jewish law anticipates the Messiah and he is here. The practice of the ceremonial law after the coming of Jesus denies that he is the Messiah, a mortal sin in Aquinas’ eyes. *Gifts*, however, suggests that the ceremonial law of Israel is still valid, since it is irrevocable: ‘The first Christians were Jews; as a matter of course they gathered as part of the community in the Synagogue, they observed the dietary laws, the Sabbath and the requirement of circumcision, while at the same time confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent by God for the salvation of Israel and the entire human race’ (*Gifts*, para. 15). This raises issues that suggest that traces of supersessionism still remain.

Firstly, why doesn’t the Church urge Catholics to observe the ceremonial law if it is eternally valid? The ceremonial law applies only to Jews, not gentiles, but the acceptance of the Jewish covenant means it should apply to both: ‘Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, the

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<sup>275</sup> D’Acosta, ‘Supersessionism’, p.101.

<sup>276</sup> Summarised from D’Acosta, ‘Supersessionism’, p.102.

*ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, One Church originating from Judaism, the other from the Gentiles, who however together constituted the one and only Church of Jesus Christ' (*Gifts*, para.15). This statement seems to imply that the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus* are: 'a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression' (*Gifts*, para. 43). D'Acosta points out that it follows from this that some kind of 'ordinariate' would need to be granted to Catholics, as was granted to Anglican clergy who wanted to be in communion with Rome but also wanted to keep their own spiritual heritage.<sup>277</sup> This novel way of overcoming supersessionism, however, presents difficulties. What about those Jews who promote Jewish-Christian dialogue but object to Jews who keep their Jewish religious identity while following Jesus? This difficulty is exemplified by the 'Jews for Jesus' movement, a modern messianic Jewish-Christian organization that proselytises to Jews, and believes that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. Jews for Jesus describes itself as: 'Jewish followers of Rabbi Yeshua ben David (Jesus of Nazareth)'.<sup>278</sup> This syncretic religion/sect is not recognised by any Jewish religious authorities, nor by the State of Israel. The incarnation and Trinitarian status of Jesus Christ has no place in mainstream Judaism. And if the Catholic Church recognises messianic Judaism for the sake of mitigating supersessionism, then it puts at risk good relations with mainstream Judaism.

There are two different ways of interpreting fulfilment. Fulfilment of the moral law leaves it intact, still practised and still equally valid for both Jews and Catholics who can therefore partake together in a range of social issues. The fulfilment of the ceremonial laws means that Jewish ceremonial worship does not require practice by Jewish Christians. It is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, not superseded. The ceremonial law is valid in a new kind of worship-in the worship of Jesus Christ. But this is not valid for Jews who do not know the truth of the gospel. Jews may say that

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<sup>277</sup> D'Acosta, 'Supersessionism', p.103.

<sup>278</sup> [Who We Are — Jews for Jesus](#) [Accessed 22 March 2023]



the worship of Jesus Christ is not authentic Jewish ceremonial law and it has been superseded. In this case does fulfilment inevitably amount to mild supersessionism?

A further question presents itself: if supersessionism is totally repudiated, is there any reason for mission to the Jewish people? *Gifts* is ambiguous on the matter, perhaps deliberately so, as there are varying Catholic viewpoints on the matter. *Gifts* discusses the matter in section six under the rubric of ‘The Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism’:

The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. While there is a principled rejection of an institutional Jewish mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God’s Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah (*Gifts*, para. 40).

The reference to ‘institutional mission work’ may be an echo of the history of a Jewish evangelization mission that originated in the nineteenth century, namely the Sisters of Zion, founded by a Jewish convert Théodore Ratisbonne in 1842. After the Holocaust the sisters abandoned their missionary work and became pioneers in Jewish-Catholic dialogue.<sup>279</sup> The key statement in the above extract is, ‘...the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews’, but bears witness to Jesus Christ, ‘in a humble and sensitive manner’. This may be an attempt to bury memories of forcible conversion of the Jews in times past, but it is difficult to see a difference between a ‘specific institutional mission’ and the Christian urge to bear witness to Jesus Christ. ‘Christian mission has its origin in the sending of Jesus Christ by the Father’ (*Gifts*, para. 41), and the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and thus the universal mission of the Church is fundamental. Perhaps the difference lies, as noted in the above citation, in the sensitivity of approach. This issue is sure to stimulate continuing reflection and discussion in Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

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<sup>279</sup> Christian M. Rutishauser, ‘Christian Mission to the Jews Revisited: Exploring the Logic of the Vatican Document “The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable”’, *SCJR* 14, no.1 (2019), pp.1-16 (here, p.8).

From a Jewish perspective, Edward Kessler welcomed and commended *Gifts*.<sup>280</sup> particularly the assertion that: ‘the New Covenant for Christians is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the fulfilment of the promises of the Old Covenant’ but he also expressed a caveat that fulfilment slides easily into replacement and substitution theory and welcomed further reflection on what fulfilment really means in terms of relations with Judaism. In particular, Kessler finds little discussion in *Gifts* about contemporary Judaism, with the focus being on biblical and rabbinic Judaism. A critical question that Jews and Christians need to reflect on is the extent to which Christians view Judaism as valid in its own right – and vice versa. For Jews, God’s covenant promised to Abraham and revealed to Moses shows the unique and irrevocable relationship between Jews and God but also perhaps permits theological space for Christians to have their own special relationship with God and see their reflection in a Jewish mirror, which may deepen Christian faith in Jesus and Christian respect for their elder siblings. In sum, Kessler sees the last fifty years as a noticeable move from a pre-*Nostra Aetate* monologue about Jews to dialogue with Jews. A monologue does not understand the reality of the Other, but a dialogue requires as respect for the Other. Building a bridge from monologue to dialogue remains a challenge.

Supersessionism has been an important element of the ecclesiastical position of Christianity on Judaism from the earliest time of the Church as an institution. *Nostra Aetate* started a momentous shift in Catholic theology by opposing supersessionism and declaring that Jews were in a salvific covenantal relationship with God. The Pauline teaching runs counter to the Johannine message in his Gospel that the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant. An important question that arises from discussions of covenantal theology is, can Christians view Judaism as valid in its own right? or, as *Gifts* puts it: ‘Christians can and must admit that ,the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Scriptures...’ (*Gift*, para. 31). Or: ‘The term covenant...means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Christians and Jews’ (*Gifts*, para. 27). Such a pronouncement does not indicate inferiority or superiority. The two

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<sup>280</sup> Edward Kessler, [A New Vatican Document | The Woolf Institute \(cam.ac.uk\)](#) [Accessed 30 March 2023].

Covenants are complementary: ‘The New Covenant can never replace the Old but presupposes it and gives it a new dimension of meaning, by reinforcing the personal nature of God as revealed in the Old Covenant’ (*Gifts*, para 27). But such Delphic statements of policy are sometimes difficult to see realised in actual practice. Much of Catholic changes of attitude and reform in relation to the Jews is process, not event; outcomes emerge gradually and there is often sufficient interpretive ambiguity to placate conservative Catholic opinion; continuities are emphasised and new developments are framed within an extant tradition – one that is sometimes fluid. *Gifts* continues the momentum begun in *Nostra Aetate*. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are reframed as ‘good’ and ‘better’ covenants, rather than ‘good’ and ‘bad’ covenants.<sup>281</sup>

A difficulty for abandoning supersessionism completely is that of the unique status of the New (Christian) Covenant: its soteriological efficacy, its fulfilment of the biblical promises, and the universality of its spiritual benefits for all humanity. These are indispensable claims for most Christians and for Catholic theology.<sup>282</sup> Jews and Christians disagree over the status of Jesus but this basic issue is not presented in terms of right and wrong but with understanding: ‘That this Kingdom of God has come with himself [Jesus Christ] as God’s representative is beyond the horizon of Jewish expectation’ (*Gifts*, para. 14). And so we have two Covenants and two religions who have different perspectives but, on a positive note, the concept of fulfilment and complementarity is a promising approach that avoids comparative judgements and paves the way for continuing productive Jewish-Catholic/Christian dialogue.

Supersessionism, however mild, still remains in Catholic doctrine. *Gifts* claims that: ‘The Church is the definitive and unsurpassable locus of the salvific action of God’ (*Gifts*, para. 32). And this is reinforced by: ‘the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith’ (*Gifts*, para. 35). On universality, Abulafia points out that its benefits have been overrated and claiming it for one’s faith divides the

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<sup>281</sup> Adam Gregerman, ‘Superiority without Supersessionism: Walter Kasper, The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable, and God’s Covenant with the Jews’, *Theological Studies*, 2018, vol 79(1), pp.36-59 (here, p.58).

<sup>282</sup> Gregerman, ‘Superiority without Supersessionism’, p.39.

world into those who do and do not adhere to it.<sup>283</sup> She points to the work of Edward Schillebeeckx, a Catholic scholar, whose book *Church: The Human Story of God* in which he sets out to show how Christianity might hold on to its particular truth claim while finding a way to consider other religions without ‘absolutism or relativism’, and he goes on to say: ‘God is absolute, but no single religion is absolute’ and ‘...God is too rich and too over-defined for it to be possible to exhaust him in his fullness through a particular and thus limited religious experiential tradition’.<sup>284</sup> This is well put but as a practical strategy it has its limitations. The Catholic Church is highly unlikely to renounce its universal claim and so some version of supersessionism will persist. There is considerable unresolved tension in the description in *Gifts* of the theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity, between the Old Covenant and the New, between the Old Testament and the New. But at least it provides a topic of debate for further amicable Jewish-Catholic dialogue. To sum up: firstly, *Gifts* privileges a one-covenant understanding of the relationship between Christians and Jews, and a resultant theology of fulfilment, both of which strongly reflect traditional Catholic teaching that Christ and the Church represent the fulfilment of the promises made to the people of Israel, while at the same time rejecting the idea that the Jews have been replaced as God’s chosen people. This has been most recently articulated by Pope Benedict XVI, who authorized the preparation of *Gifts*, but which was written after Pope Francis was elected; secondly, a theology of fulfilment tends in the direction of supersessionism even if it is considerably mitigated from previous versions, that is to say, it is soft supersessionism; and thirdly, *Gifts* nevertheless contains possibilities for constructing an understanding of the Jewish-Catholic/Christian relationship that avoids supersessionism, whether explicit or implicit, and for creating a more positive evaluation of post-biblical Judaism. In conclusion, the numerous supersessionist references in John’s Gospel have been mitigated by being seen as fulfilling or

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<sup>283</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, ‘Response to The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable’, *European Judaism*, vol. 50, No. 1, Spring 2017, pp.92–98 (here, p.96).

<sup>284</sup> Abulafia, ‘Response’, p.96.

adding value to the Old Covenant through the New Covenant whereby they are reframed and reinterpreted by a hermeneutic approach to which we now turn.

#### **4.4 Can Hermeneutics Contribute to a Reading of John's Gospel?**

'Context is the touchstone against which every interpretation must be judged'.<sup>285</sup>

The final topic to be discussed within the framework of questions on which this study is based (section 1.3 above) is the matter of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and is, 'foundational to every field of human knowledge'.<sup>286</sup> In biblical study it is necessary and unavoidable, even when claims to non-interpretation are made, as in the Protestant Reformation's *Sola Scriptura* mantra that the Bible needs no interpretation.<sup>287</sup> But this denial of interpretation is in itself a form of interpretation. Hermeneutics can be viewed as a paradigm and/or a methodological approach. It can operate on a large scale, for example, in which the Old Testament can be viewed as the hermeneutical key to the New Testament<sup>288</sup>, or on a smaller scale such as the matter to be discussed here: whether hermeneutics can contribute to a reading of John's Gospel and, more specifically, to an understanding of perceived anti-Judaism therein. Hermeneutics has already been silently utilised in this study with reference to interpretive ambiguity, for example with regard to *Dei Verbum* (2.6 above) and the various iterations of supersessionism (4.3 above). In addition, the discussion on perceived anti-Judaism in John's Gospel in chapter 3 has involved interpretive arguments and considerations, and a historical-critical interpretive strategy regarding 'the Jews', whereby the term has multiple referents, and, for example, negative uses may refer to Jerusalem authorities, for example, and not the Jews as a whole.<sup>289</sup>

We now turn to a more focused discussion on examples of hermeneutical interpretation of John's Gospel. In this instance, Catholic and non-Catholic perspectives are blended and not specifically marked. According to Reimund Bieringer, discussions of perceived anti-Judaism in

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<sup>285</sup> William D. Barrick, 'New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants', *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 18/1 (Fall 2007), pp. 165-189 (here, p.166).

<sup>286</sup> Zimmerman, *Hermeneutics*, p.xiii.

<sup>287</sup> A more detailed discussion on *Sola Scriptura* is at section 2.3 above.

<sup>288</sup> An example of this approach is Steve Moyise, *Evoking Scripture: Seeing the Old Testament in the New* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

<sup>289</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.29.

John's Gospel adopt reading strategies that enable them to safeguard the authority of the sacred text in spite of the presence of ethically dubious content. He claims that a well-known strategy behind historical-critical scholarship is to assume that only the earliest version of a text has revelatory authority, and that it is therefore the task of commentators to expose later additions to this text.<sup>290</sup> James Charlesworth, for example, declares that it is embarrassing to Christians who are looking for dialogue with other religions, Judaism in particular.<sup>291</sup> The text has been used to exacerbate hatred of the Jews. But perhaps it can be re-interpreted as misrepresentation of the basic message of Jesus Christ. Charlesworth suggests that 14:6 consists of two layers; the first sentence, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life', is positive and is addressed to those in the community; the second sentence, 'No one comes to the Father except through me', is negative and is addressed to those outside the community, and denies any other path to God. The exclusivity that is implicit in the first sentence is made explicit in the second. This latter sentence, claims Charlesworth, is unique in that it has no textual variants and this may suggest that it is an un-Johannine interpolation that cannot be traced back to Jesus and may be derived from the concerns of the second generation of Jesus's adherents.<sup>292</sup> Charlesworth considers at length possible evidence of redaction in John's Gospel as a whole, as well as in John 14:6.<sup>293</sup> He concludes that the final emphasis on 'Jewish thought' has not been sufficiently developed by Johannine commentators and that the offensive Christology of John 14:6 may be a help in understanding the break within the Johannine community.<sup>294</sup> He goes on to say that only in John 14:6 is there explicit exclusivity, a denial of salvation except through Jesus. Elsewhere in John's Gospel it is implied, but there is a distinction between implied and explicit exclusivity and to claim that Jesus is 'the way, and the truth and the life' does not mean that all who do not believe in Jesus are damned.<sup>295</sup> Charlesworth concludes that because John 14:6 'betrays the fundamental thrust and message of biblical theology', and

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<sup>290</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.29.

<sup>291</sup> James H. Charlesworth, 'The Gospel of John: Exclusivism Caused by a Social Setting Different from That of Jesus (John 11:54 and 14:6', in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.247-78 (here, p.259).

<sup>292</sup> Charlesworth, 'The Gospel of John', p.260.

<sup>293</sup> Charlesworth, 'The Gospel of John', pp.262-72

<sup>294</sup> Charlesworth, 'The Gospel of John', p.272.

<sup>295</sup> Charlesworth, 'The Gospel of John', p.272.

‘represents the anti-hermeneutic of some church fathers’, the verse would seem to be an interpolation.<sup>296</sup>

Charlesworth attempts to attribute a hostile and inconvenient text in John’s Gospel to a late interpolation on the grounds that it is against the spirit of the Gospel. But there are other equally hostile texts, particularly with reference to ‘the Jews’ that cannot easily be explained in this way. Other scholars do not interpret 14:6 as negative. A scholar who emphatically disagrees with Charlesworth’s analysis is Rudolf Schnackenburg who finds no fault with John 14:6 and declares that it is, ‘a culminating point in Johannine theology’, and that, ‘it forms a classical summary of the Johannine doctrine of salvation that is based entirely on Jesus Christ’.<sup>297</sup> Francis Moloney also takes a benign view of this text and that Jesus’s claim to be ‘the way’ is both self-revelation and a statement of what he does. The way leads somewhere: ‘to the Father. Jesus is the only way to the Father, the unique and saving revelation of God’.<sup>298</sup> Both Schnackenburg and Moloney therefore find no hostile meaning in John 14:6. These contrasting views show that readings of John’s Gospel can sit at opposite ends of a hermeneutical spectrum, rather like a Rorschach inkblot test, where different people see different things, depending on their frame of reference.

Another hermeneutical approach uses the traditional rule of exegesis that the scriptures should be interpreted by means of the scriptures.<sup>299</sup> In this way, the perceived anti-Judaism of certain passages in John’s Gospel may be mitigated by pointing to the Jewishness of others.<sup>300</sup> For example, the diabolization of the Jews at John 8:44 is mitigated or deconstructed by means of John 4:22 (‘Salvation is from the Jews’), where ‘Jesus affirms the historical primacy of Israel’.<sup>301</sup> Raymond Brown disagrees with Bultmann who claims that this is an editorial gloss as it does not fit in with Johannine hostility towards ‘the Jews’. Brown sees it as a positive reference and is: ‘a

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<sup>296</sup> Charlesworth, ‘The Gospel of John’, pp.272, 273.

<sup>297</sup> Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol 3, p.65.

<sup>298</sup> Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, p.395.

<sup>299</sup> John A. Balchin, ‘An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics’, at [3-2\\_balchin.pdf \(theologicalstudies.org.uk\)](https://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/3-2_balchin.pdf), pp.35-46 (here, p.39). [Accessed 30 June 2023].

<sup>300</sup> Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, p.30.

<sup>301</sup> R. Alan Culpeper, ‘Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel as a Theological Problem for Christian Interpreters’, in Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, pp.61-82 (here, p.74).

clear indication that the Johannine attitude to the Jews cloaks neither an anti-Semitism of the modern variety nor a view that rejects the spiritual heritage of Judaism'.<sup>302</sup> However, this view of John 4:22 appears to be contradicted by the following verse: 'But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (Jn 4:23). This could be interpreted to mean that the coming of the new era in Jesus means that Judaism has no special place or, that those who worship the father 'in spirit and truth' could include the Jews.

The historical-critical method emerged as the gold standard of interpretation by Catholic biblical scholars following Vatican II, and has been a well-trodden approach to John's Gospel. Other interpretive approaches may yield further light on it, in particular the matter of anti-Judaism. A narratological approach by means of prolepsis is a literary attempt to throw light on the separation of emerging Christianity from Judaism. Historically, the main attempts at such separation were made in the second century of our era, but John's Gospel could be read as a predictive attempt *avant la lettre*, one that skips ahead of chronological time. Before discussing this, some definition of terms is necessary. Prolepsis is a moment in a narrative in which the chronological order of story events is disrupted, and the author narrates or hints at future events out of turn.<sup>303</sup> Or, in filmic terms, it is a 'flashforward', as opposed to a 'flashback.' Prolepsis is a useful analytical concept in studies of fiction but it is also useful in non-fictional academic work, including biblical studies, with prophecy being a well-known example of prolepsis. The topic is addressed by Andreas Hoeck in his article on prolepsis (and its antonym analepsis, which will not concern us here) in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>304</sup> He asserts that prolepsis is an understudied feature of Johannine style and identifies several instances of it in John's Gospel. The Johannine Passion narrative, for example, can be read as the fulfilment of the proleptic nature of much of the Gospel.<sup>305</sup> Unfortunately, he cites no examples that are relevant to anti-Judaism, but if we

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<sup>302</sup> Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, p.172.

<sup>303</sup> Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007), p.29.

<sup>304</sup> Andreas Hoeck, 'Prolepsis and Analepsis in the Fourth Gospel: Underpriced Treasures of Johannine Narrative Process', *Scripta Fulgentina*, nos. 55-56 (2018), pp. 7-32.

<sup>305</sup> Hoeck, 'Prolepsis and Analepsis', p.12.



incorporate discourse analysis into the discussion and consider examples that are ‘above the sentence’ and consider higher level features and structures, we can identify some relevant instances. The whole of the perceived anti-Judaism in John, for example, examined in the light of proleptical narratology, could be seen as anticipating the ‘parting of the ways’, a flashforward to a time outside the Gospel’s narrative, and the establishment of Christianity as distinct from Judaism. Another example is the Johannine Community (4.2 and 4.2.1 above). The reconstructed story of the Johannine Community could be interpreted as a proleptic indication of the emerging Christian community.

Interpretation will never be definitive but will continue to challenge the reader who is co-creator with the text to produce new meanings in a revelatory process that is never-ending for succeeding generations of interpreters. Hermeneutics can provide an overarching explanation of anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel and mitigate the surface appearances of hostile texts. In addition, the Scriptures are not the only place or the end of divine revelation – *Non Sola Scriptura* - and John’s Gospel cannot be credibly reduced to its perceived anti-Judaism. Hermeneutics can provide a framework for a reinterpretation of the Fourth Gospel, to convey a different world of all-encompassing love and life that rises above anti-Judaism, where the world of the text and its reception transcends the world of the author and bears witness to divine revelation.<sup>306</sup> This chapter has presented and analysed three topics, namely, the matters of the Johannine community, supersessionism and hermeneutics, each of which shine a light on anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel. The hypothetical Johannine community suggests a group navigating its way through the final break between the synagogue and the nascent Christian church. Of the three leading Catholic commentators only Raymond Brown wrote extensively on the matter. Supersessionism can be interpreted in numerous Johannine citations but the term is mitigated by ‘fulfilment’, meaning that the Old Covenant is not superseded but added to by the New Covenant. Even in its more emollient designation, it is still a live issue today in Catholic theology. Finally, some examples of a

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<sup>306</sup> Deirdre Good, ‘Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel’, review of Bieringer, *Anti-Judaism*, in *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 85, issue 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 377-78 (here, p.378).

hermeneutical approach to John's Gospel is discussed, and examples are given whereby certain passages can be read positively or negatively, depending on the reader's frame of reference.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

‘Understanding of the text is never definitive but rather remains open because the meaning of scripture discloses itself anew in every future’.<sup>307</sup>

### 5.1 Summary of Thesis and Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to consider Catholic perspectives on anti-Judaism in John’s Gospel, particularly in the light of policy pronouncements of Vatican II Council (1962-65 CE) on Jewish-Catholic relations and biblical scholarship.

Chapter 1 set out the approach and methodology of the study, and introduced the framework of five research questions with which the thesis is tested.

Chapter 2 discussed and analysed the contexts to the Vatican II Council, including the historical legacy of anti-Judaism by the Christian/Catholic churches, and pre-conciliar Catholic biblical scholarship. The chapter also discussed in detail two influential documents: *Nostra Aetate/In our time* and *Dei Verbum/Word of God*. The former established policy for relations with Judaism, which henceforth would be one of reconciliation and respect after centuries of hostility and contempt. This would provide a framework for the latter document on biblical translation whereby negative interpretations of the Gospels, in particular John’s Gospel, would be approached and interpreted more sensitively.

Chapter 3 addressed two of my five research questions. The first question, ‘Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish?’, examined interpretations of the Johannine text in terms of modern and historical sensibilities. The language of John 8:44-47, considered vituperative in modern terms, can also be interpreted with reference to first-century Graeco-Roman rhetorical conventions and the need for the emerging Christian community to establish for itself a separate identity from Judaism with which it shared a symbiotic relationship. Anti-Judaism was an accepted feature of Christian/Catholic interpretations of John’s Gospel up until the mid-1960s, and in this respect, leading Catholic commentators are no different from their non-Catholic counterparts. Raymond

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<sup>307</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?”, in *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, edited and translated by Schubert M. Ogden (London: SCM, 1985). Cited by R. Alan Culpepper and Paul N. Anderson, *John and Judaism*, p.243.

Brown, for example, takes a negative view of the Johannine Jews in Jn 8:44-47 in his early works. In later years he became more aware of anti-Judaism and its hermeneutical implications in John's Gospel and also became mindful of the pronouncements of Vatican II Council (which he attended). He accordingly changed his view on several aspects of the relationship between John and Judaism.. Francis Moloney, like Brown in his early works, also makes negative comments about the Johannine 'Jews', in his 1998 commentary on John's Gospel; he also attributes perceptions of anti-Judaism to uncritical or incorrect reading of the text. Like Brown and Moloney, Rudolf Schnackenburg makes disparaging remarks about the Johannine Jews in commenting on John 8:31-34. Among Catholic commentators, an uncompromising stance was taken by Rosemary Ruether who criticised the attempts made by modern apologists to ameliorate or explain away inbuilt anti-Judaism in John's Gospel.

The second question, 'Who are 'the Jews' in John's Gospel?', concerns the identity of 'the Jews' and this study attempts to discern the various referents of the term which has multiple meanings according to the literary context in which they appear in the gospel narrative. Raymond Brown spells out in detail these referents and stresses that there is no single meaning that covers all uses of the designation 'the Jews' in John's Gospel. Francis Moloney agrees with him, as does Rudolf Schnackenburg. In this respect, Catholic and non-Catholic commentators are also in broad agreement on the need to distinguish the contextual referents of 'the Jews' and not to apply the term to the Jewish people as a whole, as has been the case in most of Christian/Catholic history.

Chapter 4 addresses the remaining three research questions. The third question, 'Is there a conflict between the Johannine community and "the Jews?"', concerns the emergence of a hypothetical Johannine community and its envisaged conflict with 'the Jews'. Raymond Brown proposes a stepped development framework for the community, as do non-Catholic commentators such as J. Louis Martyn. Moloney and Schnackenburg deal more summarily than Brown with the topic and do not develop it to the same extent. The fortunes of the Johannine community could be interpreted as a process of identity formation and inferences of conflict between it and 'the Jews'

have been read as anti-Judaism in John's Gospel. The hypothetical nature of the Johannine community would seem to be responsible for the different emphases of the commentators.

The fourth question, 'Is John's Gospel supersessionist?', can be interpreted on a spectrum from positive to negative. In his pre-Vatican Council II works Brown claims that the New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant, but in his final Gospel commentary he strikingly recants and speaks of 'fulfilment', whereby the New Covenant enhances the Old Covenant and adds value to it. Moloney also uses the language of 'fulfilment' in his commentary on John's Gospel. The issue persists into the twenty-first century, and fulfilment as a mild form of supersessionism still exists in Catholic doctrine. Once again, there is no discernible difference between non-Catholic and Catholic commentators in their scholarly approaches to the topic in question.

The fifth question, 'Can hermeneutics contribute to a reading of John's Gospel?', is an overarching question that, along with the first of my five questions ('Is the Fourth Gospel anti-Jewish?'), bookends the approach underpinning this study. It involves reading strategies that interpret texts in ways other than their literal, obvious meanings. It enables reinterpretation and reframing of apparently toxic texts with due regard to modern sensibilities. For example, with regard to John 14:6: '...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me', James Charlesworth interprets the second sentence as hostile towards non-Christian religions, including Judaism, and suggests that as it has no textual variants, it must be an un-Johannine interpolation, and should therefore be discounted. Brown, Moloney and Schnackenburg on the other hand, do not interpret this text negatively.

## **5.2 Is there a Distinctive Catholic Contribution to Biblical Scholarship?**

Catholic responses to the above five research questions, have prompted this study to consider a sixth question: 'Is there anything specifically Catholic about Catholic scholars' contribution to biblical scholarship?'. Some scholarly attempts have been made to answer this question, notably in Luke Johnson and William Kurz's study which consists of a dialogue between the two authors,

and tries to discover whether there is a distinctive Catholic contribution to biblical scholarship.<sup>308</sup> At the outset of the discussion Johnson puts his finger on a paradox: ‘From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, the phrase “Roman Catholic biblical scholarship” would have been regarded by many as oxymoronic; it may have been Roman Catholic but was it actually scholarship? At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the phrase is equally oxymoronic; no one doubts the quality of the scholarship, but in what way is it any longer Catholic?’<sup>309</sup> Johnson here strongly suggests that a distinctive Catholic voice may have been muffled by the turn to uncensored (by Vatican authorities), international standards of scholarship by Catholic commentators.

It will be recalled from section 2.6 above that the faith of the Church rested on the twin pillars of Scripture and Tradition, which came into prominence in the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Tradition began to assume a separate status as a corpus of teachings distinct from Scripture, and curated by the teaching arm of the Church, the Magisterium. The supremacy of Tradition, and the role of the Magisterium, were downgraded to equal status with Scripture at Vatican II Council in the *Dei Verbum/Word of God* document which at the same time gave official approval to the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis. Catholic commentators, with some notable exceptions, held fast to Tradition until Vatican II Council jolted them out of the Tradition-bound paradigm and exhorted them to consider new paradigms of attitudes to Judaism and biblical scholarship.

On the basis of the evidence presented in this study, limited though it is, although Catholic and non-Catholic views may differ on individual topics, I have been unable to discern any Catholic exceptionalism in biblical scholarship, Tradition has been further downgraded as far as biblical scholarship is concerned. Scholarship is the new Tradition which has morphed into cumulative scholarly wisdom; it has been superseded (not fulfilled) by a new tradition that rests on

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<sup>308</sup> Luke Johnson, ‘What’s Catholic about Catholic Biblical Scholarship?’, in Luke Johnson, and William S. Kurz *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), pp.3-34.

<sup>309</sup> Johnson, ‘What’s Catholic...?’, p.4.

international standards of scholarship. On the evidence revealed by answers to the five research questions, Catholic biblical scholarship has joined the mainstream during the last sixty years, and it works to the same rigorous, ecumenical standards as non-Catholic biblical scholars. The Vatican II Council pronouncements in *Nostra Aetate* and *Dei Verbum* gave Catholic scholars the intellectual freedom to join mainstream biblical scholarship. There appears to be no visible institutional or ideological Vatican line on biblical interpretation, other than internationally recognised scholarship standards. Catholic scholars acknowledge the authority of Scripture and recognize that its interpretation is based on scholarly principles and practice, and that ‘Catholic’ biblical scholarship is now catholic biblical scholarship. I believe this to be the case based on the evidence presented in this thesis.

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## ANNEX A

DECLARATION ON  
THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS  
*NOSTRA AETATE*  
PROCLAIMED BY HIS HOLINESS  
POPE PAUL VI  
ON OCTOBER 28, 1965.<sup>310</sup>

In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher

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<sup>310</sup> Tanner, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, pp.323-8. Also at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html) [accessed 2 August 2022]. Endnotes have been omitted.

help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham’s sons according to faith (6)-are included in the same Patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles. Making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She

also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if

possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

## ANNEX B

DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION  
ON DIVINE REVELATION  
*DEI VERBUM*  
SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED  
BY HIS HOLINESS  
POPE PAUL VI  
ON NOVEMBER 18, 1965.<sup>311</sup>

### PREFACE

1. Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: "We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3). Therefore, following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, this present council wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love. (1)

### CHAPTER I

#### REVELATION ITSELF

2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. (2)

3. God, who through the Word creates all things (see John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities (see Rom. 1:19-20). Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents. Then after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved (see Gen. 3:15) and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of salvation (see Rom. 2:6-7). Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation (see Gen. 12:2). Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and

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<sup>311</sup> Tanner, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts*, pp. 84-89. Also at [Dei verbum \(vatican.va\)](http://Dei_verbum(vatican.va)). [accessed 2 August 2022]. Endnotes have been omitted.

to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.

4. Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2). For He sent His Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (see John 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." (3) He "speaks the words of God" (John 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which His Father gave Him to do (see John 5:36; John 17:4). To see Jesus is to see His Father (John 14:9). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.

The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).

5. "The obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," (4) and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it." (5) To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.

6. Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men. That is to say, He chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind. (6)

As a sacred synod has affirmed, God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (see Rom. 1:20); but teaches that it is through His revelation that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race. (7)

## **CHAPTER II**

### **HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION**

7. In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, (1) and to impart to them heavenly gifts. This Gospel had been promised in former times through the prophets, and Christ Himself had fulfilled it and promulgated it with His lips. This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic

men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing. (2)

But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." (3) This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 John 3:2).

8. And so the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (see Jude 1:3) (4) Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.

This tradition which comes from the Apostles develop in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. (5) For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition, whose wealth is poured into the practice and life of the believing and praying Church. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known, and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active in her; and thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (see Col. 3:16).

9. Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence. (6)

10. Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (see Acts 2, 42, Greek text), so that holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort. (7)

But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, (8) has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, (9) whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS DIVINE INSPIRATION AND INTERPRETATION**

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.(1) In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him (2) they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, (3) they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. (4)

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings (5) for the sake of salvation. Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

12. However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, (6) the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms." For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. (7) For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another. (8)

But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, (9) no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church



must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God. (10)

13. In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." (11) For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT**

14. In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race the God of infinite love, by a special dispensation, chose for Himself a people to whom He would entrust His promises. First He entered into a covenant with Abraham (see Gen. 15:18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (see Ex. 24:8). To this people which He had acquired for Himself, He so manifested Himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men. Then too, when God Himself spoke to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of His ways and made them more widely known among the nations (see Ps. 21:29; 95:1-3; Is. 2:1-5; Jer. 3:17). The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable. "For all that was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

15. The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (see Luke 24:44; John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (see 1 Cor. 10:12). Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy. (1) These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence.

16. God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New. (2) For, though Christ established the new covenant in His blood (see Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25), still the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, (3) acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament (see Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Rom. 16:25-26; 2 Cor. 14:16) and in turn shed light on it and explain it.

## **CHAPTER V**

## **THE NEW TESTAMENT**

17. The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (see Rom. 1:16), is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament. For when the fullness of time arrived (see Gal. 4:4), the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in His fullness of graces and truth (see John 1:14). Christ established the kingdom of God on earth, manifested His Father and Himself by deeds and words, and completed His work by His death, resurrection and glorious Ascension and by the sending of the Holy Spirit. Having been lifted up from the earth, He draws all men to Himself (see John 12:32, Greek text), He who alone has the words of eternal life (see John 6:68). This mystery had not been manifested to other generations as it was now revealed to His holy Apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 3:4-6, Greek text), so that they might preach the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and gather together the Church. Now the writings of the New Testament stand as a perpetual and divine witness to these realities.

18. It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior.

The Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin. For what the Apostles preached in fulfillment of the commission of Christ, afterwards they themselves and apostolic men, under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, handed on to us in writing: the foundation of faith, namely, the fourfold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.(1)

19. Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven (see Acts 1:1). Indeed, after the Ascension of the Lord the Apostles handed on to their hearers what He had said and done. This they did with that clearer understanding which they enjoyed (3) after they had been instructed by the glorious events of Christ's life and taught by the light of the Spirit of truth. (2) The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches and preserving the form of proclamation but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus.(4) For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who "themselves from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" we might know "the truth" concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (see Luke 1:2-4).

20. Besides the four Gospels, the canon of the New Testament also contains the epistles of St. Paul and other apostolic writings, composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by which, according to the wise plan of God, those matters which concern Christ the Lord are confirmed, His true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and its marvelous growth, and its glorious fulfillment is foretold.

For the Lord Jesus was with His apostles as He had promised (see Matt. 28:20) and sent them the advocate Spirit who would lead them into the fullness of truth (see John 16:13).

## **CHAPTER VI**

## SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

21. The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13).

22. Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. That is why the Church from the very beginning accepted as her own that very ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament which is called the septuagint; and she has always given a place of honor to other Eastern translations and Latin ones especially the Latin translation known as the vulgate. But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them.

23. The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies. Catholic exegetes then and other students of sacred theology, working diligently together and using appropriate means, should devote their energies, under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings. This should be so done that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God. (1) The sacred synod encourages the sons of the Church and Biblical scholars to continue energetically, following the mind of the Church, with the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigor. (2)

24. Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. (3) By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place, is nourished in a healthy way and flourishes in a holy way.

25. Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This is to be done so that none of them will

become "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly" (4) since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." (5) Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying." (6)

It devolves on sacred bishops "who have the apostolic teaching" (7) to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which are to be provided with the necessary and really adequate explanations so that the children of the Church may safely and profitably become conversant with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit.

Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another.

26. In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred books "the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified" (2 Thess. 3:1) and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similar we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which "lasts forever" (Is. 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25).