

Jean-Marie Auwers/Régis Burnet/Didier Luciani (eds): *L'antijudaïsme des Pères. Mythe et/ou réalité?* Paris: Beauchesne 2017 (Théologie historique 125). 212 p. € 42.00. ISBN 978-2-7010-2231-4.

This book includes the papers presented at a conference held at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve on 20–22 May, 2015, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Relationship between Christians and non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, passed at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The idea was to take stocks of the vexed question of the violent polemics of the Church Fathers against the Jews in Late Antiquity, and their relevance to the formation of Christian anti-Semitism. The initiative of the conference at the root of this publication is to be hailed. All in all, the resulting book is well balanced and provides a welcome *status quaestionis*, thoroughly documented and up-to-date, with a number of insightful ideas for future research.

Of the eleven chapters, ten deal with the problem directly, while one approaches the polemics from the Jewish side (through the question of the Jewish-Christians in the Talmud). The various chapters discuss questions of definitions and method, approaches in scholarly literature, literary forms, Jews and Christians in (sometimes implicit) exegetical dialogue, Latin, Greek and Syriac texts and authors (two of the chapters are devoted to Augustine, one each to Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, Aphrahat and Ephrem, and one (perhaps the most novel one) to Hesychius of Jerusalem, a fifth-century Origenian author from Jerusalem. It is clear, then, that this book deals mainly with the literary output of the Church fathers, and hence cannot (and does not intend to) provide the reader with a full-fledged assessment of the relationship between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity (as the one provided, years before *Nostra Aetate*, by Marcel Simon in his *Vernus Israel* (1948).

What is missing, of course, are the earliest sources on the problem, i. e., the New Testament, Apocryphal and Gnostic literature, which are all necessary in order to understand the origins and early development of the *Auseinandersetzung* between Jews and Christians. Even within the Patristic tradition, the absence of such an important testimony as that of Melito of Sardis (who has been called “the first poet of Deicide”) is regrettable. In a sense, the focus on literary production, vast as it may be, (and, on top of it, almost only that of one side) rather than a full-fledged historical approach, is

misleading if one wants to understand what Marcel Mauss called “le fait social total.” To be fair, this was not the organizers’ ambition. Rather, they wanted to check the issue from the theological perspective of the Fathers’ guilt (or of their innocence) about the vicious anti-Semitism of later ages up to the Shoah. Now that question itself may not be one that can be answered categorically. Obviously, the Church Fathers were not guilty of genocidal instincts. Not less obviously, their serious responsibility for the Jews’ disenfranchisement in the Christianized Roman Empire, an Empire in which religious violence grew significantly, cannot be obliterated. The chapter on the Syriac Fathers, of course, points to Christians and Jews in the Sasanian, rather than in the Roman Empire. There, both Jewish and Christian communities remained religious minorities.

One of the editors, Auwers, discusses in the first chapter Christian versus pagan negative attitudes to Jews, raising issues of vocabulary: should we speak of anti-Semitism, or rather of anti-Judaism, or even of Judaeophobia (a term used by Peter Schäfer in his book on attitudes toward the Jews in antiquity). What he writes stands to reason, but the most important question, I think, has not been raised clearly enough in this book, namely, can we detect a vector which would lead from (unavoidable) polemics of the young religious movement with its Jewish roots to a progressive exclusion of the Jews from full citizenship in the Empire, and a rejection of their religion as some kind of arch-heresy of (orthodox) Christianity.

Finally, a small note on the word ‘Antisemitismus.’ While it is true that Friedrich Wilhelm Marr, who established in 1879 the Antisemiten-Liga, did much to propagate the word as defining anti-Jewish prejudice and hatred, the word itself was coined by the Jewish scholar Moritz Steinschneider (d. 1856), in relation to Ernest Renan’s negative views of ‘Semitic’ peoples and religions, Muslims and Islam as much as, or more than, Jews and Judaism. This is of course largely irrelevant today: anti-Muslim feelings are now called Islamophobia, and there is also a Muslim anti-Semitism, or hatred of Jews.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Préface

1. Judéophobie païenne, antijudaïsme chrétien (J.-M. Auwers)
2. La recherche sur les relations entre Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Antiquité et ses enjeux contemporains (P. Lanfranchi)
3. Au-delà de la polémique, l'héritage du judaïsme chez les Pères (M.-A. Vannier)
4. Contrepoint : *Le Serpent de l'hérésie* ou la présence de judéo-chrétiens parmi les Sages du Talmud. Nouvelles considérations (D. Jaffé)
5. Ambroise antijuif dans l'affaire de la synagogue de Callinicum ? Hésitations et errements de l'historiographie (XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> s.). Essai de mise au point (P. Mattéi)
6. Quelques éléments de réflexion sur les *Sermons contre les juifs et les judaïsants* de Jean Chrysostome (G. Bady)
7. Augustin, théoricien de l'antijudaïsme chrétien ? (A. Massie)
8. L'image des juifs dans *La Cité de Dieu* d'Augustin (J. Lagouanère)
9. « Que son sang retombe sur nous et sur nos enfants ». L'exégèse de Matthieu 27,25 chez saint Jérôme (R. Courtray)
10. Hésychius de Jérusalem face à la Synagogue (M. Van Parys)
11. Les Pères syriens et les juifs (D. Cerbelaud)

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