

Antisemitic Positions in Christian Holy Scriptures: the Idea of Israel's Election and its Challenge for New Testament Authors and for their Readership

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The religious idea of Israel as a chosen people has consistently played an important role in Christian antisemitic polemics. For example, in his well known book “About the Jews and their lies” (“Von den Jüden und jren Lügen”) Martin Luther drew the picture of the boasting Jews with respect to God's election:

“Then he (i.e. God) must hear how they are boasting and praising God that he has set them apart from the gentiles and has given them birth from the holy fathers and has chosen them to be a holy, treasured people etc. And there is no end and proportion of the boasting about the blood and the carnal birth from the fathers ...”¹

Luther, however, left no doubt that the Jews were in his view by no means to be considered any longer as a chosen people, on the contrary:

“Therefore, this angry deed (i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem) proves that the Jews, who are certainly rejected by God, are no longer his people and that he is no longer their God. This according to Hosea 1(:9): ‘Lo Ammi. For you are not my people and I am not your God.’ ... The Jews might think about our Lord Jesus what they want. We see that it happens as he said (in) Luke 21(:20—23): ‘When you see Jerusalem surrounded by an army then know that its desolation has come near. ... And there will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.’”²

Although scholars after the Shoah became increasingly aware of antisemitic³ statements in the New Testament and of antisemitic patterns such as supersessionism in the history of the Christian religion,⁴ the antisemitic coined references to Israel and its election in

¹ Cf. Martin Luther, *Von den Jüden und jren Lügen* (1543), 5. In German: “Da mus er (i.e. Gott) hören, wie sie sich rhümen, und Gott loben, das er sie hat von den heiden gesondert und von den heiligen Vetern geboren lassn werden und zum heiligen eigen Volck erwelet etc. Und ist des rhümens vom geblüt und leiblicher Geburt von den Vetern kein mas noch ende ...”

² Cf. Martin Luther, *Von den Jüden und jren Lügen* (1543), 2–3. In German: “Darumb schleusst dis zornig Werck (i.e. die Zerstörung Jerusalems), das die Jüden, gewislich von Gott verworffen nicht mehr sein Volck sind. Er auch nicht mehr ir Gott sey. Und gehet nach dem Spruch Hosea I(:9): ‘Lo Ammi. Ir seid nicht mein volk. So bin ich nicht ewr Gott.’ ... Wolan, die Jüden mugen unsern Herrn Ihesum halten wo fur sie wollen. Wir sehen das also gehet wie er sagt Luce XXI(:20–23): ‘Wenn ir sehen werdet Jerusalem belegert mit einem Heer so mercket das erbey komen ist ihr verwüstung. ... Und wird grosse not im lande sein und zorn uber dies volck.’”

³ I do not differentiate between Antisemitism and Antijudaism, this differentiation is in my view artificial. For a helpful definition of Antisemitism see European-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism.

⁴ See for example Willehad P. Eckert et al. (eds.), *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Exegetische und systematische Beiträge* (München: Kaiser, 1967); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide. The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); Gerd Theissen, *Aporien im Umgang mit den Antijudaismen des Neuen Testaments*, in: *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte*. FS R. Rendtorff (eds. E. Blum et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 535–553; Walter Dietrich et al. (eds.), *Antijudaismus – christliche Erblast* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999); Reimund Bieringer et al. (eds.), *Anti-Judaism and the fourth Gospel. Papers of the Leuven Colloquium (Jewish and Christian heritage series 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001); Terence L. Donaldson, Jews and anti-Judaism in the New Testament. Decisive Points and divergent Interpretation* (London: Baylor University Press, 2010); Robert Chazan, *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism. Ancient and medieval Christian Constructions of Jewish History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Ulrich A. Wien (ed.), *Judentum und Antisemitismus in Europa* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Dorothea

several New Testament scriptures have as yet largely escaped notice: the earliest antisemitic reception of this idea, which is crucial for Judaism, has yet to be thoroughly analysed. Such an analysis would require a book-length study, in this paper I may, however, draw attention to at least some important points.

The paper includes three main parts: In the first part, I will explain some central aspects of the idea of the chosen Israel according to one of the most relevant passages in the Torah. In the second part, I will focus on the New Testament reception and will exemplarily analyze selected passages of three different authors. Finally, I will consider some ways, how today's Christian readership may deal with the antisemitic positions in the analyzed New Testament passages in an appropriate way.

1. Israel as God's chosen people according to Deut 7:6–11

In Second Temple Judaism, in the aftermath of war, destruction, exile and miraculous survival, the authors often described the status of Israel⁵ in terms of election. The issue is undoubtedly multifaceted.⁶ Within the constraints of this paper I will concentrate on Deut 7:6–11, a passage, which is often called the "locus classicus."⁷ In the world of Deuteronomy, the speaker of this passage is Moses, addressing his people on the plains of Moab just prior to their entry into the promised land:

6 For a consecrated people you (are) to YHWH your God:
YHWH your God has chosen you to be him treasured people out of all peoples
that (are) on the face of the earth.
7 Not because you were in numbers more than any other people
YHWH set his love upon you and chose you,
for you (were) the fewest of all peoples.
8 But because YHWH's love for you
and (because) he kept the oath that he had sworn to your fathers
YHWH brought you out with a mighty hand
and rescued you from the house of slaves
from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
9 And you shall know that YHWH your God is the God, the faithful God,
keeping the covenant and grace with them who love him
and who keep his commandments to the thousandth generation
10 and repaying them who hate him to their face, to destroy them.
He will not be slow with one who hates him, to his face he will repay him.
11 And you shall keep the commandment—the statutes as well as the judgements—
which I command you today to do them.

Wendebourg et al. (eds.), *Protestantismus, Antijudaismus, Antisemitismus. Konvergenzen und Konfrontationen in ihren Kontexten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

⁵ "Israel" is used here in the sense of the proper name for the Jewish people.

⁶ See for example the first seven contributions in Shmuel Almog/Michael Heyd (eds.), *Chosen People, Elect Nation and Universal Mission* (Jerusalem: Graf-Chen Press, 1991 [Hebrew]); Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election. Paul's Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel* (WUNT II 202; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 7–76. For interesting modern Jewish approaches to the meaning of the concept of Israel's chosenness see W. Gunther Plaut, *The Case for the Chosen people* (New York: Doubleday, 1965); Will Herberg, *The 'Chosenness' of Israel and the 'Jew' of today*, in: *Arguments and Doctrines. A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (ed. Arthur A. Cohen; New York/London: Harper & Row, 1970), 267–283; Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith. Judaism as Corporeal Election* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1983); David Novak, *The Election of Israel: Outline of a Philosophical Analysis*, in: *A People Apart. Chosenness and Ritual in Jewish Philosophical Thought* (ed. D. H. Frank; New York: State University Press, 1993), 11–50.

⁷ Cf. e.g. Klaus Seybold, *Art. Erwählung. I Altes Testament*, in: *GGG*⁴ Vol. 2 (1999), 1478–1481, 1479.

The first important point to notice is that Israel's election is not shaped as an elitist concept: the election is solely based on divine love and by no means on Israel's strength (v. 7). Furthermore, the privilege of election aims at inducing Israel to live according to God's will (v. 11). This is, obviously, the very essence of the concept: the inseparable connection between election and Israel's (Torah-)obedience.⁸ Finally, election is undoubtedly an exclusive concept: on the one hand the chosen people, on the other hand the not-chosen nations (v. 6). However, as other texts in the book of Deuteronomy show, not-chosen does not mean rejected.⁹ For example, according to Deut 4:19, God has allotted to the gentile world Deities in order to serve them.¹⁰ The designated religious ways for the nations certainly differ from that of Israel, but they are not considered as sinful or religiously illegitimate. This is a position which was held by other authors in Second Temple Judaism as well as in rabbinic Judaism, too.¹¹ In sum: The conception of election within the developing monotheistic Jewish religion in antiquity did not lead inevitably to religious intolerance. At the same time, however, the construction of religious identity in the developing monotheistic Christian religion made it impossible to value Israel as God's chosen people, as the following examples will demonstrate.

2. Israel and the idea of election in selected New Testament scriptures

In the first century CE, the followers of Jesus Christ, who believed him to be the Messiah, could not ignore the religious idea of the special status of Israel, because this was testified in the Jewish Holy Scriptures, which they themselves accepted as authoritative. On the other hand, they were faced with the fact that many members of the chosen people did not accept Jesus as their Messiah. Consequently, the first Christians were forced to take up a stance with respect to this part of Israel.

2.1. All Israel will be saved: Israel as God's chosen people in Rom 11:11–36

Paul's latest preserved epistle is the epistle to the Romans, written in the fifties of the first century CE. The apostle, who did not know the Roman congregation personally, introduced himself and his theology in this epistle. He expounded many central issues, among others the question of the religious status of Israel in chapters 9–11. In the following, I quote parts of the passage 11:11–36. In this passage, Israel is compared with a deep-rooted cultivated olive tree, the addressed Roman Christian gentiles with a wild olive:

11:16 ... And if the root (is) holy, so (are) the branches.

⁸ See as well Amos 3:2, and cf. Lou H. Silberman, Art. Chosen People, in: *EJ*² Vol. 4 (2007), 699–672, 670.

⁹ See Karin Finsterbusch, *Deuteronomium. Eine Einführung* (UTB 3626; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 86f.

¹⁰ See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: JPS Society, 1996), xvi.

¹¹ An prominent example is the idea of the Noachide commandments, see e.g. David Novak, *The image of the non-Jew in Judaism: the idea of the Noachide Law* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011). The general picture about the gentiles in the rabbinic literature is all in all negative. However, there are some remarkable exceptions, e.g. a Midrash on Deut 33:3 in *Mekhilta Devarim*: “‘Also, he loves the nations:’ this teaches that with every love with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loves Israel, he loves the nations of the world”, see Menachem Kahana, *Pages from the Deuteronomy Mekhilta on Haazinu and Wezot Habrakha*, in: *Tarbitz* 57 (1988), 165–201, 180–81 (Hebrew).

17 But if some of the branches have been broken off
 and you, although being a wild olive, have been grafted in among them
 and have become a partaker of the root (and) the fatness of the olive tree,
 18 do not boast against the branches.
 If you do boast, (remember) it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ...
 22 Note, then, the kindness and the severity of God:
 to those who have fallen, severity,
 but to you, kindness of God, if you continue in his kindness,
 otherwise you, too, will be cut off.
 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in,
 for God is able to graft them in again.
 25 For I don't want you, brothers, to be ignorant of this mystery,
 lest you be wise in your own sight:
 Hardening has come in part upon Israel
 until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
 26 And thus all Israel will be saved, as is written:
 "From Zion will come the deliverer
 and will turn away iniquities from Jacob."
 27 And this (is) my covenant for them,
 whenever I take away their sins."
 28 As regards to the gospel, (they are) (God's) enemies for your sake,
 as regards to the election, (they are) beloved for the sake of the fathers (i.e. patriarchs),
 29 for irrevocable (are) the gifts and (is) the calling of God.

In the last decades, it has often been emphasised that this passage contains some of the most positive statements on Israel in the whole New Testament.¹² And indeed, according to 11:28 Israel is and will remain God's chosen people (via the patriarchs¹³); according to v. 26 and v. 27 all (!) Israel, this is the whole Jewish people, will finally be saved by God's own initiative¹⁴ at the end of times, which Paul expected to be soon to come.¹⁵

However, a closer look at the passage does complicate this friendly picture: Paul compared the non Christ-believing¹⁶ Jews with branches of an olive tree that were broken off by God (v. 17); furthermore, the apostle described them as "hardened" by God until all plans with the gentile world will be fulfilled (v. 25); he classified their behaviour, using scriptural language, as "iniquities" and "sins" (vv. 26–27); he claimed them to be God's enemies (!¹⁷) with regard to the gospel (v. 28). These are strong terms¹⁸ which reveal that Paul's attitude towards contemporary Judaism was, to say the least, ambivalent. I only want to add briefly here that it was Paul who wrote one of the

¹² See e.g. Samuel Vollenweider, *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament. Der Anfang einer unseligen Tradition*, in: *Antijudaismus – christliche Erblast* (eds. W. Dietrich et al.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999), 40–55, 50f.

¹³ The idea that the election of the Patriarchs has led to the election of the whole people is expressed in several texts in Second Temple Judaism, see e.g. Isaiah 41:8–13, and cf. also Acts 13:17 below.

¹⁴ The quotation in Rom 11:26b–27 is a mixture of LXX-Isaiah 59:20–21a and 27:9. The deliverer, mentioned in v. 26b, could be referred to God (as in Isaiah), or to Jesus Christ, thus the scholarly majority view, see e.g. Grindheim, *Election*, 167, note 115.

¹⁵ See Romans 13:11f.

¹⁶ The Christian exegetical literature is littered with biased terms like "unbelieving Israel" or "the unbelief of Israel." An exception is Matthias Konrad, using the term "nicht-christusgläubige Juden," see Idem, *Die historisch-kritische Exegese und das reformatorische Schriftprinzip. Eine Reflexion über die Bedeutung der Exegese des Neues Testaments in der Theologie*, in: *ZNT 39/40* (2017), 105–125, 122.

¹⁷ Dieter Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Regensburger Neues Testament; Regensburg: Pustet, 1985), 199, rightly called the use of the adjective ἐχθρός "shocking".

¹⁸ If Paul had known that the history of Christianity will last some thousand years more, he probably would have had written differently. Not least with regard to the different historical situation, Christians today are certainly not forced to adopt Paul's attitude towards contemporary Judaism, see Konrad, *Schriftprinzip*, 122f.

worst antisemitic statements of the whole New Testament in his first epistle to the Thessalonians¹⁹ and who declared in his epistle to the Philippians in one passage his Jewish roots, education and way of life as “rubbish.”²⁰

Nevertheless, Romans 11:11–36 altogether demonstrates that Paul somehow was convinced that in God’s plan there is a kind of particular way and a kind of eschatological happy end for God’s chosen people as a whole. This was undoubtedly the crucial point which he wanted his Roman addressees to understand.

2.2. Expansion of election and deconstruction of identity: Israel in the epistle to the Ephesians

According to the prescript (1:1–2), the epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul. Paul, however, was in all likelihood not the author, rather, the epistle was written presumably only between 80 and 100 CE.²¹ With regard to the status of Israel and to the idea of divine election, the views developed in this epistle are rather peculiar. A first crucial text is the eulogy (1:3–14). The eulogy consists of one long complex sentence, I quote only an extract:

1:3a Blessed (is) the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ
 3b who has blessed us with all spiritual blessing in heavenlies in Christ
 4 according as he has chosen us in him (i.e. Christ) before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him in love
 5 having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself (i.e. God) ...
 9 having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he set forth in him (i.e. Christ)
 10 as a plan for the fullness of times: to gather together all things in Christ ...

In order to understand the content, it is necessary to briefly analyse the syntactical structure of the eulogy:²² After the opening with the Berakah formula in v. 3a (nominal clause εὐλογητός ὁ θεός) the focus in v. 3b is on the blessing God (attributive participle aorist ὁ εὐλόγησας). In v. 4, God’s blessing is specified as the election of “us” (referring to the author and the addressees²³) and the election is claimed to be a pre-existent act which is linked to Jesus Christ.²⁴ The meaning of the election, then, is spelled out in vv. 5–14 in two points: firstly, as adoption as children of God through the deliverance from sin granted by Jesus Christ (vv. 5–8, beginning with the participle aorist προορίσας “having predestined”); secondly, as imparting of understanding of God’s purpose for

¹⁹ See 1Thess 2:14–16.

²⁰ See Phil 3:8.

²¹ See Gerhard Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 58.

²² In terms of syntax, the passage is extremely disputed, especially with regard to the relationship of the three participles aorist in v. 3 (ὁ εὐλόγησας), v. 5 (προορίσας) and v. 9 (γνωρίσας). Many scholars take all three as attributive participles (meaning that the first participle is continued by the second and third one), e.g. Sellin, *Epheser*, 75–81. However, the second and third participle are neither determined nor are they connected with the first participle by καί, as already noticed by Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit. Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (StUNT 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), 68. Therefore, it seems much more likely to take προορίσας and γνωρίσας as predicative participles, modifying the preceding finite verb ἐξελέξατο within the καθώς clause in v. 4.

²³ Cf. Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (CEC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 114.

²⁴ The author was in all likelihood inspired by the idea of the pre-temporal divine election of Israel according to several texts in Second Temple Judaism, e.g. JosAs 8:10, Ass Mos 1:14, and see Sellin, *Epheser*, 90–91.

the cosmos including the summing up of all things in Jesus Christ (vv. 9–14, beginning with the participle aorist γνωρίσας “having made known”).

In light of the eulogy, then, there is only one effectual divine election, and this is the pre-temporal election in Jesus Christ. It is clearly implied that “not chosen” means in this case “not predestined for salvation.” Israel that would not accept Jesus Christ as Messiah may be called according to the Jewish Holy Scriptures or may understand itself as God’s chosen people. However, this election would be of no consequence: the author of the eulogy left no doors open for acknowledging any legitimate relationship between God and Israel as his chosen people *alongside* this Christ centred interpretation of God and his plans for the cosmos.

The reason to expand the idea of election on the one hand and to completely ignore or even repulse the idea of God’s election of Israel on the other hand becomes all the more comprehensible if we take a look at chapter 2 of the epistle. There, the author explained the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. It may suffice to quote the verses 14–16:

2:14 For he (i.e. Christ) is our peace,
 who has made both (groups, i.e. Jews and Gentiles) into one (group)
 and (who) has broken down the wall of partition, the enmity, in his flesh,
 15 (who) has abolished the law of commandments (contained) in ordinances
 that he might create in himself one new man/humanity in place of the two,
 thus making peace,
 16 and (that) he might reconcile both (groups) to God in one body through the cross,
 thus having killed the enmity in it (i.e. the cross).

According to this text, the death of Jesus Christ aimed to deconstruct Israel’s identity as well as the identity of the Gentiles in order to create “one new man/humanity” (v. 15). In light of this aim, all Jewish religious ideas such as Torah and election could only appear as “hostile” (cf. the term ἔχθρα in vv. 14, 16). To put it in another way: as long as this world would exist,²⁵ Jews could, at least from the author’s point of view, only be judged as “enemies.”²⁶

2.3. Chosen Israel without salvation: non Christ-believing Jews in Acts 13:14–51

The book “Acts of the Apostles” was written by Luke presumably in the last decades of the first century CE. Especially important with regard to the topic of this paper is Luke’s narrative about Paul and his missionary activity in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13. The vast majority of scholars agree that this narrative is not a faithful report about historical events. Luke rather tried with help of this narrative, which includes a long sermon put into Paul’s mouth, to explain to his readership from his point of view the theological message of the apostle.²⁷ I will concentrate at first on the sermon (v. 16b–41), of which only selected parts shall be quoted:

²⁵ In difference to Paul, the author of the epistle to the Ephesians did not show any interest in eschatology (including the parousia of Jesus Christ), cf. Sellin, Epheser, 109.

²⁶ At least in my view, the comment on v. 16 given by Ulrich Luz, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, in: *Die Briefe an die Galater, Epheser und Kolosser* (NTD; eds. J. Becker/U. Luz; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 107–182, 140, is rather enigmatic: “Unser Verfasser zieht also das ‘religiöse’ Ereignis des Kreuzestodes in die Welt hinein, indem er die horizontale Dimension von ‘Friede’ und ‘Versöhnung’ betont. Damit leistet er nicht nur einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Kreuzestheologie, sondern auch zur Überwindung [!] des Antisemitismus seiner Zeit.”

²⁷ See e.g. Charles K. Barrett, *Acts 1–XIV* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 625.

14 ... They (i.e. Paul and his companions) ... came to Pisidian Antioch, and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.
 15 After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent to them, saying:
 "Fellow brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it!"
 16 So Paul stood up and, making a sign with his hand, he said:
 "Fellow Israelites, and you who fear God, listen:
 17 The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and exalted the people during the sojourn in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he brought them out of it ...
 21 ... And God gave them Saul ... 22 And after having removed him, he raised up David for them to be king ...
 23 Of this man's seed God, according to (his) promise, has brought to Israel a saviour, Jesus.
 26 Fellow brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation has been sent.
 27 For the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers fulfilled, because they did not recognize this man, even²⁸ the voices of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, in having condemned (him).
 28 And although they found no cause of death, they asked Pilate, to have him executed.
 29 And when they had completed all that is written about him, after having taken (him) down from the tree (i.e. the cross) they laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead. ...
 38 So let it be known to you, fellow brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and (that) from everything from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses
 39 in this man everyone who believes is justified.

For Lukian Paul (as for the historical Paul), the history of Israel begins with God's election of the people (via the patriarchs, v. 17²⁹). It is this elect people (as represented by the house of David) that received God's promise, to bring a saviour, who is identified as Jesus Christ (v. 23). For the death of this saviour, Lukian Paul does not blame the Romans, but he does hold responsible—as also the historical Paul and many others do—the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers, alleging them to have acted in a malicious manner (vv. 27–28).³⁰ However, the Jewish communities outside of Jerusalem may make their own decision with regard to this saviour, as Lukian Paul explains in the concluding part of his sermon (vv. 38–41). In this part, it is of particular interest that "forgiveness of sins" and "justification"³¹ are linked exclusively to Jesus Christ (vv. 38–39). As a consequence of this exclusive linkage, Jews who wouldn't accept Jesus Christ as their saviour are automatically denied, though being part of the chosen people, to have any possibility to gain forgiveness (for example at Yom Kippur) or to hold the attribute "just," when acting according to the mosaic Torah alone.

²⁸ καί is used here in a kind of „adverbial“ function, see Friedrich Blass et al., *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, ¹⁸2001), §442 (second sentence in the introduction to this paragraph); Eduard Bornemann/Ernst Risch, *Griechische Grammatik* (Frankfurt: Diesterweg, ²1978), §253,23b („steigerndes“ καί in the meaning of „sogar“/„even“). The active, transitive verb πληρώω requires a direct object.

²⁹ Cf. Rom 11:28 above.

³⁰ It is one of the main antisemitic stereotypes in the New Testament that the Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, see e.g. Mtth 27:24–25; Joh 8:43–44; 1Thess 2:14–16, and cf. Theissen, *Aporien*, 537–539.

³¹ δικαιῶσθαι ἀπό means something like "to be released from (sins)." As is indicated by the aorist (δικαιωθῆναι), the author had a punctual event or punctual events in mind and did not mean justification in the Pauline sense, see Christoph Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge. Traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas' Darstellung der Frühzeit des Paulus* (FRLANT 103; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 117, n. 258; Barrett, *Acts*, 650f.

I will now turn to Luke's narrative about the reactions of the population on the sermon (vv. 42–51). Most problematic is the picture which Luke drew of the Jews who did not accept the way which was being offered to them by Paul. It may suffice, to quote a few sentences:

44 And the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

45 But when seeing the crowds, the Jews were filled with envy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, blaspheming.

46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first of all to you. Since you thrust it and you judge yourself to be not worthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles ...'"

50 And the Jews incited the devout women ... and leading men of the city and they raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their borders.

In this narrative we find not only a revealing generalisation: non Christ-believing Judaism is equated with "the Jews." But we find also a depreciative language with regard to "the Jews:" the application of the categories "envy," "blasphemy" and "incitement." In light of these categories, the narrated rejection of the salvation offer does not only seem highly irrational, but it also seems to be as a kind of moral and religious self-disqualification.³² Luke did not offer in his book any further remarks to soften or to modify this picture. How, then, would it be possible for the readers of Luke to think anything positive of the non Christ-believing Judaism?

3. Antisemitic positions in Christian Holy Scriptures: the challenge for today's Christian readership

In all analyzed New Testament texts the authors expressed in their ways their depreciation of the non Christ-believing Israel, underlined with pejorative emotional terms and statements. The rationale is the shared belief that *Judaism as such* is actually not worth being protected and preserved, since the focus is all on Jesus Christ and the universal consequences of his death—and it is precisely this rationale which makes it in my view impossible to relate the analyzed texts to Jewish texts in Second Temple Judaism which indicate indeed many controversial inner Jewish discourses about religious identity³³ (the expressions of depreciation in the New Testament texts are not expressions of a dispute among "siblings").³⁴ It is hardly surprising, then, that

³² In this passage, it is not God who (actively) rejected the non Christ-believing Jews, contra Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 397.

³³ For example, Jewish identity according to the authors of the Damascus Document must include a life according to Torah and Halakha (as expressed in the CD), see Karin Finsterbusch, *Konstruktionen kollektiver Identität in der Krise: 'Israel' nach dem exilischen Deuteronomium und der Damaskusschrift*, in: *Konstruktionen individueller und kollektiver Identität (I)* (eds. K. Finsterbusch/E. Bons; BThSt 161; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2016), 109–131.

³⁴ In historical terms, the relationship(s) between Christian and Jewish groups in the first and second century CE may have been rather complex. In scholarly literature, terms like "parting," "partings" and "party of the ways" are discussed, see e.g. James D.G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2006); Tobias Nicklas, *Parting of the Ways? Probleme eines Konzepts*, in: *Juden – Heiden – Christen? Religiöse Inklusionen und Exklusionen im Römischen Kleinasien bis Decius* (eds. S. Alkier/H. Leppin; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), in print.

supersessionism was a dominant pattern in the history of the Christian religion:³⁵ Christians have claimed to be the rightfully chosen people and the “true Israel” and have claimed the Jews to be rejected by God. Or in other words: the New Covenant was believed to have superseded the old Mosaic Covenant. I remind you again of Luther’s statements, quoted at the beginning of this paper.

It may be allowed to present one more example from the field of arts, namely the figures of ecclesia and synagogue, which can be found as a pair in many medieval cathedrals:



Figure 1: The figures ecclesia and synagogue in the cathedral of Strasbourg

Both figures are a kind of artistic realisation of supersessionism: ecclesia in the position of triumph, synagogue in the position of weakness and defeat: blind with a broken lance and falling tablets of law.

It was only after the Shoah that at least some of the main Christian churches in Germany and elsewhere started to reconsider their positions towards Judaism, for example explicitly rejecting the view that Israel ceased to be God’s chosen people.³⁶

³⁵ See Rainer Kampling, Art. Substitutionslehre, in: *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vol. 3 Begriffe, Theorien, Ideologien (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 310–312.

³⁶ For relevant references see Norbert Lohfink/Erich Zenger, *Der Gott Israels und die Völker* (SBS 154; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994), 11–18; Manuel Goldmann, „Die große ökumenische Frage ...“ *Zur Strukturverschiedenheit christlicher und jüdischer Tradition und ihrer Relevanz für die Begegnung der Kirche mit Israel* (NBST 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 386–389. Cf. as well *Evangelische Kirche*

This leads to the crucial question, if it is indeed possible to (re)define the substance and identity of the Christian religion as a religion without antisemitic elements. I would like to conclude with three considerations about the meaning of the Holy Scriptures for such a process of (re)definition—which would of course be necessary in every generation anew:

1. The Christian Bible with regard to its two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, is not a dogmatic text, but a dynamic document. There are often several differing, multiperspective positions (from different authors written in different contexts and epochs) about one and the same issue. They were put together secondarily, and this undoubtedly in order to allow, to encourage or even to urge the readership or addressed communities to critically discuss, to choose, to shape positions and to take sides in a changing world. To put it in another way: the biblical texts themselves do by no means require that every single passage must be read and accepted in a fundamentalist way.
2. The Christian Old Testament is (*grosso modo*) the Tanach in Judaism. The scriptures are shared heritage and valued canonical texts for both religions. As a consequence, it is in my view impossible for Christians to declare the daily liturgical Jewish prayers to God, which are in part deeply rooted in the Scriptures, as invalid or inferior.³⁷
3. With regard to the status of Israel in the New Testament, Rom 11:26–27 (“all Israel will be saved”) could be a point of departure to develop a position, which would include the full acceptance of Judaism alongside the Christian sector in the “divine economy.”³⁸ Statements on non Christ-believing Jews, however, comparing them with branches of an olive tree that were broken off by God, or views on Israel like those expressed in Eph 2:14–16 or in Acts 13 should be abrogated altogether.

Deutschlands et al. (ed.), *Antisemitismus. Vorurteile, Ausgrenzungen, Projektionen und was wir dagegen tun können* (Hannover, 2017), 18f. (download: www.edk.de/publikationen).

³⁷ Several times in the history of Christianity, the canonical status of the Old Testament was disputed. For a recent debate see Friedhelm Hartenstein, *Zur Bedeutung des Alten Testaments für die evangelische Kirche. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Thesen von Notger Slenczka* in: *ThLZ* 140 (2015), 738–751, who rightly defends the position that the Old Testament is an indispensable part of the Christian Bible and essential for Christianity.

³⁸ This expression is taken from Plaut, *Case*, 54–55.