

‘Toxic Texts’ and Interfaith Relations: The Case of John’s Gospel and ‘the Jews’

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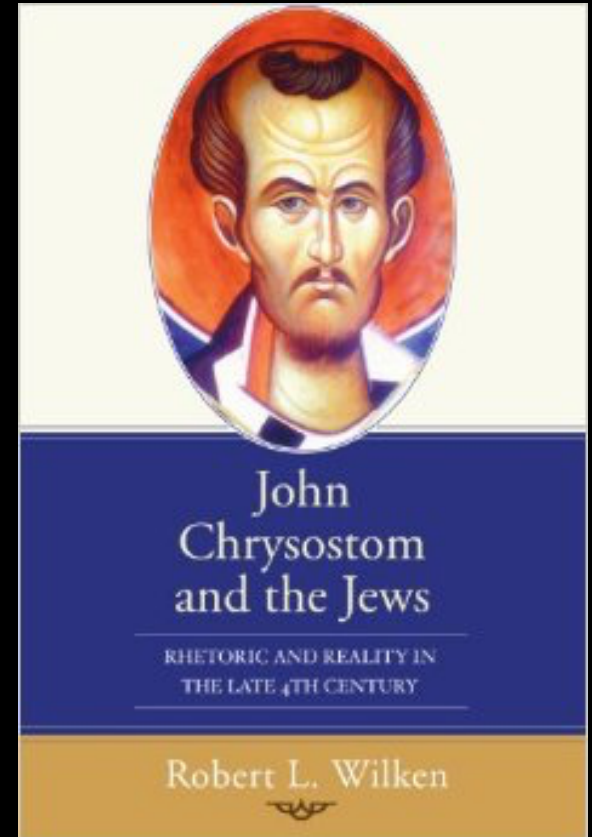
The Satanization of the Jews

Jesus said to them [the Jews who had believed in him], 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. 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 the 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'.

John 8:41-47

Theological Interpretations

- John Chrysostom: 'the synagogues of the Jews are the homes of idolatry and devils'. Satan himself 'inhabits the soul of a Jew' (*Adversus Iudaeos* ca. 387 CE).
- Gregory of Nyssa: Jews are 'advocates of the devil' and 'the congregation of demons'.
- The Devil prevented the Jews from understanding their own Scriptures; they were blinded by Satan.



Popular Interpretations

- Shift from restricted theological circles to the popular masses through the work of preachers and playwrights.
- Satan and evil demons ‘invest the Jews with courage to kill him by their outrage and to hate him just as we do’ (French Mystery Play).
- ‘Certainly the Jew is the very devil incarnate’ (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 2:2, 7).
‘Let me say “Amen” betimes lest the devil cross my prayer, for here he comes in the likeness of a Jew’ (3:1, 22).





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- 'Whenever you see a genuine Jew, you may with a good conscience cross yourself, and say, 'There goes a devil incarnate'.
 - 'The devil and all his angels have possessed this nation.'

Martin Luther, *Concerning the Jews and their Lies*, 1543).



Who are 'the Jews' (*hoi Ioudaioi*) in John?

- Symbols of unbelief.
- Those who are themselves Jews fear 'the Jews' (7:13; 19:22).
- Judaeans - i.e., inhabitants of Judaea.
- Jewish religious authorities, often linked to 'the Pharisees' (11:46-52; 18:1-3; 18:12-14).

Socio- Historical Context?

Tension between Johannine Christians and synagogue Jews (see John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

‘In an era when there were ill feelings between the Church and the synagogue, ‘the Jews’ was a term used with a connotation of hostility to Christians..... By this term John indicates his belief that the Jews of his own time are the spiritual descendants of the Jewish authorities who were hostile to Jesus during the ministry’ (R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, lxxii).