

6. When 'the full number of the Gentiles comes in all Israel will be saved; they are beloved because of the patriarchs, 'for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (11:25-29).

7. Ultimately, this is a mystery whose solution is reserved to God (11:33-36). Paul's thesis is that both Jews and Gentiles sin and fail to achieve the purpose of human existence, and are under divine judgement. But the descent of God's wrath in judgement is offset by the work of Jesus Christ. Through his self-giving in obedient love, Jesus merits divine blessings for all humanity. God's love (*agape*) is revealed through the presence of the Holy Spirit, enabling Christians to attain the destiny of sharing in the risen life of Jesus, yet this new gift does not contradict God's promises to the Jewish people.

Indeed, so strongly does Paul make this point that he offers a severe warning that Gentile Christians should not be haughty or boastful toward unbelieving Jews, much less cultivate evil intent and engage in persecution against them. This remained a critical warning almost totally forgotten by Christians in history. As we shall see in the next chapter, shortly after the New Testament canon was closed Christian writers remembered Jews as 'enemies' but not as 'beloved' of God (Rom. 11:28), and have taken to heart Paul's criticisms, using them against Jews, while forgetting Paul's love for the Jewish people and their traditions.

CHAPTER 3

The writings of the church fathers

The church fathers are the early Christian teachers who gave their name to the patristic age of church history, which lasted from the end of the first century to the early Middle Ages, and to the patristic literature, the main body of Christian texts from these years.

Their writings on Jews and Judaism illustrate a tension that continues to underlie Jewish-Christian relations today. On the one hand, there was acceptance that Jesus was born, lived and died a Jew; on the other, they wrestled with the problem that Jews did not recognise Jesus as the Messiah. The Jewish rejection was extremely embarrassing for the early Church and raised a number of challenges, notably in the formation of Christian identity and in Christianity's relationship not only with Judaism but also with the ancient traditions commonly called paganism. Pagans were generally sympathetic to older religions and held a revulsion for all things new, for antiquity was equivalent to respectability. Even though Judaism was criticised by ancient writers for many reasons, such as its alleged separateness and unfriendliness, it was admired on the grounds of its history. For example, Numenius of Apamea, who lived in the second century BCE, described Plato as an 'Articising Moses'.

The arrival of Christianity led to some harsh accusations, especially as the Romans considered new cults as suspicious and dangerous. Pagan critics, such as Celsus (c. 180 CE), were quick to exploit the Jewish rejection of Christianity: as far as Jews were concerned, the Messiah had not appeared. A philosopher and anti-Christian polemicist, Celsus accused Christians of deserting Jewish tradition even though they claimed to be faithful to its Jewish heritage. He placed the following criticism into the mouth of a Jew, 'Why do you Christians take your origin from our religion and then, as if you are progressing in knowledge, despise these things, although you cannot name any other origin for your doctrine than our law?' (*Contra Celsum* 2:4) The Emperor Julian (r. 361-3) took this argument further and

accused Christianity of being an apostasy from Judaism (and he was later known as 'Julian the Apostate').

In response to pagan, as well as Jewish, criticism, the writings of the church fathers demonstrate a hardening of attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. Indeed, as we shall see, the Jew, as encountered in the pages of many of the church fathers, is not really a human being at all; rather, he is, at best, an opponent and at worst, a monster. As a result, it is often difficult to judge whether the anti-Jewish polemical writings of the Church, known as the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature, illustrate a real encounter with Jews and Judaism or whether they should be understood as a literary genre, simply a creation of the Christian imagination, which was used for the primary purpose of attacking the views of pagans or Christian heretics.

The German Protestant scholar Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930) argued that the *Adversus Iudaeos* writings were the result of either internal needs and, therefore, directed at other Christians, or of external needs and directed at pagans. He maintained that the literature was entirely artificial and shed no light on the subject of Jewish-Christian relations. This view has been supported more recently by a number of Jewish scholars such as Jacob Neusner and David Rokeah (b. 1930), who suggest that, from the middle of the second century CE, Christian attention turned to pagans and that the Jews were merely in the middle of a polemic between pagans and Christians.

However, whilst it is likely that the *Adversus Iudaeos* writings were concerned more with strengthening Christian self-identity than with debating with real Jews, they do also shed light on the attitudes of the church fathers towards Judaism. Descriptions of close associations between Christians and Jews are found scattered throughout the patristic literature and indicate face-to-face discussions. William Horbury (b. 1942) has demonstrated in his research that, whilst von Harnack was right in recognising the importance of *Adversus Iudaeos* for formation of Christian identity, he was wrong in supposing that significant contact between Jews and Christians ceased.

THE CHRISTIANISATION OF ROME

During the patristic period, the Roman Empire became Christian, beginning with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine on the eve of the Battle of Milvian Bridge (312) in which he assumed undisputed control of the Western Empire. This was a long and complex process, not to be reduced to the religious policy of a single emperor: but the fact that the emperor was a Christian, and favoured the Church, was important,

especially when in 324 Constantine assumed control of the Eastern Empire as well. In the first three centuries the Church occasionally came under political pressure, since the rapid spread of Christianity threatened the traditional pagan cults, sometimes causing social unrest; but the last great persecution by the Roman authorities (303-11) ended with the rule of Constantine and by 380 CE Christianity was the state religion of the Roman Empire.

Before Constantine, Jews were recognised by Rome not so much as members of a national community, but as members of legal *collegia* or associations, which in many cases took the form of synagogues, indicated for example by Tertullian of Carthage's description of Judaism as a *religio licita*, or legal religion. Christians, on the other hand, as they came to be distinguished from Jews by the Roman authorities, did not enjoy a similar legal status. Indeed, they were often persecuted. The difference in legal status of the two communities was based on the Roman cultural principle of *presbyterion breiton* or 'older is better'; the formal recognition of Judaism was connected with its antiquity, whereas Christianity was 'novel', seemingly without an ancestral foundation. This is one reason why the church fathers were so concerned to maintain a claim on Jewish tradition, and acknowledge their historical links to it.

Under Constantine, the Edict of Milan (313) granted 'both to Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each desired', but this general extension of a toleration that was already customarily extended to Jews was principally intended in order to restore the position of the Christian Church after persecution. The corresponding edict of toleration for the Eastern Empire is expressed in narrower terms: freedom of worship is extended to those 'who still persist in error', that is, are not Christian.

In the following centuries the setting in which Jews and Christians had dealings with one another changed profoundly and the *Adversus Iudaeos* writings contributed to consequent Christian emperors enacting restrictive measures and movements against Jews. The Theodosian Code (438) began a long process of legal proscriptions which enacted such rulings as forbidding Jews to hold public office. Judaism, however, remained a *religio licita*: freedom of worship was upheld, as were Jews' fiscal privileges. The stance is one of reluctant toleration, in marked contrast to the Code's decidedly harsh treatment of Christian heretics. Officially persecution of Judaism was forbidden but this status was ambivalent: it was intended to preserve (until the second coming of Christ) Jews as witnesses to the truth of the gospel they had rejected; to this end they were to continue in a diminished state, forbidden to have Christian slaves, to proselytise, work for the government,

teach in public institutions, or serve in the army; nor were they allowed to build new synagogues, or even (in practice) to make major repairs to existing ones. Under Justinian I (483–565) the Code was consolidated and strengthened with new imperial ordinances (*Novellae*) that introduced anti-Jewish rulings resulting in Jews being listed alongside heretics; they were forbidden to worship, and their buildings were taken over by the Church. Indeed, the late Roman laws sanction the verity of Christian orthodoxy, as opposed to the 'error' of Judaism, heralding later medieval conceptions. Nevertheless, the exercise of the Jewish religion, in contrast to that of pagan cults, was not banned.

Gregory I, known as Gregory 'the Great' (c. 590–604), gave public support to the legal protection of Jews. Although his writings contain many features of the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition, he intervened on several occasions to prevent violence against Jews, their synagogues and their ceremonies. For Gregory, the context was one of local Roman policy towards Jews but, as the power of the popes grew, local Roman policy began to have more universal influence, demonstrated by his letter to the Bishop of Palermo (598) that began with the words *Sicut Iudaeis*. These opening words provided the formula for all subsequent letters and bulls of papal protection of Jewish rights in Christian Europe during the Middle Ages. Papal statements, however, failed to prevent outbreaks of violence against Jews, though letters and bulls were regularly published. Their frequent reissue by a succession of popes testifies to their limited success in controlling such violence.

CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS

Early Christian writings are traditionally divided into Western and Eastern traditions, a geographical as well as a linguistic division. The Western fathers wrote in Latin, while the Eastern fathers used (primarily) Greek and Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic). In the later patristic age the languages of the Eastern church also included Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopic. The forms of literature used would have been familiar to contemporary Jews, for the books follow literary models attested in earlier Jewish writing, including biblical commentary, homily, church orders (comparable with the Qumran literature), hymns and prayers. Apologetic, doctrinal and historical treatises develop Greek models previously used by Philo and Josephus.

One of the central questions the early Church attempted to answer concerned the identity of Christ. At one level, the answer involved doctrine

such as the dogma of the Trinity and of Christ's person. On another, it required an examination of the life of Christ, which transformed the Old Testament into a witness to Christ. Consequently, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments was a subject of much discussion. The church fathers insisted simultaneously on the continuity and the discontinuity of the Old and the New. Continuity centred upon the claim that the God of the Old Testament was the same as the God of Christ, and discontinuity proceeded from the belief that the Old Testament pointed to a future event – to Christ.

In the last chapter we mentioned that in the second century ce Marcion argued (unsuccessfully) that Christianity should reject the Old Testament (as well as much of the New). In response, Irenaeus, one of the most important early theologians, claimed a unity of the Testaments, interpreting passages in terms of types and allegories. Typology established a correspondence between biblical persons and events, taking seriously the historical setting. Allegory is a figurative reading that sees the literal text as standing for something else. For example, typologically, the Exodus anticipated liberation from sin and death in baptism; allegorically, the Song of Songs depicted the soul's relationship to Christ (while for Jews it described God's relationship with Israel).

Christian allegorical interpretation was based on Jewish allegory, notably that of Philo of Alexandria. For Philo, allegory alone led to true knowledge of the eternal God. Christian theologians looked to Philo as a model which they used in developing Christian doctrine. The first systematic school of Christian exegesis appeared in Alexandria in the second century and theologians such as Clement (c. 150–c. 215) and Origen incorporated Philo's allegorical approach in their writings so that he became well known in the Latin patristic tradition. Perhaps it was for this reason that he was neglected in Jewish circles until the sixteenth century when the Italian Jewish scholar Azariah de' Rossi (c. 1511–c. 1578) revived interest in Philo.

From the fourth century, a more literal and historical approach was developed by the Antiochene School of exegesis (which also has a number of parallels with traditional Jewish exegesis), epitomised by the Syrian church father, Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–73). From the fifth century, the church fathers start using and copying older exegetical commentaries and patristic exegesis becomes progressively less original. Procopius of Gaza (465–530) collated a biblical commentary of already existing exegesis and introduced the compilations of commentaries on each verse of the Bible known as the *catenae* (Latin for 'chains'). Similar in structure to some of the

rabbinic commentaries such as Midrash Rabbah, the *catenae* list quotations or paraphrases, on a verse-by-verse basis.

THE CHURCH FATHERS ON JEWS AND JUDAISM

The writer of 1 Peter commended Christians to be 'ready always to offer an explanation and defence' (3:15), and it is not coincidental that during the same period Jews were similarly counselled to 'be alert to study the law, and know how to make answer to an unbeliever' (Mt. Avot 2:14).

Faced by pagans, the church fathers sought to vindicate the legitimacy of the Old Testament. They laid claim to the Jewish Scriptures in the face of the seemingly prior claims of Jews, emphasising the accuracy of biblical prophecy, which was adapted to show that the prophets foretold the rejection of Jews and the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles. They also emphasised the antiquity of Scripture and its superiority over pagan literature. In his refutation of Celsus, for example, Origen develops the theme of Jewish stubbornness to explain their rejection of Jesus. He adopts Jewish apologetic, probably taken directly from Philo, that Abraham and Moses were older than Plato and the origins of Greek wisdom.

Some church fathers complained that Christians were far too influenced by Jewish readings of Scripture. For example, Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 375/80–444), Patriarch of Alexandria from 412 CE until his death, criticised both Jews and pagans:

The Greeks plunder you with their smooth tongues... while those of the circumcision lead you astray by means of the Holy Scriptures, which they pervert *if you go to them* [my emphasis]. They study Scripture from childhood to old age, only to end their days in gross ignorance. (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.2)

It is interesting that Cyril describes how some Christians visited Jews, presumably to discuss Scripture. Such visits indicate a close relationship between Jewish and Christian congregants, even as late as the fifth century, witnessing that Judaism continued to influence the Christian interpretation of Scripture. Perhaps not coincidentally, according to the church historian Socrates (c. 380–450) Cyril was personally responsible for the expulsion of Jews from the city of Alexandria following a riot that occurred there in 415.

Cyril's comment suggests that the description of Jews by Augustine of Hippo (354–430) simply as 'our satchel bearers [...] who carry the books for us who study them' (*Commentary* on Ps. 40:14) was as inaccurate as

it is derogatory. In *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, a polemic against the Manichean leader Faustus (c. 340–before 400), Augustine depicts Jews as children of Cain whose dispersion and woes were God's punishment. Just as the blood of Abel called out to God from the earth, so did the blood of Christ; just as Cain was cursed but lived under divine protection, so did Jews – they served as witnesses to their own evil and to Christian truth. Even so, they were not to be harmed but preached to with love. Their blindness to the acceptance of Christ marked them as no longer the elect of God. Instead, the Church was the New Israel by adoption through Christ, while Jews served as 'witnesses' to the victory of the Church as the True Israel. God preserved them in their adversity to demonstrate the truth of the Old Testament as foretelling the coming of Christ. This theology continued until the sixteenth century.

We now consider the writings of a number of the key church fathers in a little more detail.

Justin Martyr (c. 100–65)

Justin is an important source for the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the early patristic period primarily because of his work, *Dialogue with Trypho*, which recounts a debate between Justin and a Jew. Scholars disagree as to whether there actually existed a Jew called Trypho but, at the very least, Justin records contemporary debates with Jews through the mouth of Trypho. Of course, to some extent, the arguments placed into the mouth of Trypho are superficial – Trypho asks a question in order for Justin to answer. However, the view of most scholars is that the *Dialogue with Trypho* represents a real encounter and reflects the Church's debate with Jews and Judaism.

In the dialogue Justin demonstrates a good knowledge of Judaism in response to Trypho's questions about Christianity. Justin is aptly described as an apologist and he sought to defend Christianity using philosophical terminology. Given that the criterion of truth was antiquity, Justin, like earlier Jewish apologists, insisted that the Greek philosophers had drawn upon the Hebrew Scriptures. The following passage illustrates the sorts of issues with which Justin was dealing. Trypho begins by asking the position of those Christians who believe in Christ but who continue to follow traditional Jewish observance. Although the passage condemns Jewish practice, it also provides evidence that some Christians continued to follow Jewish observance, a fact that not only contradicts Justin's argument that Judaism

was worthless but indicates a closer relationship between Jews and Christians than Justin admits:

But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognising Him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to Him to be absolute Judge of all, and that His is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved, he [Trypho] inquired of me.

And I [Justin] replied, 'Let us consider that also together, whether one may now observe all the Mosaic institutions.'

And he answered, 'No. For we know that, as you said, it is not possible either anywhere to sacrifice the lamb of the Passover, or to offer the goats ordered for the fast; or, in short, to present all the other offerings.'

And I said, 'Tell me then yourself, I pray, some things which can be observed, for you will be persuaded that, though a man does not keep or has not performed the eternal decrees, he may assuredly be saved.'

Then he replied, 'To keep the Sabbath, to be circumcised, to observe months, and to be washed if you touch anything prohibited by Moses, or after sexual intercourse.'

And I said, 'Do you think that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Job, and all the rest before or after them equally righteous, also Sarah the wife of Abraham, Rebecca the wife of Isaac, Rachel the wife of Jacob, and Leah, and all the rest of them, until the mother of Moses the faithful servant, who observed none of these [statutes], will be saved?'

And Trypho answered, 'Were not Abraham and his descendants circumcised?'

...

Then I returned answer, 'You perceive that God by Moses laid all such ordinances upon you on account of the hardness of your people's hearts, in order that, by the large number of them, you might keep God continually, and in every action, before your eyes, and never begin to act unjustly or impiously... Yet not even so were you dissuaded from idolatry: for in the times of Elijah, when God reckoned the number of those who had not bowed the knee to Baal, He said the number was seven thousand; and in Isaiah He rebukes you for having sacrificed your children to idols. But we, because we refuse to sacrifice to those to whom we were of old accustomed to sacrifice, undergo extreme penalties, and rejoice in death – believing that God will raise us up by His Christ, and will make us incorruptible, and undisturbed, and immortal; and we know that the ordinances imposed by reason of the hardness of your people's hearts, contribute nothing to the performance of righteousness and of piety; (chapter 46)

Justin argues that it is impossible to keep all the commandments and that, even if they are narrowed down to the four listed by Trypho, neither the patriarchs nor the matriarchs observed them. In fact, according to Justin, circumcision, as well as the other precepts, was only given to Moses as a means of preventing sin, but even these were not sufficient to prevent injustice. He concludes that the biblical ordinances add nothing to the

practice of righteousness but were given 'on account of the hardness of the heart of your people'.

For Justin, the divine rebuke should be applied to contemporary Jews, not just biblical Israel; likewise, he applies the divine blessings to Christians only. As with many church fathers, anti-Judaism was an integral part of his writings, for 'Jews no longer understand the Scriptures' (*Dia.* 9:1). Christianity has replaced Judaism. Indeed, Justin is the earliest exponent of the teaching that the Church appropriated the Old Testament. Only Christians could offer true interpretations for they are the heirs to all God's promises and are the True Israel (*verus Israel*). For instance, Justin Martyr wrote:

Let all of us Gentiles come together and glorify God, because He has looked down upon us; let us glorify Him by the King of glory, by the Lord of hosts. For He hath taken pleasure even in the nations, and He receives the sacrifices more gladly from us than from you. What account should I, to whom God has borne testimony, then take of circumcision? What need of that other baptism to one, who has been baptized by the Holy Spirit? I think that by these arguments I shall be able to persuade even those who are of slight intelligence. For the words have not been fitted together by me, nor adorned by human art, but they were sung by David, proclaimed as good news by Isaiah, preached by Zechariah, written down by Moses. You recognize them, Trypho? They are laid up in your scriptures, or rather, *not in yours but in ours* [emphasis added], for we obey them, but you, when you read, do not understand their sense. (*Dia.* 29)

This passage illustrates four key features of early Christian exegesis. Firstly, Gentiles have been brought into Israel; secondly, circumcision (which represents Jewish practice in general) is no longer required; thirdly, Scripture not only provides proof-texts supporting the Christian message but no longer belongs to Jews – Jewish interpretation is demonstrably false and only Christians offer correct interpretations; fourthly, the biblical commandments were given because of Israel's hardness of heart and have been replaced by faith in Jesus as the only means of salvation.

Arguments found in the *Dialogue* continued to be used in later *Adversus Iudeos* literature, which makes it probably the most important and comprehensive anti-Jewish document in the patristic writings, sowing the seeds for anti-Jewish attitudes that came to dominate the thinking of the churches from the fourth to the twentieth century. Justin also describes Jewish hostility against and cursing of Christians, which we will explore in the next chapter.

Justin's *Dialogue* also provides the first real expression of the idea that Jewish social misfortunes (such as the consequences of the failed Bar Kokhba

revolt in 132–5 CE) are the consequences of divine punishment for the death of Jesus; as a result, Jews will never be able to escape suffering in human society, remaining confined to a marginal and miserable existence. This theology became the source for the 'wandering Jew' imagery prevalent in later Christian popular thinking, folklore and art.

Melito of Sardis (c. 140–85)

Melito was Bishop of Sardis, a city that was also home to one of the oldest and possibly largest Jewish communities of Asia Minor. His major work is a liturgical homily on the Passion, *Peri Pascha*, which compares the celebration of Passover with that of Easter and shows signs of direct debt to the Passover liturgy and the *Haggadah* (from the Hebrew for 'to tell, relate'), a term that refers to the retelling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Melito's interpretation of Jewish symbols such as the *afikomen* (a piece of *matzah* which is used during the *seder* meal) and his exposition of unleavened bread and bitter herbs illustrate personal knowledge of contemporary Jewish Passover celebrations. The homily is seen by many scholars as a response to the activity of the Jewish community and its influence on the local Christians who celebrated Easter on 14th Nisan – the same day as the Jewish Passover.

For Melito, the events of Jewish history merely served as prototypical models for the great event of Easter; having fulfilled this role with the coming of Christ they serve no useful spiritual purpose. This is the beginning of the Christian theology of supersessionism that regarded Judaism as a religious wasteland.

Melito is notorious for his charge of deicide – killing God – which became a recurring theme in the history of Christian anti-Judaism. He argued that not only had Jews rejected Christ, they killed him. Whilst his emphasis on Jewish culpability is not unusual among early Christian writers one is struck by his sharp language and preoccupation with Israel's 'crime', as the following passage demonstrates:

He [Christ] is the Pascha of our salvation.
It is he who in many endured many things:
It is he that was in Abel murdered
and in Isaac bound
and in Jacob exited
and in Joseph sold
and in Moses exposed

and in the lamb slain
and in David persecuted
and in the prophets dishonoured.
It is he that was enfleshed in a virgin,
that was hanged on a tree,
that was raised from the dead,
that was taken up to the heights of the heavens.

He is the lamb being slain:
he is the lamb that is speechless;

he is the one born from Mary the lovely ewe-lamb:
he is the one taken from the flock,
and dragged to slaughter,
and sacrificed at evening,
and buried at night;

who on the tree was not broken,
in the earth was not dissolved,
arose from the dead,
and raised up man from the grave below.

It is he that has been murdered.

And where has he been murdered? In the middle of Jerusalem.

By whom? By Israel.

Why? Because he healed their lame
and cleansed their lepers
and brought light to their blind
and raised their dead.

That is why he died.

Where is it written in law and prophets,
'They repaid me bad things for good
and childlessness for my soul,

when they devised evil things against me and said,
'Let us bind the just one,

because he is a nuisance to us'" (Isa. 53:10)?

What strange crime, Israel, have you committed?

You dishonoured him that honoured you:

you disgraced him that glorified you;

you denied him that acknowledged you:

you disclaimed him that proclaimed you:

you killed him that made you live.

What have you done, Israel? Or is it not written for you.

'You shall not shed innocent blood' (Jer. 7:6, 22:3)

so that you may not die an evil death?

'I did', says Israel, 'kill the Lord.

Why? Because he had to die.'

You are mistaken, Israel, to use such subtle evasions
about the slaying of the Lord.

He had to suffer, but not by you:
 he had to be dishonoured, but not by you:
 he had to be judged, but not by you;
 he had to be hung up, but not by you
 and your right hand.

(*Peri Pascha*, 69-75)

Melito's poem – he has been called the first poet oficide – marks a significant shift from earlier years when it was the attitude towards the 'Law' that epitomised the gulf between Jew and Christian, not the accusation that the responsibility for the death of Jesus lay with Jews. In the New Testament, the impression persists that the crucifixion was part of the pre-ordained purpose of God (e.g., Luke 24:7, 46; Marc. 26:33ff.; John 12:23) despite the Jewish acceptance of responsibility according to Matthew 27:25 or a sinister Jewish presence in the background of the fourth Gospel. However, for Melito the focus has shifted to the fulfilment of prophecy in the person of Jesus and to Jews as the killers of Christ.

Origen (185-254)

Origen is one of the most well known of the early church fathers although he is not, in a strict sense, a church father because he was denounced as a heretic at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (553 CE). Origen helped organise and systematise Christian biblical interpretation and produced the *Hexapla*, which consists of a harmony of the Hebrew text and the Greek translations of the Scriptures. He was the first church father to devote himself fully to the study of the Bible, and this led him to meet Jews and engage with Jewish interpretation of Scripture.

Despite hostility, Christians still looked to Jews for help in translating and interpreting Scripture. Origen was unusual because, although he rejected Judaism, attacking for example the observance by Christians of Jewish festivals, he also recognised the importance of the Jewish tradition for Christian scholarship. Nevertheless, in his view Jews refused to believe in Jesus as the Saviour because they lacked a spiritual sense of the Scriptures which would allow them to go beyond the literal meaning.

For Origen, Jews and Gentiles reversed roles. The historical Israelites ceased to be Israelites while the believers from the Gentiles became the New Israel. Jews were the chosen people but 'through their fall salvation is come to the gentiles'. Jacob now represents the Church and Esau the Jew. The difference between Judaism and Christianity, according to Origen, is that Christians perceive the mysteries, which are hinted only at in the Bible, whereas Jews are capable only of a literal reading of the text. Jews

'make impious and ignorant assertions about God' because they do not understand Scripture in its spiritual sense but interpret it according to the 'bare letter' (*Principles* 4.2.1; *Romans* 8.7). In an age where Christian life was still socially blended in close proximity to Jewish practice and belief, Origen represents a major step towards the establishment of a separate Christian identity.

Origen's writings make clear that messianic prophecy was one of the principal battlegrounds between Christians and Jews; he refers to discussions over:

- the virgin birth (Isa. 7:10-14 – *Against Celsus* 1:34)
- the birthplace of the Messiah (Mic. 6:1 – *Against Celsus* 1:51)
- the Messiah riding on an ass (Zech. 9:9 – *Against Celsus* 1:46)
- the suffering servant (Isa. 53 – *Against Celsus* 1:54)

Origen recommends Christians to study Scripture as an aid in responding to Jews:

And I try not to be ignorant of their various readings, lest in my controversies with the Jews, I should quote to them what is not found in their copies, and that I may make some use of what is found there, even though it should not be in our scriptures. For if we are so prepared for them in our discussion, they will not, as is their manner, scornfully laugh at gentle believers for their ignorance of the true readings as they have them. (*Epistle to Africanus* 5)

Origen was presented with a dilemma: on the one hand, Jewish knowledge of the Scriptures and of rabbinic exegesis was greatly desirable; on the other hand, Jews were 'Christ-killers', blinded by literalistic interpretations of biblical texts. Origen defended Jews against pagan attacks and occasionally referred to Jews and Christians together as 'all of Israel' (*Against Celsus* 6:80), awaiting the salvation of God. Origen's theology of Judaism is therefore complex and inconsistent. On the one hand, his derogatory rhetoric and supersessionist remarks place him among the emerging *Adversus Iudeos* thinkers of the early Church. On the other, Origen's appreciation for Jewish insight and thought is immense.

Antioch and John Chrysostom (c. 350-407)

The Jewish community of Antioch was founded in the middle of the second century BCE, and, as in other cities in the Eastern Empire, Jews held an important place in the city's life. Antioch was also the birthplace of Gentile Christianity and represents a bridge between Judaism, Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity. It is mentioned in Acts as the scene of

the first mission to the Gentiles: according to Luke (11:26), 'in Antioch they first called the disciples "Christians"'. In the fourth century CE, Antioch was relatively pluralistic with Jews, Christians and pagans living within its confines and many of the main buildings were Hellenistic shrines.

John Chrysostom, 'the golden tongue', was born into a wealthy and powerful family. He studied under the well-known theior Libanius, and was baptised in 368. Chrysostom retreated to the desert to study with monks, was ordained in 382 and in 398 summoned to Constantinople to become patriarch, but in 403 was deposed and exiled.

Chrysostom delivered eight angry sermons entitled *Adversus Iudeos*, in 386/7 at an early stage of his career. They were bitter and polemical but also demonstrate a close relationship between his Christian congregations and the local Jewish community which Chrysostom feared would threaten his authority. Although the target of Chrysostom's attacks is the Christian 'Judaizer', the Jew is the victim. His homilies show that many Christians in Antioch participated in Jewish festivals and fasts, believed that synagogues were endowed with numinous aura and viewed Jews as a continuation of the biblical Israel.

Chrysostom's main concern was that many Christians wanted to follow aspects of Jewish practice, were tolerant to those Christians who did so and failed to see a significant difference between Judaism and Christianity. He expressed frustration that Jews did not return the favour and keep Christian rites. Chrysostom also protested that Christians attended the synagogues during the festivals, stayed away from the church and celebrated Easter with their Jewish neighbours. He complained that Christians regarded the synagogue as a place to take an oath even though it was the home of idolatry and the devil and the idea of going to synagogue was itself blasphemous. He wanted to refute the charge that only Jews knew the Hebrew Scriptures and that Christians possessed only a copy, while Jews had the original.

His sermons denigrated Jews and Judaism, but when we read them more than 1,600 years later we need to remember their context. Firstly we should bear in mind that the purpose of Chrysostom's rhetorical training and his use of invective was not to argue logically or truthfully but to vilify. Invective was not taken literally by the listeners, who would have regarded it as a form of entertainment. He was a skilled preacher who was aware that a congregation tended 'to listen to a preacher for pleasure, not for profit, like critics at a play or concert'. It needs little knowledge of history to establish that controversy in today's world of political correctness and external good manners is conducted beneath a veneer of civility that was

completely lacking in the ancient world. Examples are given of ferociously aggressive contemporary insults and intolerably abusive language.

Yet there were no angry crowds storming the synagogue as a result of Chrysostom's sermons; he simply aimed to win back Christians who had deserted the churches. His attacks should also be seen in the context of his attacks against other groups. For example, his description of Judaism as a disease was used several days earlier with reference to the Arians; his description of Jewish fasting as a form of drunkenness was elsewhere applied to the moral laxity of Christians; his description of the synagogue as a gathering place for 'whores, thieves and the crowd of dancers' was also used in an attack against Julian the Apostate.

One further point needs to be made. Neither Chrysostom, nor his contemporaries, were aware that they lived at the beginning of a period of Christian domination. The Emperor Julian had only been killed twenty years earlier and the persecutors of the Church were flourishing shortly before. There was fear of another Julian, another Valens, even another Diocletian. Ambrose (339–97), a contemporary of Chrysostom, knew some magistrates who could boast of having spared Christians.

However, the impact of Chrysostom's *Adversus Iudeos* sermons can be seen in later generations who enjoyed Chrysostom's rhetoric but either did not recognise, or ignored, the oratorical conventions. Sections of the homilies were excerpted into the Byzantine liturgy for Holy Week and later writers drew freely from the homilies. They were translated into Russian in the eleventh century (at the time of the first pogrom in Russian history under Prince Vladimir (956–1015)), and were read in medieval Europe, in Byzantium, and especially in Russia where Jews were subject to repressive laws. Jews were now viewed as semi-saranic figures, cursed by God and specially set apart by the civil government.

Chrysostom begins his homilies with an admission. He had originally intended to speak against the Arians, but a more urgent 'disease was upon us'. He clarifies the cause of his concern: 'the festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us, one after the other and in quick succession: the feast of trumpets, the feast of Tabernacles, the fasts [...]'. He continues:

Let me also say this to those who are our own – if I must call our own those who side with the Jews. Go to the synagogues and see if the Jews have changed their fast: see if they kept the pre-Paschal fast with us: see if they have taken food on that day. But theirs is not a fast: it is a transgression of the law, it is a sin, it is trespassing. Yet they did not change. But you did change your glory and from it you will derive no profit; you did go over to their rites. Did the Jews ever observe

our pre-Paschal fast? Did they ever join us in keeping the feast of the martyrs? Did they ever share with us the day of the Epiphany? They do not run to the truth, but you rush to transgression. I call it a transgression because their observances do not occur at the proper time. Once there was a proper time when they had to follow those observances, but now there is not. That is why what was once according to the Law is now opposed to it... (*Adversus Iudeos* 4.3)

Chrysostom then states that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans was part of God's punishment for the Jewish rejection of Christ. For Chrysostom, like many church fathers, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the failure of Bar Kokhba's revolt in 132-5 were signs of the divine rejection of the Jewish people. The Romans renamed Jerusalem *Aelia Capitolina*, building a temple dedicated to Jupiter on the site of the Jewish Temple and forbidding Jews from entering the city. This partly explains the great anxiety felt by Christians when the Emperor Julian decided to rebuild the Temple in 363. He was, however, killed in battle the same year and the work was apparently stopped by the outbreak of fire. Even though Julian's reign lasted only two years, his writings and actions had a great impact upon the church fathers who feared that a new Julian could arise at any time, even after 380 CE when the Empire was officially proclaimed Christian.

Even if a man be completely lacking in understanding, should it not be clear and obvious to him why Jerusalem was destroyed? Suppose a builder lays the foundation for a house, then raises up the walls, arches over the roof, and binds together the vault of the roof with a single keystone to support it. If the builder removes the keystone, he destroys the bond, which holds the entire structure together. This is what God did. He made Jerusalem what we might call the keystone which held together the structure of worship. When he overthrew the city, he destroyed the rest of the entire structure of that way of life. But the Jew totally rejects this testimony. He refuses to admit what Christ said. What does the Jew say? 'The man who said this is my foe. I crucified him, so how am I to accept his testimony?' But this is the marvel of it. You Jews did crucify him. But after he died on the cross, he then destroyed your city: it was then that he dispersed your people: it was then that he scattered your nation over the face of the earth. In doing this, he reaches us that he is risen, alive, and in heaven...

I did enough to complete my task when I proved from all the prophets that any such observance of ritual outside Jerusalem is transgression of the Law and a sacrilege. But they never stop whispering in everybody's ear and bragging that they will get their city back again. Even if this were true, they could not escape the charge of transgressing the Law. But I gave you abundant evidence to prove that the city will not be restored nor will they get back their old commonwealth and way of life. (*Adversus Iudeos* 4.6)

John Chrysostom's writings have perhaps been the most damaging and influential in the popular imagination and his denunciations of Judaism gave the Church for centuries a pseudo-religious basis for persecuting Jews. Indeed, some Christians considered themselves chosen to assist God in fulfilling the curse upon Jews, feeling free to engage in attacking Jews with a divine seal of approval.

Jerome (c. 342-420)

Alongside Origen, the most famous church father who knew Hebrew and was familiar with Judaism was Jerome, author of the Vulgate translation. Jerome devoted himself to biblical study and the preparation of a new Latin version of the Bible. He settled in Bethlehem and worked on his translation of the Old Testament taken directly from the Hebrew which, he became convinced, represented the authentic voice of Scripture, *Hebraica veritas*. This resulted in the accusation that he followed Jews and earned him disapproval from, among others, Augustine.

Jerome immersed himself in Hebrew studies, meeting Jewish teachers, acquiring Jewish texts, and learning all that he could about the Hebrew language and Jewish exegesis of Scripture. This involved close contact with Jews; indeed, he had written to Pope Damasus (r. 366-84) describing a visit from a Jew bearing scrolls from the local synagogue to help him in his researches. Scholarly converse with Jews continued in Bethlehem. That in itself was extraordinary given the climate of the times; even more remarkable was his composition of *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* which, according to Robert Hayward (b. 1943), represents the most ordered and sustained attempt by any Christian writer, up to Jerome's time, to transmit Jewish scholarship to the Church. There is not one instance where Jerome prefers the LXX reading over the Hebrew text. His purpose seems nothing less than an attempt to justify his dealings with Jews and Judaism, when the ecclesiastical and civil authorities were marginalising them. As if this were not enough, *Hebrew Questions* aims to show his detractors that Jewish understanding of the Scriptures is often correct. The originality of his thesis demanded that Jerome defend, from first principles, his dealings with Jews and their teachings, and his acceptance of the latter.

From his Jewish teachers, Jerome acquired knowledge of exegetical traditions, which he incorporated into his writings and his many letters; most of these can be traced in extant Jewish sources, while others may represent otherwise lost Jewish interpretations of Scripture. While judging some Jewish traditions as true, others he calls fables; he attacks Jewish rituals,

sneers at Jewish prayer, is downright hostile to 'Judaizing' Christians, and repeats stock Christian objections to Judaism. Respect for individual Jewish scholars he could offer; positive regard for Judaism and its practices seems to have been beyond him.

The Syriac fathers

Since the writings of Jerome and other church fathers developed at the same time as the Hebrew and Aramaic literature of the Talmud and midrash, some patristic awareness of rabbinic tradition is perhaps to be expected. Particularly striking, however, is the general overlap between patristic and rabbinic exegetical tradition in the Syriac writings, such as the poetry of Ephrem the Syrian which has much in common with midrash and Targum.

Syriac is a form of Aramaic and linguistic similarities contributed to close relations between Jews and Syriac Christians, which displayed both shared traditions and also sharp antagonisms. This is illustrated by the fifth-century *Doctrine of Addai*, which on the one hand accuses Jews of killing Christ but on the other indicates that Christians had friendly relations with Jews and may have attended synagogue. Because Syriac Christianity retained its original Semitic expression, it was less affected than Christianity in the rest of the Roman Empire by the need to negotiate the thought-world of Hellenism, and it also remained open to Jewish traditions.

The principal Syriac version of the Scriptures (and still the authorised version of the Syriac-speaking churches) is called the *Peshitta*, the Old Testament of which was probably made from a Hebrew original in the early part of the second century for the Jewish community in Edessa; it betrays the influence of Targumic interpretations. Recent research suggests that some books in this version (such as Chronicles) may have been translated into Syriac by Jews and that translations of the Pentateuch and Prophets show affinity with post-biblical Jewish exegetical tradition. Interestingly, this seems to have been a two-way process for, in the case of Proverbs, the Targum depends upon the *Peshitta*.

Some Syriac writers such as Aphrahat (mid-fourth century CE) and especially Ephrem betray extensive knowledge of Jewish exegetical traditions in their writings. The poet Ephrem employed literary techniques similar to those of contemporary Jewish poetry (such as regular syllable stresses and acrostics interwoven into a biblical text). His hymn cycles (*madrashe*) display many affinities with rabbinic exegesis, such as his treatment of the 'robe of glory' lost by Adam and Eve but regained through baptism, and

his identification of Melchizedek with Shem, son of Noah. Familiarity with and dependence upon Jewish exegetical tradition did not prevent scathing attacks on Jews. Ephrem, who also attacked Marcion and the Gnostics, engaged in fierce polemic with Jews – with whom, especially in Nisibis, he was in close proximity. Like all Christian writers of his time, Ephrem is unambiguous about the redundancy of Judaism. He is, however, unusually bitter in lambasting Jews for their collusion both in the crucifixion and in more recent persecutions.

Even so, influence of this contact between Jews and Syriac Christians may be perceived in other less polemical Christian writers, notably Eusebius of Emesa (d. c. 359), whose quotations of 'the Syrian' and 'the Hebrew' in his commentaries often demonstrate information derived from a Jewish source. *Pygmalion* – Jewish hymns that embellish statutory prayers – also provide examples of positive Christian interaction with Jewish writings, notably in Byzantine poetry. The *kontakion* hymns composed by the sixth-century poet Romanos Melodos (d. 555?), perhaps Byzantium's greatest liturgical poet and born quite possibly to Jewish parents, are similar in form to the Hebrew *qerovah* adopted by his Jewish contemporary Yannaï. The *kontakia* deal mainly with biblical events and consist of a short prelude followed by a number of longer strophes in identical metre, separated by a repeated refrain, and united by an acrostic.

For all his zeal against Christian heretics, Romanos displays a remarkably temperate attitude to Jews at a time when official toleration was diminishing. He has no doubt that Jews are in error, but accepts that at the Last Day they will be judged. They will certainly bewail their error in not recognising the Christ and confessing the Trinity, but they will not be punished for it. Equally, in his treatment of the Passion of Christ he singularly fails to lambast 'the Jews', preferring the less inflammatory 'the lawless'. In advocating a position that upholds the integrity of the Christian revelation without denying the ongoing special dispensation accorded to Jews, Romanos represents a significant and constructive voice of continuing relevance.

As well as poetry, Jewish and Christian religious buildings shared many of the same characteristics, both with each other and with the architecture of other religions. The synagogue may have developed as a place for communal Jewish worship during the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE), but the earliest synagogue thus far excavated (Delos, Greece), dates from the first century BCE. The earliest excavated example of a church dates from the third century CE, in Dura-Europos (on the border of present-day Iraq and Jordan). In one street, archaeologists uncovered three separate houses, accommodating a Mithran sanctuary, a synagogue (from 245 CE) and a church (c. 290 CE).

In ancient Eastern churches in particular, there are inherited similarities with the design of a synagogue, which can still be seen today, for example in the Coptic church in Giza, on the outskirts of Cairo. In the middle of the church building one finds a large, U-shaped, walled-in platform. This is distinct from similar features in Western churches because of its location and the fact that, unlike them, it does not possess a throne for a bishop and seats for the clergy. Contemporary literary sources, such as Ephrem, describe this feature as a 'bema', which was where the Bible was read and the sermon delivered. It is generally agreed that the church 'bema' is a copy of the synagogue 'bima' which was a similarly designed platform in the middle of the synagogue, from which the Torah and Prophets would be read.

Another example is the synagogue at Sardis (3rd–4th centuries CE), which is basilican in form with a colonnaded forecourt leading to the Jerusalem-facing entry wall. The arrangement parallels Old St Peter's in Rome (c. 320–30). The spatial resemblance between these two houses of worship is remarkable, indicating that the architectural precedent of the Roman basilica was more influential than theological differences between the two religions in the patristic era.

CHAPTER 4

The writings of the rabbis

Scholars disagree about when the 'rabbinic period' in Jewish history really began. Perhaps it started as early as the fifth century BCE, with the return to Jerusalem of Nehemiah and Ezra, or as late as the second century during the reign of the Hasmonean dynasty. What is certain is that the rabbinic way of life was a new stage in the development of Judaism. In contrast to the Hasmonaeans who concentrated on national issues such as the removal of foreigners (be they Romans or Greeks) from Jewish soil, and the Sadducees who were Temple centred, the rabbis emphasised Torah and *halakhah* (Jewish law).

The progenitors of the rabbis were the Pharisees, and the success of the Pharisees, and later the rabbis, enabled Judaism to survive without a homeland and without a Temple. Indeed, unlike other Jewish groups it was the rabbis' ability to respond to the catastrophe in 70 CE that enabled them, eventually, to dominate Jewish life. The rabbis replaced sacrifice and pilgrimage to the Temple with study of the Scripture, faith, prayer and deeds, eliminating the need for a sanctuary in Jerusalem and making Judaism a religion capable of fulfilment anywhere. All succeeding Judaism is ultimately derived from the rabbinic movement of the first centuries.

One result of their endeavours is the title given by Muslims to Jews (and Christians), 'the people of the Book' (*Ahl al-Kitab*), although Jews are more likely to describe themselves as 'people of the books', for there are many sacred books. The Jewish books begin with the Torah, continue through the biblical, legal and homiletical literature and extend to medieval codes, philosophical works and the literature of the mystics. In addition, every area of this vast literary corpus is complemented by detailed commentaries and annotations. Thus, rabbinic emphasis on study resulted in a huge number of works, so that if today you read the Bible or the Talmud you read it alongside the interpretations of generations of rabbis.

The foundation of all Jewish writings is the Torah, which in its narrowest sense refers solely to the Pentateuch – the Written Torah (*Torah she-bikhinut*)