(april) 1988,5

The Origins of Antisemitism:

A Study in the Thought of James Parkes

Robert A. Everett

N.E.H. Seminar

Yeshiva University

1987

april 1988 4CSG

James Parkes (1896-1981) was an Anglican theologian and historian who was a pioneer in the study of the relationship between Christian teachings and antisemitism and Jewish-Christian relations. In this paper, we shall examine his thesis that the origins of antisemitism are found in the teachings of the Christian Church and not in the pre-Christian "classical" period. This thesis counters the idea that antisemitism is not a Christian phenomenon but rather a deformity introduced into the Church by Gentile converts who brought with them a deep-seated hatred of Jews. While Parkes' thesis was rather novel when he presented it in 1934, his position has gained a good deal of support from a number of contemporary scholars, both Christian and non-Christian. This issue of Christian antisemitism has become an important issue for the Church in the post-Holocaust era. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Parkes developed his thesis before the Holocaust happened, and he is not merely indulging in a "Christian guilt trip" over the Holocaust. Rather his work clearly exposes antisemitism as a "cancer" in the soul of Christianity that needs to be eradicated. The Holocaust simply makes the eradication of antisemitism from Christianity a moral issue Christians can no longer ignore.

Parkes argues that "classical" antisemitism in Greek and Roman culture differed from Christian antisemitism. There is clearly a question in Parkes' mind as to whether or not the anti-Jewish sentiments of Greek and Roman writers should even be called antisemitism. His reason for questioning this is based on the distinction he makes between the idea of being "anti-Jewish" and

"antisemitic". This is not merely a semantic problem, but an important factor in his reasoning as to why Christian antisemitism is not merely a problem introduced into Christianity by Gentile converts, but rather a unique problem of Christianity.

According to Parkes, antisemitism is essentially an "abnormal hostility." Hostility towards Jews can be called antisemitic when it is abnormal in the sense that there is no adequate explanation for the form or the severity of its manifestation in the actual contemporary conduct of the Jews against whom it is directed. This abnormal hostility is not to be confused with "anti-Jewishness" or "anti-Judaism". He makes the distinction in an article he wrote in 1942.

Antisemitism is a quite definable social scourge and its definition is not difficult. As long as Jews are disliked for the conduct which can in fact be attributed to them—ewen if it is exaggerated or maliciously interpreted—so long is the feeling anti-Jewish, and comparable to the other dislikes which pervade our imperfect society. But when Jews are hated for conduct of which they have not been guilty, for crimes which in fact they have never committed, then we are in the presence of antisemitism.³

He sustained this argument throughout his writings, and wrote similarly in 1963:

For what differenciates antisemitism from other group prejudices, whether suffered by Jews or any other people, is that group prejudice is normally related to something contemporary, something which actually happened, even if it be wrongly or distortedly interpreted; whereas antisemitism has almost no relationship to the actual world, and rests on a figment of the imagination perpetually bolstered up by other figments.⁴

This contrast between "anti-Jewish" and "antisemitic" forms the backdrop for the way in which Parkes compares and contrasts the relationship of the Jews in the Greco-Roman world to their relationship with Christianity and Christendom.

In his classic study, The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue, Parkes begins by raising a question about the references to "classical antisemitism" found in the scholarly works on the history of this period, particularly German scholarship. Parkes had been educated in the "old School", and he grew up reading Greek and Latin, so he was able to gain ready access to the classical sources. He came to the conclusion that much that had been written about the Jews in the ancient world and the issue of Gentile hostility was too narrow in perspective. He thought that German scholars in particular argued for a deep-seated hatred of Jews among non-Jews... "in a desire to prove that antisemitism was something which inevitably accompanied the Jew wherever he went, and which was due to his own racial and unalterable characteristics. Insofar as all these studies wish, to generalize on the position of the Jews in the ancient world from an examination of the hostility to which they were undoubtedly subject in certain places and at certain times, they exhibit the weakness of not taking into account the implication of contemporary Jewish missionary activity and its known sources. They also omit the peculiar character of the Alexandria situation, and the inevitable difficulties of the adjustment of a monotheistic people in a polytheistic world.5

In Parkes' view, the Jews in the ancient world were not the target of unrelieved hatred, but were in many ways merely one group among many, with some peculiar habits. They seem to have aroused little interest up to the time of Alexander, and the scanty references to them in all of classical literature seems to show that they were pretty much an accepted and /or ignored member of ancient society.

Jews could be found throughout the Roman Empire, and they were engaged in numerous occupations so that economics seldom played a role in generating anti-Jewish feelings, an exception perhaps being in Alexandria. Parkes takes seriously Strabo's statement that the Jews "have already settled in every city, and it not easy to find a spot on the earth which this tribe has not occupied and where it has not asserted itself", as evidence of a Jewish presence throughout the ancient world.⁶

Parkes does think the Jews posed a curious problem for the ancient world whose polytheistic learning brought with it a certain degree of religious tolerance. Judaism, however, was a religion which didn't allow for such tolerance since it was a strictly monotheistic religion. Of all the Gods in the ancient world, only the Jewish God appeared haughty and aloof. This put the Jews in the difficult role of demanding toleration, but not giving much in return. It also created an odd problem for ancient rulers. Parkes writes:

To give toleration to Yahweh was to suppress in favor of the Jews the punishment to which the omission of these acts exposed them. The laws had to be suspended in their favor. Special privleges had to be granted them—for an exception in favor of a minority is a privlege. But to refuse this toleration was to run counter to the ancient principle of toleratice, and was to render the practice of Judaism impossible. This was a dilemma: persecution or privilege.

These privileges also had to extend to exemption from certain civic rights due the Emperor. The fact is, however, that Jews were able to gain these privileges and to maintain them even when revolts were taking place in Judea.

Parkes seen this as an important aspect for understanding the

place of the Jews in the ancient world. In spite of their demands for special treatment, they were basically allowed to exist untouched. Roman authorities granted them the special status of peregrini in 161 BCE which allowed them to be judged by their own laws. In 110 BCE, they secured the same privileges for Jews in all kingdoms and states allied with Rome, independent of citizenship which some Jews already had obtained. Julius Ceasar affirmed these privileges by granting them permission to "live according to their own laws". According to Parkes "this formed the magna carta of the Jews in the Roman Empire, being frequently reaffirmed in general terms by subsequent emperors". It is not until the time of the Christian emperors that this status of the Jews is upset. 9

Parkes is aware that such privileges had a tendency to bring a sometimes unwanted prominence to the Jewish people, but he cautions that this can be easily exaggerated and misinterpreted. Even with their privileges, Jews did not seem any more visible than others."

In the main, they were indistinguishable from the other inhabitants of the Mediterranean cities. They were not the only 'orientals', and they were of the same race and appearance as the Syrains and the Phoenicians who had been dwelling in Greece, Italy and Spain for centuries. They lived in groups, for the convenience of the Synagogue worship and of common life, but so did the other foreign groups in all the great cities of the empire....The immense majority were in relatively humble walks of society, since a large proportion of them began their life in the diaspora as slaves."10

On the other hand, there is no doubt that anti-Jewish opinion did arise at various times and for various reasons. Their religion

could not help attracting attention, and in the eyes of most Greek and Roman philosophers, it hardly looked appealing. While the stress on a rigid moral code in Judaism often met with approval, the rituals of Judaism seemed riduculous. Plus, the Jews refusal to accept other Gods seemed excessively intolerant. Judaism appeared to many of the ancient writers as a curious mix of philosophy and superstition to the mind of the Greek. "Whereas the Greek intellectual stood in sharp opposition to the simple-minded Greek who worshipped the Gods, the Jewish philosophers, in other words, teachers in the Synagogue, believed intensely in the Jewish religion." Intellectually then, Judaism suffered by comparison to Greek Philosophy, and it became an object of devision in certain intellectual circles.

On the popular level, the privileges extended to Jews at times gave life to anger among the other citizens of the empire. Partly it was a typical reaction of a majority resenting any privileges given to a minority. At other times, it was due to the fact that Jews were relieved of some of the economic burdens which went along with participation in the civic cult. Questions about Jewish loyalty to the Emperor arose. This point was also aggrevated by Jewish support for an independent Jewish state and the sending of money to Jerusalem to support the Temple. 12

This Jewish intolerance and exclusivism, so unattractive to the Greek philosophers, and the special favors granted Jews by the Romans clearly gave non-Jews reasons to suspect and dislike them. Charges were sometimes made that Jews were misanthropes (a charge later leveled at Christians), anti-social, gloomy and insular. Their resistence to compromise on their religious beliefs caused

them problems. This maintance of their own standards in the plural society of an ancient city made them generally regarded as antisocial and clannish. It is a mistake to regard such manifestations of anti-Jewish feeling as antisemitism. They were natural and parallel to many xenophobias found elsewhere. The only ancient hostility which could be called antisemitic in the sense that it evolved a complete and completely untrue and abusive account of the Jews and their origins was to be found in Egypt, and especially in Alexandria. But here again, Parkes sees the anti-Jewish activities in Alexandria as having an explanation rooted in reality.

Alexandria was an exception to many rules in the ancient world. A large city somewhat artificially created by Alexander the Great, Alexandria was home to a number of different groups all vying for power and security. It tended to be turbulent, but at times, the turbulence turned to anarchy and violence. The Jews found themselves viewed as foreigners, economically successful, and holders of various privileges but not citizenship.

Its Egyptian location added another problem unique to Jews. Their central holiday of Passover portrayed the Egyptians in a very uncomplimentary fashion, and this antagonized the situation. That "ill feeling expressed itself in counter-story of the Exodus addressed by the Egyptians to the Jews". 14 Many of the charges made against Jews stemmed from the writings of anti-Jewish Egyptians like Manetho, Damocritus, and Apion. Charges were made that Jews were lepars, worshipped the head of an ass, committed cannabalism, and hated all humanity. The picture painted of the Jew was such that no charge appeared too extreme. With these stories in the air, it is easy to see how the negative exclusiveness of the Jews was

attributed to malevolence and how this malevolence could be translated into active hostility, as when ysimachus (also of Alexandria)
alleges that they are commanded to overthrow and destroy all altars
and temples—a charge which was true enough of the old independent
days in Palestine itself, but which happened outside Palestine on
rare occasions and under special provocation. 15

The anti-Jewish riots reported by Philo and Josephus indicate that there were serious problems for Jews. But here again, Parkes sees the Alexandrian situation somewhat unique in the ancient world and as a manifestation of conflict between competing social and ethnic groups, at least understandable if not justifiable. He writes:

The presence of a group, powerful both numerically and commercially, but taking no part in the common life of the city [Alexandria], was bound to be a source of jealousy and friction. It perpetually marked out the Jews as having interests other than those of the rest of the inhabitants, and at the same time it would give the Jews themselves a permanent feeling of malaise which would not tend to promote peaceful relations. We know that the Jews attempted to obtain both citizenship and a share of the public life of the city. 16

The Jews also antagonized the local Egyptians by forming an alliance with the Romans whom the Egyptians hated even more than the previous rulers, the Ptolemies. The troubles which arose in Alexandria during the time of Caligwia were well described by Claudius, in Parkes view, as "a war between Jews and the rest of the population."

Can we then see this as the first incident which steps beyond anti-Jewishness and moves over to antisemitism. Parkes thinks not. Rather he finds Alexandria to be untypical of the ancient world, and basically an example of social conflict in no way unique or abnormal.

The Jewish legal status in the Roman Empire also argues against any notion of a deep-seated hatred of the Jews. The many privileges they gained from Ceasar were continually re-affirmed and they became a "religio licita". This is not a legal phrase but a term used by Tertullian. It does help, however, to explain the Jewish status. According to Parkes, "in Roman law, the Jews formed a 'collegium' rather than a religio and as such it had a right to retain their own observances". 17 The one constant argument against Jews among the Romans was that they were "utterly exclusive", but that was nothing new. What is clear is that Jews were able to survive, and even thrive, in the Roman Empire. Even in times when revolts against Rome were going on in Judea, the status of Jews elsewhere in the Empire remained unchanged. Their expulsion from Ro me in 139 BCE doesn't seem to have been very long term for they appear quite well established when Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BCE. Jews continued to live on a basically friendly basis with the Romans, and during Herod's period, Jews enjoyed a relative amount of security under Roman protection.

The situation between Jews and Romans began to change during the first half of the first century CE particularly in Judea. While the Jewish upper classes tended to cultivate a Hellenized way of life, ordinary Jew and the Pharisee basically hated the Romans and their rule over the former Jewish soverign state. The desire for freedom from the yoke of Roman rule was coupled with the "flood of Messiahs who sprang up in the first half of the 1st century CE". 18 The hoped for Messiah would free Palestine of the Roman threat to the Jewish way of life and restore Israel to her proper place in history. Incidents between the Jews and their Roman rulers in

Palestine increased tensions, some of which are recorded in the New Testament. Ultimately, war would break out in 65 CE and 135 CE with disasterous results for the Jewish political dreams. "Under such circumstances", writes Parkes, "it is amazing the outside Palestine the Romans showed the moderation to leave Jewish privileges untouched, expecially as the troubles in Palestine were spasmodically accompanied by serious troubles in various other eastern provincees of the empire". 19

There were occasions when Roman anger spilled over and certain privileges were taken away, as when Hadrian forbid circumcision, but the Jewish rights gained under Ceasar pretty much prevailed in the Empire up through the fall of Rome. One place you can see a difference is in the writings of the Roman authors which begin to reflect the Jewish wars. Parkes believes that this can be seen by comparing the writings of Horace and Ovid as Jews with Juvenal and Martial, the latter being clearly more hostile in nature. The writings of Senaca and Tacitus also reflect this change.

The fact that Jews were able to retain their privileges even in times of war with Rome is a central point in Parkes argument against the idea that antisemitism was deeply engrained in classical culture. In addition, he argues that the success of Jewish missionary activity in the Diaspora also counters any assumption that Jews were universally hated and dispised.

Parkes links Jewish missionary activity closely with the Messianic movements which began to sweep the Jewish world in the first century CE. Such messianic excitment both drew attention to the Jewish religion and accentuated among the Jews their

activity as missionaries, but it also became a menace to Jewish security. 20 The combination of the two presented a challenge to Rome on both political and religious ground, and in Parkes' view, ultimately destroyed the peace between Rome and Judaism.

Parkes is clearly in the camp of those who believe that Judaism actively sought converts and remained rather opened to Gentiles who wished to imitate Jews without converting—the God—fearers. "The synagogue did attract widespread interest and a variety of degrees of adherence among the Gentile neighbors of the Hellinistic Jews, and these Jews were prepared to welcome such interest and adherence. Paul might have had new things to say about the status of the Gentiles who accepted his message; but he did not have to argue that Gentiles had a right to hear it—they were there already listening to him in the synagogue or in whatever other places Jews foregathered". 21

Jewish missionary activity seems to challenge the assumption of classical and contemporary writers that ancient Jewry was aloof, indifferent and exclusive. "The exclusive connection between the God of Israel, the children of Israel and the land of Israel was broken by two developments", ²² according to Parkes. The first was the universalist view of the prophets and their vision. The second was the Diaspora of Jews into foreign land. Both developments encouraged a missionary attitude among the Jews which proved to be somewhat successful in drawing in Gentile converts. ²³

It is not clear just how many Gentiles converted to Judaism because the hard evidence is scant. It does seem clear, however, that Jewish indifference or hatred toward the non-Jew seems not to

have been a factor in Diaspora life, at least, in the sense that similarly non-Jews wished, the Jewish ethical code, moral puritanism, and family life had a strong appeal to many non-Jews. The antiquity of Judaism and its monotheism also played well in certain Gentile circles.

That there were converts is without question. Parkes writes:

We hear directly and indirectly of a number of converts to Judaism during the period before the destruction of the Temple. Sometimes the references are causual, as in the inclusion among the first deacons of the Jerusalem Church of 'Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch' and sometimes we possess a substantial narrative. By far the most famous converts were the royal family of Adiabene who early in the first century of the Christian era became Jews. Adiabene was a small Mesopotamian Kingdom, but it is doubtful if many of the population followed the example of the royal house. Or the implication may be indirect: the works of Philo imply a considerable number of Gentile bearers, for his discussion of Greek philosophy would have been of limited interest to a purely Jewish audience". 24

There were Roman restrictions of Jewish missions however, due in large part on the legal status of Jews. Attraction to Judaism on the part of Gentiles caused little problem to the authorities, but actual conversion did cause a problem. Converts could not legally claim to be Jews because public law only allowed that a Jew was one who was born a Jew. Such a person could claim the legal exemptions and privileges allowed to Jews. Converts could not do so. Parkes argues that "Technically, proselytising among the non-Jews was an indictable offence, but it was only in moments of stress, such as accompanied the second Jewish war that the Roman authorities attempted to enforce the law. Otherwise, they turned a blind eye to conversion to Judaism, knowing by experience that the convert was a better rather

Sustan

than a worse citizen after his conversion". 26 This legal situation may well have prevented more Gentiles from actually converting to Judaism, but since "the worship and teaching of the synagogue were always open to those who were not members of the community...formal conversion might well appear to them unnecessary". 27

The Romans were always suspicious of eastern religious' missionary movements, not just the Jews, but Jews, being spread throughout the empire, posed a special problem. The danger of the Jews was that they were "atheists" because they did not honor the "Gods" of the state, and seeking converts meant increasing the number of "atheists" who could "legitimately" escape certain obligations by becoming Jews. Judaism walked a thin line between legitimacy and seditiousness by virtue of the privileges granted them, and it would seem that seeking converts would have jeopardized that legal status because of the legal strictions concerning who was a Jew. Yet, Parkes maintains, Judaism pursued an active missionary stance, and he sees this clearest in the way in which Gentiles ultimately found their way into the church. He writes:

The foundation of the Gentile Church was laid almost exclusively among the proselytes or people already interested in Judaism. The transition by which these groups passed from partial membership of Judaism to full membership of the Christian Church was an easy one. Had the synagogues of the Diaspora insisted primarily on the ritual and not the moral and ethical implication of Judaism, an observance of the letter rather than the spirit of the Law, it is doubtful if this transition would ever have taken place except in a few individual cases. What Christianity offered them was not something completely different, but the same thing with, in addition, the power of Jesus Christ in the place of the disadvantages and other ritual prescriptions". 28

The Greco-Roman world, in Parkes' view, did not have an unrelieved hatred for Jews. It is a mixed picture inwhich Jews are seen in both a positive and negative light. Jewish-Gentile relations were not unique, but rather followed a sociologically "normal" pattern of interaction between groups which view each other with suspicion and hostility because of religious and social difference but which also make adjustments to live together and even influence each other. Where hostility arises, Parkes sees identifiable causes and are limited to the causes. 28 There were clearly hostilities between Jews and the Roman Empire, and many problems. But, it does not account for the development of antisemitism which begins to appear after the first century. Parkes sees an irony in what develops that which changed the normal pattern of Jewish-Gentile relations was the action of the Christian Church. The irony is that the triumph of Christianity should have reduced the problem. He writes about the Roman-Jewish wars:

The struggle left both blood on both sides, but essentially the advent of Christianity to power removed all the causes of the conflict. For the reasons which inspired the Jews inspired also the Christians, and the victory of the Christian attitude to "atheism" and to the missionary activity should have brought political peace to the Jews. Instead the advent of Christianity perpetuated their tragedy. The reasons for this have nothing to do with the old emnities. They are to be found only in the conflict of Christianity with its parent religion. 30

We shall now turn to Parkes' explanation as to how the Church created the roots of antisemitism.

Parkes stated in a number of works his belief that Christian theologians were to blame for the unique evil of antisemitism.

"The central and overpowering, indeed horrifying conclusion, which that research brought me", wrote Parkes about his doctoral work, "was the total responsibility of the Christian Church for turning a normal xenophobia into the unique disease of antisemitism".31

A number of factors contributed to this development in Christianity, and Parkes' reputation as an historian is tied to his work in uncovering the historic roots of Christian antisemitism.

In Parkes' opinion, the Church developed an anti-Jewish polemic in the Gospels themselves, but the polemic became more and more vitriolic in the hands of the Church Fathers who no longer read the texts as Jews, but as Gentiles. The Gospel picture of Jesus is one of him confronting enemies among the Jews. It is a contradictory picture. In the synoptic gospels, the enemies are sometimes the Pharisees, sometimes the Scribes, sometimes the Sadducees. In the Gospel of John, however, there was no distinguishing between different groups of Jews. All "the Jews" are portrayed as enemies of Jesus. 32 The picture that emerges of Judiasm is that of a religion which was arid and legalistic. The Jewish background of Jesus is not denied, but he is seen as moving further away from Judaism and offering something new. Parkes believed that this increased hostility in the Gospels is a reflection of the growing tensions between the Synagogue and the young Church in the first century, and he finds it at least understandable. The problems arose when passages were read with no historical background, and they became the sole source of Christian ideas about Judaism and the Jewish people.33

One particularly ugly development in the Gospels was the inclusion of the charge that the Jews killed Jesus. All the Gospels make this charge in one form or another with particular interest found in the following passages: Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 14:1, 11, 43ff, 55, 64 and 15:11-15; Luke 23:1-25; and John 19:1-16. Reference

to this charge is also found in Acts 2:22-24, 32, 36 and once in the writings of Paul in 1st Thess, 2:14-16. Histories of antisemitism often isolate this charge as a major factor in perpetuating Christian antisemitism. Parkes was aware of the power of this charge to do evil. He wrote in 1930 that it was this charge that justified the slaughter of Jews in the minds of the Crusaders in 1096.

The immediate cause of the first popular attack upon the Jews was the appeal of the crusaders. "Will you offer your lives for the recovery of the holy places, and leave in peace those who are actually responsible for the death of the Saviour?" 34

The roots of the charge are found in the Gospel.

Parkes is tentative in 1934 about his position on this question. He believed that if the Romans had been entirely responsible for Jesus' death the gospels writers would not have mentioned the Jewish participation at all since the early Christians were trying to woo Jews to their side. He also contends that if there was no Roman responsibility, they would not have been mentioned since the early Church was trhing to establish a friendship with Rome. 35 But Parkes is very clear about the fact that if some Jewish authorities were in any way involved, it is neither historically correct nor morally feasible to blame all Jews. He points out that the Pharisees are not mentioned in any of the accounts of the trial of Jesus. one is to charge the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem for any culpibility, one has also to remember that they were the enemies not only of Jesus, but the Pharisees as well. In addition, they benefitted the most from Roman good-will, and they would have been most anxious to keep the Romans happy and silence any sort of Jewish messianic

stirrings that could upset the Romans.

Parkes came to realize that there were questions concerning the legality of the trial of Jesus according to Jewish law, and he questioned blaming the Jews for crucifying Jesus when crucifixion was a Roman method of execution, not Jewish. He was particularly influenced later in his work by Paul Winter's book, On the Trial of Jesus. 36 Parkes wrote a review which indicated his support of Winter's position which placed primary responsibility on the Romans. In the review, he wrote that "It was only when the Church was trying to ingratiate itself with the Roman authorities—which was just at the period when the traditions were crystallising into our present Gospels—that Pilate tended to be exonerated and 'the Jews' to be blamed."37

The deicide charge carried with it the idea that the Jews were to be punished eternally for their crime against God. It was used to explain the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., and the idea of the Jewish diaspora was linked to Jews being scattered over the face of the earth to wander eternally because of their crime. For Parkes, these were not academic questions, but ideas which gave life to a hatred of the Jewish people on the part of Christians. The Christian Holy Week was often a very dangerous time for Jews living in Christian Europe. Christians would use the occasion to attack Jews because of the alleged crime they had committed against Jesus Christ. Parkes had encountered this attitude in his work in Europe, and he wrote of it in 1936.

Is it possible that, in spite of the fact that in full consciousness of the situation Jesus a few hours later asked from the Cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," God has actually cursed the entire Jewish

people throughout history? This is no academic question. have met a responsible leader of the German Christian Student Movement who pointed out publicly that even if converted the Jews could not escape Hell, because the curse they invoked on themselves was eternal, but that knowing the mercifulness of God we might just hope that for their conversion they would receive only a mitis damnatio -- a mitigation of the pains. Moreover in a book by a Presbyterian of Jewish origin which appeared a year or two ago I found the astonishing phrase that "Our Lord prayed the Father not to lay charge of His death against His people, but I am not sure that this prayer included the priestlings, for it was they who compassed His death." With tremendous magnanimity in the supreme moment of His life, Jesus, then implored God to forgive those who were not guilty!!! So long as anything which concerns Judeo-Christian relations is capable of creating such aberrations among Christian thinkers, it is not academic to demand a reconsideration of the original situation. 38

The deicide charge was, in Parkes' opinion, a tap-root of Christian antisemitism, and its source was the New Testament.

Although the deicide charge had an evil power over the centuries, Parkes argued that it wasn't so much the Cross but the Law of Judaism which originally led to the ultimate separation between Judaism and Christianity. Parkes was firm in his conviction about Jesus being a Jew who had no intention of overthrowing Judaism or denigrating his own tradition, but he saw an important difference between viewing Jesus as a Jew and accepting what the Church taught about him as the Messiah. The line was drawn at the point where the claims about Jesus were said to supercede the Law. Parkes traced this problem to Paul, and he saw Paul's ideas about the Law as being a source of continual misinformation about Judaism and the Jewish tradition.

Paul is as contradictory about the Law and its meaning as he is about a number of other problems. Except for the Epistle of Thessalonians, Paul conveys a generally warm feeling toward his

Tewish bretheren. In spite of claiming to observe the Law, he believed that it is not necessary for the Gentiles, then beginning to enter the Church in substantial numbers, to observe the Law in order to be Christian. Such a position meant that the Church would not simply be a Jewish sect. For Paul, the Law was holy and it pointed out what was good. But it did not have the power "to save". Knowledge of the good was not enough if sin kept one from doing what was good. Something more was needed, and Paul argued that it was Christ who was needed. The problems arose when the Jewish community refused to accept the gospel of Jesus being preached by the early Church and insisted that the Law was sufficient. Paul believed in the universal significance of Christ, and he could not accept the idea of two seperate views of salvation. Jesus Christ, not the Law, was the source of salvation, according to Paul. 35

In Parkes' view, there was also an alternative view in Paul which stated that the Law had not saved the Jews because they had not understood it. This Paul stated in Romans 9:31. In Galatians 3:23-24, it is seen as the "tutor, to bring us unto Christ". At another point, Paul claims that the Jews had turned the Law from a temporary status into an eternal and final status. Parkes then goes on to say the following.

It is inevitable that Paul should claim that the promises (to Abraham and the prophets) now belonged exclusively to the Church, and that therefore Israel was, at any rate so long as it persisted in refusing to accept Christ, excluded from them. The promises of God could not lapse. The failure of the Jews could not make the word of God ineffective (Romans 4 & 5). Nor could they claim that the promises depended on the Law, for the promise to Abraham preceded the giving of it. The Gentiles, accepting Christ, became the true inheritors of them. 40

Paul did try to soften the blow of such an idea by claiming in

Romans 9-11 that the Jews would be provoked by jealousy and ultimately gathered up again in salvation. There is no idea here that Judaism qua Judaism had any continuing value, and Jews were seen as actors in the Christian scheme of salvation whether they liked the idea or not. But the idea of a remnant to be saved from Israel proved to be a theological quirk which was used to protect Jews during the Middle Ages from total extinction. "For it was argued that if they were completely extinguished there would be none to provide the converted remnant which was to be the final crown of the Church." 41

Paul's position on the Law is a curious one, and one which generated a great deal of controversy in his time. Both Jews and Jewish Christians complained about him, but for different reasons. Parkes summarizes this triangular argument as follows.

Paul argued, the Messiah has come; my task is to preach him to the Gentiles. Those who accept Him enter the New Israel by baptism, the new ceremonial which replaces circumcision for the Gentiles. With the new Israel distinctions between Jew and Gentile have ceased to exist; and although the Ceremonial Law is still valid for Jews; it is impossible for Gentiles.

The Judaisers argued, the Messiah has come, but entry into His Kingdom is by the old terms of loyalty in full to the Covenant given to Moses. Christ fulfills that covenant; He does not supercede it in any detail. Gentiles must be admitted to the Messianic Kingdom, but for admission they must become Jews.

The Jewish opponents of Paul argued, the Messiah has not come, therefore action taken upon the assumption that He has is false. In the present circumstances there is no authority for the admission of Gentiles to the Synagogue on new and more liberal conditions than formerly.

This triangular argument remained an "in-house" problem until the Church finally decided that all Christians were to abandon the Law. The question was no longer whether the Law was still binding on Gentiles who had accepted the Messiah, but whether it was ever binding

on any one in the way in which the Jews had understood it. Now the "Law" was contrasted with the "Gospel" as a different and erroneous way of life. In such a condition it is not unnatural that the Jury, which in the days of Paul had been local, became a general hatred of the sect, and an uncompromising rejection of fellowship with them. 42

It is important in our study of Parkes' thought to realize that he did not accept Paul's judgement of the Law or Judaism. He knew that his position would not gain immediate acceptance because he was disagreeing with the traditional idea that all Christians needed to know about Judaism could be found in Paul. He admitted that he had accepted the Pauline view as it was taught at Oxford until his work involved him in the Jewish Question. Once he had discovered new information about Judaism, he was forced to change his position. He firmly believed that "good theology cannot be built on bad history", and he came to the conclusion that historically Christians have distorted and misinterpreted Judaism and the nature of its tradition because of New Testament ideas. His conclusions about Paul's role in these problems are important.

That Paul in his attack upon the Law was doing it less than justice can be said without detracting from the greatness of the Apostle. 'The Christian will probably say in reply: Did not Paul himself know all about it? Was he not born and bred a Jew? Was he not a "Pharisee of the Pharisees"? Had he not been "zealous beyond those of his own age in the Jews' religion"? Was he not "as touching the law, blameless"? Who could be a better and more reliable witness upon the question of what the Jews' religion really was? Yes. And did not Paul abandon the Jews' religion? Did he not write about it long years after he had been converted to a different religion? And is it not common knowledge that a convert seldom takes the same view of the religion he has left as those who remain The fact remains, however, that the Christian Church adopted without enquiry the Pauline estimate of the Jewish religion. The ultimate redemption of Israel on which Paul pinned his deepest faith was rarely referred to by Patristic writers. Theinadequacy of the Law and the forfeiture of the promises,

was their continual accusation against the Jews. By the time the Book of Revelation was written at the very end of the century, it was already possible to speak of the redeemed of the Church in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel without appearing strange. 43

As Paul's views gained more authority in the Chrsitian community his views on Jews and Judaism became more widespread and influenced later Christian writers.

In addition to Paul, Parkes also saw the Epistle of 1st Peter and the Epistle of Hebrews presenting similar problems concerning the Law and the viability of Judaism. The book of James is an exception to this decidedly anti-Jewish strain in the New Testament. As we mentioned before, Parkes also saw the Gospel of John as being particularly bitter in its attitude toward the Jewish people. Parkes argued that this gospel assumed that the separation between the Jewish and Christian communities had already taken place. He wrote:

The fourth gospel assumes without argument that the separation has already taken place. It is no further use arguing with the Jews. They are assumed to be the enemies of Christianity: and Christianity itself is a universal and not a Jewish religion. A careful reading of the book shows an amazing contrast in spiritual tone between the discourses addressed to the disciples and those addressed to the 'Jews', and while the former constitute some of the most exquisite treasures of Christian literature, the latter are unreal, unattractive, and at times almost repulsive. We can attribute the one, even if indirectly, to a personal memory. But the other is a reflection of the bitterness of the end of the century....44

As the New Testament literature gained authority in the Church, certain ideas about Judaism and the Jewish people began to emerge. It also happened that historical events occurred which gave to the Christians what they interpreted as signs of divine displeasure. The fall of the Temple in 70 C.E., and the failure of Jewish uprisings against the Romans struck serious blows to the Jewish

community and forced it into a defensive position. The opposition offered by the rabbis to Christianity was clearly expressed in the formulation by Samuel the Small of the Minim or the 18 Benedictions. 45 A 19th benediction cut off the Jewish-Christians from the synagugue, and it offered a condemnation of the Nazarenes. What contact there had been between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not believe was greatly reduced. The atmosphere between the two communities became more hostile.

The claims made on behalf of Jesus by the early Church were rooted in the Messian decies of the Hebrew Scripture. As the separation between the two communities became more severe, a battle ensued over the proper interpretation of Scripture. The fall of Jerusalem was seen by the Christians as a sign that Jews no longer had favor in the eyes of God. Parkes points to three Christian documents from the second century as evidence of this new attack on Judaism. The documents were Justin Martyr's, Dialogue of Justin with Trypho the Jew, Ignatius', To the Philadelphians, and the Epistle of Barnabas. 46 In Parkes' view, by the second century, the Church had become a Gentile Church, and the questions now raised about Judaism dealt with "Promises" and fulfillment of prophecy rather than the Law. Parkes argued that the Gentile Church falsified Jewish history in order to support their claims about Jesus. This attitude led to the idea that the Church alone knew how to interpret Scripture, that it possessed that truth before the Jews rejected it, and that the Church existed at the beginning of revealed history. 47 The Hebrew Scriptures were turned into a "vast quarry with no other function than to prove, by anyexegesis however far-fetched, arguments to prove the reality of the Messianic claims for Jesus". 48

The inner logic of the Christian position led to another assumption which also denigrated Judaism. The Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, based on their interpretation of Scripture, meant that the Church was the true Israel. Parkes wrote:

The Messianic question once settled, there was an inevitable deduction to be made by the Christian writers. If Jesus was the Messiah promised to Israel, then they were the true Israel. It is here that we see how inevitable was the defamation of the actual history of the Jews, for if the Gentiles were the true Israel, then the Jews had all the time been sailing under false colors. That they were the true Israel they proved by innumerable passages from the prophets, inwhich God speaks of His rejection of His own people, and His acceptance of the Gentiles. Little by little the Church was read back into the whole of Old Testament history, and Christian history was shown to be older than Jewish history in that it dated from the creation, and not from Sinai, or even Abraham. Continual references to Christ were found in the Old Testament, and it was 'the Christ of God' who appeared to Abraham, gave divine instructions to Issac, and held converse with Moses and the later prophets. 49

The development of this position by the Church led to the creation of an image of Judaism as a dead, arid, legalistic religion, and the Jewish people were characterized as evil monsters.

Parkes argued that antisemitism owed its origins to the way in which the Church formulated and maintained the following claims for itself.

- a. The Torah was a temporary revelation which has been replaced by the Incarnation.
- b. As a result of their rejection of the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah, Jews have ceased to be the 'true' Israel.
- c. All the promises of the Old Testament have been transferred from the Jews to the Christian Church. 50

sort of dichotomy made Jews look even more contemptible. 52

A constant attack against Judaism and the creation of a negative image of the Jewish people was carried on in sermons, books, letters, and prayers. St. John Chrysostum of Antioch delivered eight sermons in 387 C.E. which, according to Parkes, "display a bitterness and lack of sensitivity unusual even in that place and ce ntury". 53 Chrysostum faced a problem in Antioch because many of his congregation had close ties with local Jews. He feared for their faith, and he launched an attack upon the synagogue. He charged the Jews with murdering their own children for the devil, that they killed Christ, their synagogues were the homes of idolatry and the devil, and that it was blasphemous for Chrsitians to enter into one. 54 He continued by stating that God hated the Jews, that they worshipped the devil, and Christians should hate them. "I hate the Jews", he preached, "for they have the Law and they insult it."55 Parkes commented on Chrysostum by writing that "It is evident that Chrysostum's Jew was a theological necessity rather than a living person. If he looked different from the actual Jews living in Antioch it was part of the malice of the Jews, one of the snares of the devil, set to catch the unwary Chrsitians".⁵⁶

Chrysostum the Golden Tongue, as he was called, was but one fourth century Church Father who attacked the Jews for one reason or another reason, but his sermons were among the most vitriolic. Patristic writers like Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Cyril, and Basil all had little good to say of the Jews. 57 Parkes made this charge against the Church Fathers.

The Jew as he is encountered in the pages of fourth century writers is not a human being at all. He is a 'monster', a theological abstraction, of superhuman cunning and malice, and more than superhuman blindness. He is rarely charged with human crimes, and little evidence against him is drawn from contemporary behavior, or his action in contemporary events. 58

Parkes blamed this distorted picture on the way Scripture was interpreted by the Fathers of the Church. The insistence by Christian writers of this period to separate the promises and curses and apply all the former to the Church and all the latter to the Jews led to insidious results. He wrote:

The Fathers obtained the perspective of a distorting mirror and drew faithfully what they saw. The monstrosity of Israel was evident to them. There was not one single virtuous action in their history. She had been a perpetual disappointment to God, in spite of all the wonderful things He had done for her. For it was impossible to separate these from the main strain of the history of the people. The Church might claim all the virtuous actions in the Old Testament for a kind of pre-existent Church, but she could not deny that the people had been led out of Egypt, guided by day and night across the desert, and into the Promised Land. But their record was one of nothing but disobedience, and their ultimate rejection was almost inevitable from the very beginning. The one mystery which the Fathers never attempted to solve was why, if they were really like that, God had either chosen them, or having done so, had expected them, after a career of unchanging and unrepentent malice and vice to accept His final revelation in Christ. 59

The anti-Jewish writings of the patristics formed a group of literature known as Adversus Judaeos. The appeal of this tradition was always back to Scripture, to both Testaments. Parkes' belief that the New Testament laid the foundation of Christian antisemitism is supported by its constant use by Church Fathers to bolster their arguments against the Jews. Roy Eckardt has added his voice to this proposition when wrote:

Those who seek to declare the New Testament innocent of antisemitism are hard put to explain how New Testament Christianity could have become a foundation reference for

Christian antisemitism throughout the ages. Every instance of Christian antisemitism in post-biblical history is directly or indirectly traceable to the events or reputed events recorded in the New Testament. $^{60}\,$

By the fourth century, this anti-Jewish tradition had taken a firm hold in the Christian Church. Its most sacred literature gave it support, and commentaries of the literature enlarged upon the charges against the Jews. While this was taking place in the theological realm, events in the political life of the Roman Empire began to effect Jewish-Christian relations.

Up until the fourth century, Christianity had been engaged in a struggle to gain recognition from Rome as a legitimate religion. Judaism had been awarded such status centuries before, and it had enjoyed a measure of toleration from the Romans. Unlike Christianity, Judaism's antiquity was recognized and appreciated by most people. The conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity changed the whole situation. Christianity now won favor in the eyes of the Empire, and it used its newly won strength among other things to legislate against the Jews. It was also now able to call Church counsils freely, and while no council dealt totally with Judaism, they each contributed something to the crippling of Jewish rights in the Empire. The very first law passed in Rome under Christian influence in October of 315 C.E. read:

We desire the Jews and their elders and patriarchs to be informed that if after the passage of this law anyone who flees from their gloomy sect to the worship of God is pursued by them with stones or any other molestations, as we know is at present happening, the offender shall immediatelybe consigned to the flames, with all those who have taken part in the offense. But if any person shall join himself to their evil sect, and give himself to their assemblies ("Brothels"), he shall suffer the same punishment. 61

The tradition of Rome to protect Judaism proved too strong to be dislodged immediately, but the rights of Jews were slowly whittled away over the centuries. Jewish rights became hostage to the whims of secular rulers and princes. The laws which deprived them of their rights were often written in abusive and contemptuous language. It became perfectly legitimate to humiliate Jews and their religion. The pictures drawn by Christian theologians went a long way in justifying this sort of attitude. This would prove to be an important element in Christian attitudes up through modern times. Parkes wrote:

Here also a tradition was created for medieval development, and medieval Popes adopted the same contradictory policy that everything was legitimate which humiliated the Jews and kept them in a state of subjection, even when they were requesting their flocks neither actually to murder them nor to do them violence. This belief in the necessity of himiliation did not, however, stop short at abusive language. It became a cardinal point of Christian policy that Jews were to be excluded from all the dignitaries of life, and from the possession of any office which gave them jurisdiction over Christians, and this policy which was first initiated by Honorius at the beginning of the fifth century remained in force until the emancipation of the Jews in the nineteenth, even though secular authorities frequently offended the Church by employing Jews in departments of state service where their capacities were of special value. 62

The restrictions of civil rights were followed closely by restrictions on religious rights. Whatever appeared offensive to Christians was subject to restrictions. Justinian attempted to regulate synagogue services, and he also introduced questions about the Talmud for the first time. Ambrose threatened the Emperor with excommunication if he rebuilt a syngagogue burned down by Christians. A Visigothic king, Erwing, followed similar plans. The Middle Ages concentrated primarily on the censorship of Jewish books, and Talmuds were frequently burned. The Talmud was a

mysterious book to most Christians, and it was often subject to attack. The one really hostile book was <u>Sepher Toldoth Jeshu</u>, a rather scurrilous biography of Jesus. But, on the whole, Jewish literature devoted little attention to Christianity. Efforts to surpress Jewish books were generally motivated by fear of the unknown and outright hatred. By the ninth century, the Roman laws which had given protection to Jews had been steadily undercut. The Jews found themselves without the rights of citizenship. They had become "strangers with^{in*} a society which was beginning to think of itself as 'Christendom'". 64

It is Parkes' contention that the roots of modern antisemitism are to be found in the religious conflict between Christianity and Judaism. He rejects theories which base antisemitism on racial or economic ideas. The "main responsibility", he writes, "must rest upon the theological picture created in patristic literature of the Jews as a being perpetually betraying God and ultimately abandoned by Him." This picture was based on a certain way of reading Holy Scriptures which radically divided Christians and Jews between the good and the evil. This reading took no account of Jewish reality, but rather, created a caricature of Judaism and the Jewish people which was clearly abnormal and distinctly different from ordinary group conflict. He writes:

The Christian theologian did not set out deliberately to blacken the character of his Jewish opponent, nor did he deliberately misrepresent his history. He cannot be said to have been actuated simply by hatred and contempt. His mistake was due to his belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures which he read on the basis of two separate communities. This is apparent in the whole volume of the literature of the time, with its complete silence about contemporary Jewish life. It

is always the historical picture of the Jews in the Old Testament which moves the eloquence of the writers, never the misdoings of their living Jewish neighbours. $^{66}\,$

For Parkes, it was this distortion which provided the foundation of modern antisemitism, even when antisemitism took a decisively anti-Christian /anti-religious turn as it did in many of the racial theories of antisemitism. 67 He concluded his study in The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue with the following observation which is still relevant for today. Being that it was written in 1934, in the time before the Holocaust, it certainly has a prophetic ring to it.

Fresh crimes were added to the historic crimes of the Old Testament. Ritual murder, the poisoning of wells, the profanation of the Host, all these are natural growths from the picture created by a Chrysostum or a Cyril. And the falsification of Jewish history itself persisted, and has persisted up to the present time in popular teaching. Scholars may know today of the beauty and profundity of the Jewish conception of life. They may know that 'some Jews' were responsible for the death of Jesus. But the Christian public as a whole, the great and overwhelming majority of the hundreds of millions of nominal Christians in the world, still believe that 'the Jews' killed Jesus, that they are a people rejected by their God, that all the beauty of their Bible belongs to the Christian Church and not to those by whom it was written; and if on this ground, so carefully prepared, modern antisemites have reared a structure of racial and economic propaganda, the final responsibility still rests with those who prepared the soil, created the deformation of the people, and so made these ineptitudes credible. 68

It is on this argument that Parkes bases his thesis that antisemitism's origins lie in Christian teachings not in the relations between Jews and Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world.

A growing number of Christians, Protestant and Catholic, are beginning to confront the Christian roots of antisemitism. For many, the Holocaust has been the motivating factor in this re-examination of Christian teachings. The noted Catholic theolgian, David Tracy,

has called upon Christians to apply an "hermenutic of saspicion" to Christian teachings to purge them of antisemitic ideas. 69 That James Parkes engaged in such an exercise prior to the Holocaust is noteworthy in itself. His work is also a challenge to all Christians. It isn't the Holocaust which should make them concerned about the Christian antisemitic tradition, it is the tradition itself.

Footnotes

The useage "antisemitism" appears throughout this paper following Parkes' idea that "anti-Semitism" is incorrect and misleading; it wrongly implies a movement against an imagined "Semitism". It is not a scientific term, but refers only to hatred of Jews. Unless otherwise noted, all books referred to are by James Parkes.

- 1. "Antisemitism from Ceasar to Luther" in $\underline{\text{Query}}$, 1938, p. 12-13. (ASCL hereafter).
- 2. An Enemy of the People: Antisemitism (1945), p. 65. (AEPA hereafter).
- 3. Christians, Jews and God, (1942, published by Youth Council on Jewish-Christian Relations) p. 4. (CJG hereafter). See also finished the Concretival History 1963. (A.S.) p. 64-65
- 4. A-S, p. 62.
- 5. The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism. London, The Soncino Press, 1934, p. 2. (CCS hereafter).
- 6. Ibid., p. 7, 13.
- 7. Ibid., p. 9. Parkes quotes a long passage from J. Juster, Vol. 1, p. 213 in support of his argument.
- 8. Ibid., p. 8.
- 9. Ibid., p. 11.
- 10. Ibid., p. 12. See also A History of the Jewish People, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1964, p. 33. (HJP hereafter).
- 11. C.C.S., p. 14.
- 12. "Christian Influence on the Status of the Jews in Europe" in <u>Historia Judaica</u>, Vol. 1, No. 1, Nov. 1938, p. 31. (CISJE hereafter). Also C.C.S., p. 20-21.
- 13. H.J.P., p. 32.
- 14. C.J.G., p. 14.
- 15. C.C.S., p. 17.

- 16. Ibid., p. 18.
- 17. Ibid., p. 8. See also article by Soloman Grayzel, "The Jews and roman Law", Jewish Quarterly Review 59, 1968-69, footnote p. 95, where he challenges Parkes' ideas on "collegium".
- 18. Ibid., p. 22.
- 19. Ibid., p. 23.
- 20. Ibid., p. 23.
- 21. The Foundations of Judaism and Christianity, London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1960, p. 108-109. (FJC hereafter). Parkes uses B.J. Bamberger's book, Prosilytism in the Talmudic Period, as a reference on this subject.
- 22. Ibid., p. 109.
- 23. Ibid., p. 109. See also HJP, p. 33.
- 24. Ibid., p. 110.
- Parkes, "Rome, Pagan and Christian" in <u>Judiasm and Christianity</u>, Vol. II, H. Loewe, editor. London. The Sheldon Press, p. 116-117. (RPC hereafter). See also C.C.S., p. 24.
- 26. CISJE, p. 31.
- 27. CCS, p. 111.
- 28. Ibid,., p. 25.
- 29. "Jews in Roman Catholic Education, unpublished. p. 2. (JRCE hereafter).
- 30. CCS, p. 27.
- 31. Prelude to Dialogue. London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1969.
- 32. CCS, p. 33. See also <u>Jesus</u>, <u>Paul</u>, <u>and the Jews</u>. London. S.C.M. Press, 1936, p. 292. This work contains some detailed examinations of the anti-Jewish themes in the Gospels. (J.P.J. hereafter).
- 33. CCS, p. 44-45.
- 34. The Jew and His Neighbour: a study in the causes of antisemitism. London. S.C.M. Press, 1930,p. 70.
- 35. CCS, p. 46.
- 36. Parkes' review of Paul Winter, On the Trail of Jesus.
 Berlin, Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1961. Unpublished draft,
 1961, p. 2.
- 37. Ibid., p. 3.

Gentiles who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and God: to convince others of this they had to prove that His Messianic claim, and the Doctrine of the Trinity which grew out of it, could be established from the Old Testament.

- 59. Ibid., p. 159.
- 60. A. Roy Eckardt. Your People, My People. New York: Quadrangle Books, 1974,p. 12.
- 61. <u>Judaism and Christianity</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. 119. See also Appendix of CCS for list of Laws concerning Jews, p. 379-404.
- 62. CIJSE., p. 33.
- 63. Ibid., p. 33-34.
- 64. Ibid., p. 34.
- 65. CCS.,p. 375.
- 66. CCS., p. 374.
- 67. See Uriel Tal, Christians and Jews in the Second Reich for a discussion on how the seccessful racial antisemites used Christianity to support their ideas.
- 68. CCS., p. 376.
- 69. See David Tracy. "Religious Values after the Holocaust", in Christians and Jews After the Holocaust, Abraham Peck, ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, pp. 87-110. Also see Arthur A. Cohen, "The Holocaust and Christian Theology: an interpretation of the problem" in Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism, (1919-1945). The Historical Society of Israel. Jerusalem, Israel, June, 1982.