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Article abstract

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Early Christianity's Polemical views of Jews and Judaism: a Sociological Perspective

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Early Christians had no single, shared perception of Jews and of Judaism. For some, Jews are demonic, while for others, they provide access to heaven's blessings. It appears difficult to account for such variation in theological terms alone. Rather, distinctive social patterns extant in Late Antique Christianity better explain either the abhorrence of, or fascination with, Jews and Judaic rites. One such social pattern characterizes emergent Roman orthodoxy. Another reflects an earlier, more decentralized Christianity which persisted alongside the former well into the late 4th century, if not beyond. For each type of Christian community the characterization of Jews is shown to 'fit' the group's 'mapping' (1) of the *loci* of the sacred and (2) of social order and authority. These congruences help render each mapping cogent — and with them, the perceptions of Jews and Judaism.

Les premiers chrétiens n'avaient pas une seule vision partagée des juifs et du judaïsme. Pour certains, les juifs sont démoniaques, pour d'autres, ils donnent accès aux grâces du ciel. Il semble difficile de rendre compte d'une telle variation en termes théologiques uniquement. Ce seraient davantage les règles sociales de la Chrétienté Antique Récente qui expliqueraient soit la haine soit la fascination que suscitaient les juifs et les rites judaïques. Parmi celles-ci, on note l'orthodoxie romaine naissante. Une autre est le reflet d'une chrétienté plus ancienne et plus décentralisée qui s'est maintenue jusqu'à la fin du 4^e siècle au moins. Pour chaque type de communauté chrétienne, la caractérisation des juifs semblent s'intégrer au système de représentation du sacré et à celui de l'ordre social et de l'autorité.

The Problematic: From the History of Theology to the Sociology of Knowledge

Scholars have tended to interpret vilification by Early Christianity of Jews and Judaism theologically.¹ Such polemical assertions as: Jews have fallen under the domain of Satan, that they are demons, or that their healers work by the powers of Hell are routinely explained as following from Christian doctrine.² But no basic Christian doctrine constitutes a syllogism of which these polemical statements about Jews and Judaism are the necessary conclusion. Paul's claims that in baptism one participates in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and that faith in Jesus wins eternal life in a "spiritual body" do imply that the life of Torah alone does not win salvation. Pauline doctrine may deny altogether the possibility of salvation via obedience to Torah. Such beliefs entail that the life of Torah is neither necessary nor perhaps sufficient to gain escape from death. That Jews are demons does not directly follow syllogistically or implicitly. One may supply the missing premises, such as, all those who have not accepted Christ are demons. But not all Christians would so state matters, notwithstanding their Pauline doctrine or Apostolic creeds. Early Christian theology, to be sure, partially underlies vilification of Jews. But these beliefs remain an insufficient explanation.

Some may appeal to an extensive pre-Christian antisemitic tradition in the Graeco-Roman world. To be

sure, 'libelous' claims about Jews' leperous origins, accounts of human sacrifice in the Jewish cult, vilification of the Sabbath as slothful and of Judaism as superstition, notions that the Jews are congenitally suited only for slavery, views that Jews hate all Greeks — all may be found in Greek and Latin literature of the time (see Stern, 1974-78). Josephus (*Contra Apionem*) attempts to refute Apion's and Manetho's accounts of alleged Jewish calumnies. Cicero (*Pro Flaccum*) libels Jews in his defense of one Flaccus against a charge of embezzling Jewish donations to the Jerusalem Temple. The church, of course, preserved Josephus' writings. Church fathers, like Eusebius (in his *Ecclesiastical History*), knew of other later pagans who slur Jews and Judaism. But just as Christian vilifications of Jews and Judaism does not follow from early Christian theology, neither do they follow from such Graeco-Roman claims.

The inadequacy of appealing to basic Christian beliefs (or to a 'pagan' anti-semitism) in explaining the early church's vilification of Jews and Judaism is further borne out by the fact that many Late Antique Christians (and 'pagans') viewed Jews and Judaism otherwise. As I will indicate at length, well into the late 4th century Gentile Christians in such major centres as Antioch associate with Jews, visit the synagogue and participate with Jews in Judaic liturgy. These Judaizing Christians share the same basic Christian beliefs as their contemporaries who vilify Jews and their religion. How can one account for these contradictory perceptions of Jews among early Gentile Christians?

This paper offers a different theoretical perspective than the theological one in explaining the facts at hand. Differing perceptions of Jews and Judaism result from distinctive forms of social organization in the early Gentile Church. In particular, two contradictory structures of authority in the Church underlie collective perceptions of early Christians, including their perceptions of Jews. In short, I argue that social experience significantly molds shared attitudes. Shared perceptions of the universe are part of a larger cultural environment of meaning. The rationality of these perceptions, felt to possess a self-evident character about them, results not from syllogisms based on antecedent Christian (or Graeco-Roman) premises, but from the relationship borne to the social structure, which itself encodes meaning. Views about how things (and people) 'really are' must fit this social universe. Otherwise shared perceptions lack requisite cogency and plausibility for members of the group (Douglas, 1975: 210-229, 276-318; Douglas, 1973; Douglas, 1978; Douglas, 1982; Durkheim, 1954; Geertz, 1966).

Polemical claims, such as those leveled by the early Church against Jews and Judaism, in particular force us to this anthropology of knowledge, because polemics constitute neither descriptive nor analytic claims arising from theological, nor any other, syllogisms. Rather they

are locative (Smith, 1978a), locating persons, objects and forms of behaviour somewhere within the social topography at or beyond its borders. Their rationality, then, appears all the more socially grounded, since they have precisely to do with mapping out the boundaries of the group.

What follows spells out these claims and gives some indication of the cogency of this theoretical approach to understanding early Christianity's vilification of Jews and Judaism. After a brief exposé of our theoretical and methodological framework, the argument runs from 'effect' to 'cause,' from two quite different sets of attitudes concerning Jews to two distinctive social forms. I begin by viewing perceptions of Jews within a larger context of which they seem a part, that is, the issue of Judaizing and the locus and control of supernatural power in early Christianity. Finally, I argue that at the heart of the matter lie two competing modes of social organization and of authority in the early Church. One characterizes emergent Roman orthodoxy; the other reflects an earlier, rather more decentralized and variegated Christianity, which persisted alongside the former well into the late 4th century.

Theoretical and Methodological Perspective

Scholars of Early Christianity and of Ancient Judaism often assert that Judaic and Christian texts, beliefs and world-views reflect their socio-cultural contexts. But researchers in Religious Studies have given little systematic attention to *how* these perceptions and teachings mirror their milieu. In part this is due to scholars' familiarity with classical western religions — a familiarity which takes for granted the 'normative' and 'normal' character of their doctrines, rites and literature. Deviance, that is, heresies, invite explanation; the 'normal' does not.

A second, and related, reason for the hiatus is that scholars of 'classical' Judaism and of Early Christianity have not adopted and adapted theoretical perspectives which facilitate the systematic study of religious belief in relation to social order and culture. The tendency to theological explanations — even the appeal to the history of ideas — begs too many theoretical and methodological questions. Interpreting and 'explaining' the early church's perceptions of Jews and Judaism invites the query. What for a particular community is normal about 'normal' views of the outsider? Wherein lies for members of the group the cogency of such perception? In light of the difficulties raised at the outset of this essay, we propose to Religious Studies that in the methodological and theoretical perspectives of social anthropology one may find tools which shed light upon the problem. This essay argues that the cogency of such perceptions as the early Church had of Jews and Judaism has to do with the 'fit'

or ‘homological relationship’ which obtain across the various structured patterns constituting the socio-cultural setting.

C. Geertz (1966) has proposed that “religious knowledge” finds its rationality in a “mutually confirming” relationship with other aspects of the cultural system. M. Douglas (1973 and 1978) has empirically shown that the social map, or ordered pattern of social relationships, will significantly correspond to the mapping of the world in belief, rituals, rules and taboos. She points to a tendency for patterns implicit in the social and other spheres to replicate one another. Because of this tendency the actors experience any one instance of the pattern as “emotionally satisfying” (Geertz, 1966) or “self-evidently appropriate” (Douglas, 1975: 276-318).

Of the various structured or patterned spheres of the cultural setting, Douglas views the social setting as the independent, determining variable, with respect to which other mappings (or, ‘knowledge’) of the world will vary and in terms of which these mappings will be felt to be self-evidently true. Yet for Douglas the social system effects a bias toward certain patterns and their implicit meanings, rather than determining outright their shape and character. Like Durkheim (1964) she recognizes that this bias effectively limits what is *plausible* to the group, given what is historically *available* to work with. Cultural bias operates as movement in one direction or another along a continuum the ends of which are given by the group’s antecedent formulations. The comparison of historically ‘close’ groups, then, will shed light upon the meanings communicated by the patterns of any one group.

Viewing variation in ritual patterns or in perceptions as movement along an historically given continuum seems particularly salient in the case at hand. For, as mentioned, different Early Christian groups, with much the same religious tradition as antecedent background, express different, opposing views of Jews and Judaism. This variation, then, is rendered intelligible to us in terms of these Christian groups’ differing social organization. It is in terms of the latter that each group’s perceptions are experienced by its members as compelling, cogent, self-evident. For each community group the pattern of its characterization of Jews will be shown, relative to other contemporary Christian characterizations, to ‘fit’ the group’s ‘mapping’ of the *loci* of the sacred and of social order and authority. These congruencies help render each mapping cogent — and with them, the perceptions of Jews and Judaism.

Polemical Attitudes to Jews and the Problem of Judaizing

As intimated at the outset, to view early Christian anti-Judaism as a correlate of the early Gentile Church’s struggle for a self-definition apart from Judaism remains a

commonplace — but wholly insufficient to the understanding of Christian polemics against Jews over the first four centuries of Christianity. The theological legitimacy of a Gentile Church hardly concerned many early Christians beyond the beginning of the 2nd century. To see that problem underlying polemics such as John Chrysostom’s in 386 CE fails to convince. Rather a revulsion of Jews and Judaism, on the one hand, and an abhorrence for Judaizing, on the other, appear to be persistent correlates from circa 250-400 (Kimmelman, 1981: 236-40). Hence we may commence with the problem of Judaizing in the Church.

Chrysostom furnishes a point of departure. His virulent anti-Judaic polemics are typical. For him Jews are cursed by, and because of, their observance of an abrogated Law, are in league with demons or are possessed by them, perform “magic” by the agency of their indwelling demonic spirits, and the like. The occasion for such vilification he clearly pegs on Judaizing. Even for the now triumphant Church of Chrysostom, the Jews and dealings with them present a seduction greater than that of the Arian heresy. Thus:

And many who belong to us and say that they believe in our teaching, attend their [the Jews’] festivals, and even share in their celebrations and join in their fasts. It is this evil practice I now wish to drive from the church. Sermons against the Anomoeans [Arians] can be delivered at another time and the delay would not work any harm. But if those who are sick with Judaism are not healed now when the Jewish [High Holy Day] festivals are “near at the very door” (Mt 24:33), I am afraid that some, out of misguided habit and gross ignorance, will share in their transgressions, and sermons about such matters would be pointless. If the offenders are not present to hear what we say today, afterward medicine would be applied in vain because they would have already committed the sin. This is the reason I am in a hurry to take up this matter before the [Jewish] festivals. That is the way doctors do things. They deal with the most urgent and acute sickness first. [*Homily I Against the Jews, Patrologia Graeca*, 48.844-845, in Meeks and Wilkens, 1978:86, my interpolations]

The underlying problem to which Chrysostom’s *Homilies Against the Jews*, are intended to respond, then, appears not simply to be the inclusion of Judaic practices in organized Christian ritual, but also associating with Jews by participating with the Jewish community in the latter’s rites. The question is: May one have any personal association with Judaic rites in addition to one’s (Gentile) Christian affiliations and practices? Chrysostom decries: attendance at synagogue liturgies for the New Year and Day of Atonement; fasting on the latter and perhaps on other Jewish fasts; using Jewish courts; considering the synagogue a *locus sanctus* because of the sacralizing presence of the “scrolls of the Law and Prophets;” and the patronizing

of Jewish charismatic Holy Men for healings and prophylactics.

Neither the appropriation of Jewish rites nor the aforementioned forms of association with Jews and Judaism commences in late 4th century Christianity. Documents from the earliest decades of Christianity deal with Judaizing. The epistles of Paul take up the issue. The *Didache* enjoins Christians to fast on days other than Mondays and Thursdays, “because your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites <i.e. the Jews> (8:1). So too (in 8:2) Jewish liturgy is forbidden, again because “you must not pray like the hypocrites.” The *Didaschalia Apostolorum* exhorts Christians to abandon Jewish rites from the “Second Legislation;” the exhortation is accompanied by anti-Judaic characterizations.

Several letters attributed to Ignatius (*To the Magnesians* and *To the Philadelphians*) add to this picture an extensive Judaizing threat arising from Christian observance of the Jewish Sabbath. The epistles suggest that Gentile Christian teachers were responsible for this tendency.

Now if anyone preaches Judaism to you, pay no attention to him. For it is better to hear about Christianity from one of the circumcision than Judaism from a Gentile <Christian>. [Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians* 6, (Richardson, 1970:109)]

Ignatius too uses typical anti-Jewish polemics to legitimate his attack on Judaizing (in this context, on Sabbath observance). He states (*To the Magnesians*, 8-9) that the Jews “persecuted” their own prophets, who foreshadowed the Gospel and themselves “lived Jesus Christ’s way;... they ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord’s day...”

Participation with the Jewish community in synagogal functions does not begin with Chrysostom. Origen, for example, gives evidence of the same. He denounces in particular Christian attendance at the synagogue during the Sabbath liturgy.³

Throughout the first four centuries of Early Christianity, then, one often finds within canonical literature a correlation of anti-Jewish and anti-Judaic polemics with an abiding concern for Judaizing tendencies. To explain the link I would first venture some general remarks about the larger perceptual worlds of which negative and positive attitudes to Judaizing remain only a part.

Judaizing and the Locus and Control of Supernatural Power

The Judaizing-question in the early church is bound up most immediately with the larger issue of the *locus* and control of sacred power. Judaizing Christians see such power manifested even in objects, sites, rites and persons deemed holy by their Diaspora Jewish neighbours (see Lightstone, 1984). Thus the Torah Scrolls offer a

source of supernatural force⁴ — this irrespective of their Judaic provenance. The issue separating Chrysostom and his Judaizing parishioners may be translated into distinctive perceptions of the character and source of divine power.

Peter Brown (1982) accounts for the schism in the 7th century of Eastern from Western Christendom in terms of such differing attitudes to supernatural power in East and West. Since such a distinction seems germane to our problem, a cursory look at Brown’s characterizations will prove helpful.

Of early Christianity in general Brown (1982:176) states:

...the Christian communities were prepared to invest individual human beings with supernatural powers... It was as precisely identifiable bearers of the holy, and as heirs of an imagined genealogy of similar bearers of the holy — apostles, martyrs, prophets — that the Christian leaders were able to form Christian communities. The groups that took up a stance to the society and culture of their times were formed around known and revered *loci* of the holy — and these *loci* tended to be human beings.

Thus early Christian groups dotted their world with places and persons who dispensed the benefits of the deity; communities oriented themselves about these sources.

The emergent tension between East and West Brown attributes to the increased control in the West over the *locus of divine power*. “*In the West*,” he states, “the precise locus of the supernatural power associated with the holy was fixed with increasing precision” (Brown, 1982:178). The holy came increasingly to fall within fixed and overarching definitions of social structure and authority. “Here,” Brown intimates, “we are dealing with oligarchies of bishops powerful enough to overshadow any other bearers of the holy, but who were themselves locked in such bitter competition to remain equal as to deny holiness to any but the most well tried, that is, the most safely dead figure” (Brown, 1982:187).

In the East not only did the earlier pattern of widely scattered local *loci* of the supernatural persist, but also by the 7th century “the eastern Church had entered on to... a baffling ‘crisis of overproduction’ of the holy. More men were accepted as bearers or agents of the supernatural on earth, and in a far greater variety of situations... As a result, the precise locus of spiritual power in Byzantium remained... tantalizingly ambiguous” (Brown, 1982:179). Of this situation Brown further notes, “The holy escaped social definition — or, rather, its absence of social definition became intelligible — because it was thought of principally as a power that ‘manifested’ itself in a manner that was as vivid as it was discontinuous with normal human expectations” (Brown, 1982:182). Thus “...moments of *epiphaneia* were significantly widely-distributed throughout the whole range of East Roman religious experience” (Brown, 1982:183).

These distinctions of Eastern from Western Christendom of the Early Medieval Period obtain as well in Late Antiquity. But the division is less a geographic one than is the case several centuries later. Within the East itself circa 200-400 (and to a lesser degree in the West) various parties aligned themselves with respect to two distinctive perceptions of the *loci* of sacred power.

Chrysostom, Irenaeus, Ignatius and their like foreshadow that pattern which in the 7th century dominated in the West. But Chrysostom's Judaizing parishioners and other Late Antique groups evince those attitudes to the holy later to characterize Eastern Christendom. These early Gentile Christians inhabited a world in which various persons, rites and places separately or in catalytic combination dispensed the saving power of the deity and the Lord Jesus to the believer. Holy Men of lesser and greater rank provided potions and incantations, or merely commanded by their own authority the release of their clients from illness, demons and the like (M. Smith, 1978). The bones of saints and martyrs also effected the same. And the sacramental hierophany of the flesh and blood of the risen Lord by means of the Eucharist often took place in the cemeteries, where the tombs of the dead provided gateways to heaven for the rites and prayers of the communicant (Brown, 1981; Brown, 1982; Bauer, 1971; Markus, 1980; Rothkrug, n.d.).

This Christian world, then, was dotted with persons and places at which access to the sacred power of heaven might be had. And co-lateral rites, Holy Men, martyrs' tombs and ritual objects (like the Torah Scrolls) played the same role for the Diaspora Jewish community (Lightstone, 1984). Christians, in their search for all available loci of the sacred, shared in those of the Jews. Since Jews of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora similarly perceived the operation of God's power on earth, the Diaspora Jews did not view as anathema this co-usage.

Identity, Community and Authority: Competing Structures of Allegiance in Early Christianity

Conflicting Christian attitudes to sacred power reflect significantly different social mappings in early Christianity. The data overwhelmingly speak for one side of the conflict, for the bishops ultimately palatable to the Western, Roman episcopal hierarchy. But one may assert much about the state of affairs which they sought to assimilate to themselves.

Through the second and third centuries a plethora of Christian groups flourished. They possessed distinctive forms of organization and self-understanding as followers of Christ (Brown, 1981; Brown, 1982; Bauer, 1971; Markus, 1980; Rothkrug, n.d.). These communities were not deviations from some primitive Christian unity, as the New Testament Canon and Patristic literature portray matters. Such a vision of unity in early

Christianity is a retrospective projection; it legitimates what in the 4th and 5th centuries emerged as the "universal" Roman church, with its overarching hierarchy, rites and theology. Chrysostom, Irenaeus, and Ignatius, among others, speak for this emerging orthodoxy. They not only decry Judaizing but also expel other heresies from the "body of Christ," the "universal church."

The links between Judaizing, heresy and episcopal authority in Ignatius' case are aptly spelled out by Schoedel (1980:36):

For any challenge to Ignatius' own authority or to the competence of the local bishops is seen as a threat to the coherence of the group. Thus Ignatius understood his opposition to the Philadelphian Judaizers as the activity of 'a man set on unity' (Phil. 8:1)... Ignatius values loyalty to the group over individual inquiry. Exclusion and unity are two sides of the same coin.

In this regard it is interesting to note as well that what is said by heresiologists in the early Church about heretics resembles in many ways what is said, for example, by Chrysostom, of Jews' demonic associations (Vallee, 1981:94-87).

Orthodoxy's early Christian protagonists allow decentralized and more varied forms of access to heaven, because they evince more localized loci of Christian life and identity. For these Christians, as for Diaspora Jews, the structure of the world of sacred power served their respective social universes. Herein lay the cogency of their perceptions of the supernatural. These Jews and Christians move about a larger society, populated by one another, as well as by 'pagans;' they have and require constant intercourse with this mixed and undifferentiated social universe. R.M. Grant (1980:28), attempting to characterize this environment (as experienced by early Christians), allows a statement from Tertullian (*Apol.* 42) to stand as his own conclusion:

<We Christians> live with you, enjoy the same food, have the same manner of life, and dress, the same requirements for life... We cannot dwell together in the world, without the market-place, without butchers, without your baths, shops, factories, taverns, fairs and other places of business. We sail in ships with you, serve in the army, till the ground, engage in trade as you do; we provide skills and services to the public for your benefit.

The anomalous and ambiguous character of this environment finds its counterpart in direct access at numerous junctures and in various mendicant persons to the sacred, itself experienced as ambiguous. The tangeable effects of this pattern of divine mediation are to allow domicile in this undifferentiated territory while offering release from its anomalies and ambiguities. Itinerant Holy Men at once epitomize the condition of

the Gentile Christian and Diaspora Jew, as they also provide the prophylaxis for their condition. They travel through that world, in the midst of ambiguity, mediating between heaven and earth and between their respective communities, just as the Jew or Christian must mingle with pagans and with one another while maintaining meaningful links with their brethren.

As J. Z. Smith (1978b) has argued, Jews in the Diaspora provided one instance of “map without territory,” a mapping of ordered world without a corresponding native territorial life. But even more so, they provided a model for mapping in which ordered space need not be contiguous; rather it could be interdispersed throughout ‘foreign’ mappings and territory, even at the very local, mundane level of social interaction and experience. This social topography the Jews reproduced in their drawing of their map of access to heaven (Lightstone, 1984). In all, just this was required as well by the early Christian communities; they too set themselves off from their local pagan neighbours, and were at some distance from other communities of related brethren.

Overlaying this localized and variegated early Christianity there emerged an overarching “universal Church,” associated with the “orthodox” bishops. This entailed the standardization of belief, liturgy and practice, to be sure. But these orthodox symbolic systems too serve a distinctive socio-organizational structure, the *Church* configured by the bishops in a manner much like the Empire (Markus, 1980; Brown, 1982). Thus Christ’s power, like authority and social allegiance, was located in the whole. The episcopate identified the Church with the college of bishops; and early on the see of Rome occupied the centre of this map.

Christian identity in this topography meant being part of and subject to this whole, as represented in the person of the *local* bishop and in *his* presbyterate. “Other” (*heteros*) Christians, who mitigated exclusive episcopal authority, lay either outside the boundaries of “the Church” or as anomalous beings within it. In the main, then, itinerant Holy Men, prophets, charismatics, and even the cults of the saints and martyrs, the bishops assimilated to their imperial ecclesiastical model (Brown, 1981; Markus, 1980). The bishop, not the prophet, speaks for Christ; the bishop’s and presbyter’s celebration of the Eucharist in the churches dispenses the blessings of Christ.

The church had to forge its unitary world out of various, discrete communities. As local associations, many bases for social cohesion and identity within each Christian community remained readily at hand (Grant, 1980; Meeks, 1983). Common language, local tradition and social norms, as well as loyalty to Christ, formed the basis for local Christian associations. These groups appear much like other associations which dotted the map of the Graeco-Roman topography.

What, however, reinforced local Christian communities and identity thwarted a pan-native, hierarchical Christian world. The Church Universal neutralized sources of local loyalty and provided an identity which had to be defined otherwise. For “the Church” could not invoke any highly specific body of shared norms, mundane patterns and traditions as operated at the local level. And orthodoxy was not likely to devise or co-opt Gauls, Egyptians, Greeks, Spaniards, etc., to any single social configuration of requisite specificity. Thus boundary definition and maintenance bore much weight in forging a Universal Christian world. The insulation of the edges of the group, not (as before) the mediation across those frontiers, emerges as the problematic for orthodoxy. Here standard belief and liturgy focused primarily upon the bishop and his presbyters played their role.

Attitudes to the Jew and Judaism in Context

The Church Universal and the local Christian associations each provided distinctive social contexts for attitudes and claims about Jews as possible bearers of divine power. The Church forged a new Christian identity in a Christendom replete with local loyalties and norms; access to the benefits of the supernatural could not be allowed to float free of the emerging Catholic order. Jews, as the object of Judaizing tendencies, were, therefore, problematic. For the local Christian brotherhoods various sources of divine power had provided rallying points for nascent Christian communities, which lay somewhat outside, but culturally a part of, the established social order. Jews and Judaic rites constituted such focal points, among others. Thus for both Chrysostom and his Judaizing parishioners the Jewish Holy Man lay outside the Christian social sphere. But for one he was to be shunned, hence demonic; for others he furnished access to supernatural forces. Chrysostom’s Jewish Holy Men challenge the Catholic social order. For Judaizers, as for devotees of the stylite Saints, these living conduits of the divine not only were irrelevant to the institutionalized authority, but also could fulfill their function for early Christians largely *because* as charismatic figures they were so located.

To return, then, to orthodox patristic polemics against Jews — one ought not separate what is said of Jews and Judaism from statements about others who similarly undermine the episcopal order. The Church could suffer few who claimed to dispense on earth God’s blessings. Saints’ relics might be removed from cemeteries to the episcopal altars; where they could, the bishops might “declare no man holy until he is dead” — so Gregory of Tours. Some remain, for various reasons, less assimilable, like various heresiarchs and heresies and the Jews to whom Judaizers flock.

Accordingly, throughout the 2nd to late 4th centuries, orthodoxy's statements about Jews are increasingly couched in the same polemical language as that used for gnostics⁵ and other heretics (Vallee, 1981). They are in league with the devil; they are demons incarnate; they are magicians — all just like the heresiarchs. Thus Irenaeus exhorts Christians to have nothing to do with heretics, who are 'magicians' and 'instruments of Satan' (*Against Heresies* II. 31. 1-3; see Vallee, 1980:182; Vallee, 1981:94-97). And by the end of the 2nd and beginning of the 3rd centuries polemics against Jews are included in heresiologies, with the vilification of one assimilated to the other in the same literary works (Vallee, 1981:97). Unlike heretics, Jews neither claim to be the true Christians nor, from the 2nd century on, engage in any serious missionizing of Christians. Jews do, however, welcome Gentile and Gentile-Christian participation in the synagogue and in other Judaic spheres. Jewish Holy Men accept Gentile and Gentile-Christian clientele. The Jews, for their part, are able to welcome this participation, because the strongly ethnic basis for their group identity will be little affected by the presence of non-ethnic participants in some Judaic rites and institutions. These parallel positions of heretics and the Diaspora Jews of the Late Roman world as centrifugal social forces for an emergent Universal Church order explain the same polemical perceptions of both Jew and heretic alike. Indeed, Chrysostom in the opening homily *Against the Jews* draws his parishioners' attention to the likeness.

In sum, early Christians had no single, shared perception of Jews and of Judaism. For some Jews are demonic, while for others they provide access to heaven's blessings. It appears difficult to account for such variation in theological terms alone. Rather, distinctive social patterns extant in Late Antique Christianity better explain either the abhorrence of, or fascination with, Jews and Judaic rites. One such social pattern characterizes emergent Roman orthodoxy. Another reflects an earlier, more decentralized Christianity, which persisted alongside the former well into the late 4th century, if not beyond.

General theoretical approaches, such as we have attempted, distort somewhat. But they are not in the first place intended as empirical generalizations. For theory is not essentially descriptive. Herein lies its power to shed new light on matters. Theory, however, invites ongoing testing. If this essay lends weight to our theoretical approach, it warrants the attention of others who would further test it.

NOTES

1. I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. W.S. Green, University of Rochester, who extensively commented upon an

earlier version of this essay. If at times I failed to heed his advice, I alone am to blame.

2. I shall not document the range and extent of these accusations, as many have concerned themselves with precisely this. See Richardson and Granskou (1986), and Wilson (1986).

3. Subsequent to Ignatius and prior to Chrysostom, evidence for synagogue attendance and Sabbath observance is supplied by Origen, among others, who in countering tells his Judaizing Christians that the Jews curse Christians in their liturgy, an alleged fact for which Kimmelman (1981) can find insufficient evidence. Chrysostom too must account for Jewish acceptance of Christians in the synagogue as an ingenuous masking of their true aims; really, says Chrysostom, the Jews mock these Christians behind their backs (see Lightstone, 1984:125-140).

4. Interestingly, this seems precisely the Neo-Platonic understanding of theurgy as represented in Prophyry and Iamblichus.

5. I consider, however, gnostic groups a less valuable point of comparison as one might well argue that their beliefs contain an inherent anti-hierarchical character, a point basic to E. Pagels' methodological perspective (Pagels, 1982), and aptly stated by B.A. Pearson (1980:160): "The very nature of the Gnostic religion, however, with its focus on self-realization and spiritual freedom, would mitigate against the establishment of an institutionalized 'normative' group identity. ...The Gnostic religion thereby became an important negative factor in the institutionalization of the catholic church ..." Or as G. Vallee (1980:183 and 181-82) puts matters: "for Irenaeus "Gnostics relativize the authority of the presbyters;" see *Against Heresies* V.29.2ff.

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