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A REVIEW ARTICLE

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***HATED WITHOUT A CAUSE?:
A SURVEY OF ANTI-SEMITISM***

Graham Keith

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During the last two thousand years, three momentous events took place in the history of the Jews: the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D., the Holocaust (1932-45), and the birth of the State of Israel during the fifth decade of this century. Not only do they occupy center stage in Jewish history, but they are of equal importance to Christians as well. *Hated Without a Cause?* comes at an important time as we are about to enter the third millennium after the birth of Christ. The author, Dr. Graham Keith, teaches Religious Education at James Hamilton Academy in Ayr, Scotland. He undertook to write this book after viewing, in 1991, a television series titled *The Longest Hatred* which dealt with anti-Semitism. After some research and study he was "convinced that there was more to the Christian legacy of anti-Semitism than" he "had at first thought."

The book consists of twelve chapters. In the first, "Anti-Semitism in the Time Before Christianity," Professor Keith remarks on the earliest literary manifestation of anti-Semitism: "We can, therefore, say with confidence that tensions

between the Greek and Jewish populations in Egypt in the second or possibly in the third century BC saw the start of a literary tradition of anti-Semitism which has persisted in varied forms until today" (10).

Chapter Two deals with a controversial topic, "Anti-Semitism in the New Testament—the Gospels and Acts." Dr. Keith states the case in these words:

Since the ending of the Nazi Holocaust the Christian Church has been buffeted by two distinct storms of criticism about its responsibility for generations of anti-Semitism. The first storm was stimulated by Jules Isaac, a Jewish historian from France. . . . [He] insisted that the Christian church was primarily responsible for the anti-Semitic legacy on which the Nazis capitalized. But he did so without impugning the New Testament. Instead, he claimed the church had misunderstood its own Scriptures and its own founder. The second storm was initiated by a Roman Catholic theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, who argued . . . that the New Testament could not be exonerated from the charge of inherent anti-Semitism (34).

It is very important, as we follow Keith's argument, to be careful in our exegesis of the pertinent passages in the New Testament which deal with the opposition of the Jewish authorities to the Lord Jesus Christ and His response to their hostility. This is why there must be a distinction between anti-Semitism and an opposition to Judaism. The former is an antipathy to a specific people based on their race, while the latter is a religious opposition to a reconstruction of Old Testament faith in Rabbinical Judaism.

In Chapter Three, "The Testimony of the Apostle Paul," Keith expounds an interpretation of Romans 11 which reminds us of John Murray's exegesis of this passage.

I would conclude that Paul's discussion in Romans 11,

especially at verses 12, 15 and 26, does entail a future blessing on the Jews out of all proportion to anything Paul saw in his own day, a blessing that would have beneficial repercussions for the whole church of Jews and Gentiles alike (68).

Chapter Four ends with a rebuttal of the charge that the New Testament is guilty of anti-Semitism:

The charge, therefore, that anti-Semitism is embedded in the New Testament is false. Certainly, if sections of the New Testament are read superficially or without due regard to the full context, they may well provide scope for those who come looking for additional fuel to fan the flames of anti-Semitic prejudice which has already been started for very different reasons. Sadly, the church has been guilty of misreading its own Scriptures at this very point, and in the process has betrayed the same blindness as has afflicted the Jews. Subsequent history has proved the appropriateness of the warning that Paul issued to the gentile church against the same religious arrogance as led the Jews to reject Jesus. Obviously we cannot blame the New Testament for this; the real culprit is gentile arrogance in ignoring the plain warning of scripture (90).

After detailing in Chapter Five the attitude of the early church toward the Jews, Keith describes the "Hardening of Attitudes Toward the Jews During the Middle Ages" in Chapter Six. This legacy is carried over, with some modifications, to the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Chapter Seven is dedicated to a discussion of Luther and the Jews. A distinction is made between Luther's early writings and those which date from the latter part of his life. In 1523 he published a tract, "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew." "It was addressed both to gentiles to urge them to a brotherly respect for the Jews, since they were kinsmen of Christ, and to Jews in the hope that some of

them might be converted to Christ" (151).

In his later years, Luther became embittered by the lack of response of the Jews to the gospel offer. He wrote in 1543 a major work with this provocative title, "On the Jews and Their Lies." Sadly, as Keith put it: "Perhaps the worst of Luther's legacy was left until this century when the Nazis were able to make capital out of the popular perception of Luther as an anti-Semite and German nationalist" (169).

In Chapter Eight, "The Reformation After Luther," we are introduced to the other Reformers, and especially to John Calvin's attitude toward the Jews. While not shedding completely the legacy of the Middle Ages, Calvin's understanding of the total biblical message made him quite different from Luther.

Calvin believed that the Apostle Paul implied in Romans 11 that it was improper to despair of the salvation of the Jews. Commenting on verse 28, he was bold enough to say, "Paul shows that the very worst feature in the Jews does not mean that they are on that account to be despised by the gentiles." On both counts he had rebuked the attitude of the later Luther (179).

Chapter Nine, "From the Reformation to the French Revolution," details the impact of Spinoza on the Jews of Europe. Spinoza played a major role in sowing the seeds of doubt among the Jews regarding their status as a chosen people as well as their messianic hope. The Enlightenment brought about the process of emancipation and the challenge of assimilation.

In Chapter Ten, "Modern European Anti-Semitism," the author disputes the claim that anti-Semitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was primarily a German phenomenon. Both in Russia and in France, there were shocking evidences of a virulent type of anti-Semitic attitudes and actions. The state-sponsored pogroms in Russia drove out multitudes of Jews, forcing them to seek shel-

ter elsewhere. The Dreyfus Affair in France exposed a strong anti-Semitic current running not only among segments of the French population, but equally within the high command of the French army. Of course, one cannot deny that anti-Semitism was quite strong even before the defeat of Germany in World War I. But it was left for Hitler and the Nazis to bring about the horrors of the Holocaust.

Simon Wiesenthal has pointed out that since a stand was not made against the lesser injustices . . . it became impossible to resist the much greater injustices. By endorsing the idea that there was a Jewish problem, the [German] churches did not oppose the first comparatively mild anti-Jewish measures of the Third Reich. And so, by the time the trains started running to Auschwitz it was too late to do anything significant (240-41).

Chapter Eleven treats the subject of "Arab and Islamic Anti-Semitism." This topic is extremely important because it deals with a phenomenon which is much alive today and is not likely to disappear in the near future. In Islam, both Jews and Christians were classified as *dhimmis*, i.e., the protected people. They were treated as second-class subjects, but anti-Semitism was not known during the first thirteen centuries of Arab or Islamic history. What gave rise to this attitude was political Zionism and the birth of Israel. As Keith put it: "The very existence of a sovereign Jewish state in the Arab heartland . . . represents a threat to the political triumphalism which is part of the Muslim identity" (251). While there are some hopeful signs that certain Arab leaders are willing to accept Israel's existence, this mood is not necessarily shared by the masses in the Arab world.

I found Chapter Twelve, "Conclusion," of great help. It comes from the heart of a Christian scholar of the Reformed tradition who endeavors to do justice to the dif-

ficult subject he has treated. While taking history seriously, his solution is sought from within the framework of the Bible. He does not agree with liberal Protestants who want to declare a moratorium on the evangelization of the Jews. Neither does he approve the hermeneutics of such American Christian fundamentalists as Hal Lindsey, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson:

They have identified the emergence of a Jewish state as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, a vital stage on the road to the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Christ. . . . [U]nreserved support for the Jewish leadership in Israel will neither promote justice among the peoples of the Middle East nor further the claims of Jesus of Nazareth among the Jewish people (280, 282).

This book is highly recommended for its thorough scholarship and genuine love and concern for the ancient people of Israel who have suffered beyond measure in our century. I hope it will soon be available in a North American edition.

Author

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