

developed into the Christian church, the one-sided reading of Paul fitted like a glove. Eventually, the notion of the Apostle to the Gentiles arose, the man who repudiated his original religious identity in order to become the one who brought the salvation of the God of Israel, not to the Jews, but to the non-Jews, and at the same time banished everything Jewish to the rubbish heap.

We are now going to move forwards, almost two thousand years in time, and examine how this idea has been utilized and how the image of another, even more complex Paul, is gradually emerging.

## THE EMERGENCE OF A PARADIGM

### The Tübingen School and German Idealism

#### *Hegel and Dialectics*

The leading philosopher in nineteenth-century Germany was no doubt Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770–1831). In his early years, he studied theology at the University of Tübingen with the purpose of becoming a minister. While there, he was strongly attracted to mysticism, something that is also evident in his philosophy, which to a great extent is characterized by theological issues. From 1818 until his death he held a professorship in Berlin. In Tübingen, where he had started his academic career, his influence would eventually result in the emergence of one of the most radical theological schools the world had seen: the Tübingen School.

In view of the enormous influence that his ideas generally had, it is perhaps only natural that Hegel's philosophy had such an impact on the theological development in the nineteenth century. During his sojourn at the Berlin University, he gathered adepts from all over Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century, most leading philosophers were Hegelians.

Many theologians saw in Hegel's philosophical system new opportunities to recover ground after the humiliating defeat theology had suffered from the philosophy of the Enlightenment. Although the "absolute spirit" of Hegel was something quite different from the Christian God, Hegel regarded Christianity as the highest form of religion and even

used basic Christian terms, though with a rather different tenor. The main reason why Hegel's philosophy became so popular was presumably that it comprised every aspect of the world, from the approach to knowledge to the enfolding of history—art, culture, religion, and the social structure of society.

The basis of Hegel's philosophical system is far-reaching rationalism. Thought and reality merge completely, but while Hegel's predecessors imagined a system consisting of immutable thoughts and an unalterable reality, Hegel conceived of thought as a continuous process toward higher and higher stages. This process, which according to Hegel is the process of reality, progresses due to the fact that every state brings forth its own negation, which then gives birth to a more complex unity. Every *thesis* generates its *antithesis*, and these two opposites are joined in a *synthesis*. This synthesis partially embodies elements from both thesis and antithesis, but does not quite obliterate those elements. It is important to note already that the synthesis represents a *higher order*.

The point of departure for Hegel is the most abstract conceivable notion, the term "being," which at the same time represents "the absolute." According to Hegel, the conception of "pure being" will turn into its opposite, that is, "nothing." When these two conceptions merge, the synthesis "becoming" appears, including elements from both the thesis "being" and the antithesis "nothing." In this manner, not only the formation of conceptions, but the entire development of the world evolves in dialectic triads, in which every new evolutionary stage turns into its opposite and then again merges with its own negation. In this way the evolution of the world rises to never-ceasing higher stages.

In Hegel's world nothing was better in former times. The past always represents a lower evolutionary form than the present, and the future always holds something better in store. The reason for this is that the dialectical process is not governed by chance. Behind the scenes, "the world spirit" acts, and evolution is in fact nothing but this spirit manifest in concrete form in history. While most people are unaware of this, a few, the geniuses and the heroes of history, are capable of actively taking part in the world evolution. The history of the world is thus a process run by reason, which in reality is the true lord of the world. Hegel's philosophy inspired a whole generation of

young theologians, but hardly those who represented theological orthodoxy.

#### *F. C. Baur and the Tübingen School*

The Tübingen School is one example of what Hegel's philosophical system gave rise to, and it is closely associated with Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860). Baur came to Tübingen in 1809 and studied philosophy for some years and then theology. Tübingen already housed a Tübingen School, which reached its peak during the first decades of the nineteenth century. It was founded by Ernst Gottlieb Storr, who died in 1805, but his work was carried on by Ernst Gottlieb Bengel, grandson of the famous biblical scholar Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), who had been Storr's mentor. Bengel came to exert great influence on the young Baur, who thus received his basic theological training within a relatively conservative, Lutheran theological tradition.

The aim of the Old Tübingen School was to create a scientific basis for the authority of the Bible by means of historical research. Storr wanted to prove the authenticity of the New Testament and show that divine revelation is not contradicted by reason. However, among the successors of Storr, a rather strong Kantian trait could be discerned, and a certain shifting of emphasis toward the ethical side of the Christian faith took place: the true nature of Jesus was demonstrated by the divine morality and the ethical truths revealed in his teaching. The Old Tübingen School was essentially nothing but a type of conservative Christianity trying to trim its sails to the new philosophical winds, without giving up its own supernatural foundation.

Baur graduated from the University of Tübingen in 1814 and made a living as a private tutor and teacher until he was offered a position as professor at the lower seminary in Blaubeuren.<sup>1</sup> Here he wrote his first book, *Symbolik und Mythologie, oder die Naturreligion der Antiquität* ("Symbol and Mythology or Nature Religion of Antiquity," 1824/25). This examination of the nature of religion hardly seems inspired by Hegel—the work rather displays influences from Schleiermacher, Schelling, and Fichte. Baur's interest in Hegel only surfaced when he received the summons to take over the professorship in Tübingen in 1826 and was initiated by one of his soon-to-be famous disciples, David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874).

Strauss studied in Tübingen between 1825 and 1829 and gradually became interested in the Hegelian philosophical system. He even moved to Berlin in order to attend Hegel's lectures and also met Hegel shortly before his death. Strauss remained in Berlin until 1832, when he returned to Tübingen to teach at the Protestant seminary for Württemberg theologians. After Hegel's death, Strauss attended the lectures on Jesus by Schleiermacher, who inspired him to undertake his own study of the life of Jesus. In 1835, his book, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (*The Life of Jesus*, ET 1846), was published. This book caused a seldom-seen sensation. The entire theological establishment was shaken to its very foundations and the book gave rise to a heated debate all over Europe.

Strauss's book constitutes the definitive antithesis of the Old Tübingen School, which strove to form a synthesis between the Jesus of scholarship and the Jesus of faith. *Das Leben Jesu* instead blasted an unbridgeable chasm between the historical Jesus and the Christ the Christians confessed. Strauss dismissed all rational and supernatural interpretations of the miracle narratives in the Gospels. According to Strauss, these were but myths created by the earliest disciples of Jesus. The publication of the book had far-reaching consequences for Strauss and he was immediately dismissed from his position in Tübingen. During this time, Baur kept a low profile. Although he shared Strauss's opinions, he understood that if he did not want to face the same fate as Strauss, he simply had to bide his time. Baur was encumbered enough by his friendship with Strauss, and the works he published were viewed by the critics as emanating from the same heretical tradition as *Das Leben Jesu*.

Thus one might say that the publication of Strauss's book was the starting shot of the *new* Tübingen School. In the course of more than a decade, the members of the group published works that in strong terms called in question traditional interpretations, but from the end of the 1840s, the members became more involved in defending their individual positions against attacks than accomplishing more research. Personal conflicts and bitter internal controversies also tore the group to pieces in the all-too-common manner found in academic circles even in our time. Baur's death in 1860 tolled the death knell of the Tübingen School, at least in the formal sense.

The importance of the Tübingen School for the discipline of New Testament exegesis can, however, hardly be overestimated. Through its

programmatic emphasis on the inner-worldly perspective, where supernatural explanations had no place, the Tübingen School laid the foundations for modern biblical scholarship. Admittedly, some scholars had already hinted at this development, but mostly from theistic points of departure. The methodological starting point for the Tübingen School, however, was the dismissal of a transcendent God, active in history. Baur's ambition was to create an objective foundation for biblical scholarship. The Tübingen School is founded on anything but objective biblical scholarship, however. In Baur's case, speculative, philosophical idealism was crucial for his conclusions.

#### *Baur and History—Jew versus Christian*

In spite of its innovative perspective, Baur's Hegelianism had some rather unfortunate consequences for the development of the view of the relationship between Paul and Judaism. In 1845, he published his most important exegetical work, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi* (*Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, ET 1876), but as early as 1831 he had already set the tone in an article about the different factions in Corinth: "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde" ("The Christ Party in the Corinthian Church"). In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul exhorts the community to remain in accord and not split up into different groups, but to "be united in the same mind and the same purpose." In the following verses he wrote:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." (1 Cor 1:11-12)

It seems that the community had divided into four different factions, each championing its own leader. The question then arises as to what these groups represented and what their mutual relations were like. Baur claimed that there were in fact only two factions—one pro-Pauline non-Jewish party and one pro-Petrine Jewish-Christian party. To Baur, it seemed clear that the text revealed a basic antagonism between a Pauline, universal type of Christianity, for which the Torah had had its day, and a Jewish-oriented, particularistic type of Christianity, still bound by the

Torah. This perspective, the basic conflict between—in practice—Judaism and Christianity, became the keystone in Baur's idealistically inspired writing of history. These writings were developed into a comprehensive explanation of the history of the early church in, among other works, Baur's posthumously published lectures, *Vorlesungen über neutestamentliche Theologie* ("Lectures on New Testament Theology") 1864.

According to Baur, the embryo of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity is so fundamental that it is present even prior to Paul's emergence on the scene. Baur's basic assumption is that Christianity represents the "absolute religion" and that all messianic particularism was thwarted with the death of Jesus. Hence it is Stephen who represents the earliest formulation of the true nature of Christianity. The first disciples were loyal to their Jewish religion, and the only thing that distinguished them from other Jews, Baur maintained, was the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. The attachment to Judaism among the first disciples of Jesus, however, shows that Christianity was still undeveloped and rudimentary. When Stephen in his speech (Acts 7:1-53) confronted traditional Jewish religion, the Jewish reaction to this challenge was manifested in his lynching. The antagonism between Judaism and Christianity then becomes a fact.

Baur saw the same conflict manifested in Romans, and above all in Galatians, and noted the considerable difference between the descriptions of the apostolic council in Jerusalem in Acts and Galatians respectively. Baur was of the opinion that the account in Acts could not reflect the real historic circumstances, simply because the conflict between Judaism and Christianity was toned down. For this reason Luke could not be the author of Acts, and as the first ers of the church definition was characterized by the deep antagonism between Judaism and Christianity, the harmonized account in Acts must represent a later period, probably the end of the second century.

Baur believed that the history of the church evolved in three phases, the first one ending with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. This period was characterized by the deep conflict between Judaism and the emerging Christianity. Judaism was about to turn into its own negation and became superseded by Paul's Christianity in which the gospel was substituted for the Torah. In fact, this conflict became crucial for Baur's dating of the books of the New Testament: texts that did not expose this conflict could not be from this early period. Regarding Paul, this meant that Baur only accepted four letters

as authentic: Romans, Galatians, and the two letters to the Corinthians. Revelation, which Baur believed was written by the apostle John, also dated from this period, according to him. John, so Baur claimed, had come to Asia Minor to oppose Paul, which can be surmised from the reference to the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15. According to Baur, the Nicolaitans adhered to the Torah-free gospel and were thus free to eat food sacrificed to idols, which was precisely what the author of Revelation found so abominable.

The second period ran from the fall of Jerusalem to the end of the Bar Kochba uprising in 135 CE, when the Jewish people were expelled from Judea. In Baur's view, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Acts, Philemon, Philippians, Ephesians, and the letters to the Thessalonians dated from this period, during which Baur imagined that both sides strove to downplay the conflict. This is most clearly exposed in the account in Acts, which does not acknowledge any antagonism between Peter and Paul. The overall aim of Acts, according to Baur, was to obliterate the differences between the two apostles by depicting their respective spheres of activity as parallel: in the first part of Acts, Peter was portrayed as being as similar to Paul as possible; in the second part, Paul was characterized in a manner reminding the reader of Peter.

During the last period, from the 140s CE until the end of the second century, the separation of Christianity from Judaism reached its peak, and was reflected, for instance, in the Gospel of John, in which the Jews were made to represent unbelief personified. All threats against the universalism of Christianity—Judaism, Jewish Christianity, and Gnosticism—had been eliminated. The conflict between Peter and Paul was done away with as the church accepted the picture of the parallel apostolates in Acts. Instead of Paul *or* Peter, *both* were chosen. In the Gospel of John, the relation between the Father and the Son was described as the basis of love and constituted the merging of the divine and the human. All is consummated and Christianity has taken the place of Judaism as the highest form of religion, representing the concretion of the Hegelian "absolute spirit" in history.

Baur's hypothesis of the evolution of the early church is impressive—but not correct. As in the case of all historic reconstructions, the outcome is entirely dependent on the fundamental assumptions upon which it is based. Baur's dependence on Hegel leads to a deterministic view of history that affects, not least, the dating of the books of the New

Testament. Using the conflict between Judaism and Christianity as the only criteria for dating the texts simply does not work, and Baur's analysis is a fine example of reasoning in a circle: the books of the New Testament are used for reconstructing history, while the historical development at the same time constitutes the basis for forming a judgment for dating the respective text.

The most serious consequence of Baur's view of history is, however, that the conflict between Judaism and Christianity is forced on to a Procrustean bed in which Judaism *of necessity* is depicted as inferior to Christianity, because it represents an earlier stratum—an antithesis—in the divinely controlled world order. Baur thus conferred scientific legitimacy on this view of Judaism in its relation to Christianity. Strangely enough, Baur does not seem to have taken the consequences of his theoretical superstructure seriously. The evolution of world history in dialectic triads should, according to Hegel, result in the synthesis, including elements from both the thesis and antithesis simultaneously abolished and preserved. In the case of the history of Christianity, we would accordingly expect to find also Jewish-Christian influences in Christian theology. But with Baur, the synthesis bears close resemblance to the classic Lutheran picture of Paul. At the end of the day, the theological sympathies of Baur seem to rest precisely here.

Perhaps this is not so strange. As we will see, the idea of the state of opposition of Judaism to Christianity is not a new one, but has efficiently been passed on down the centuries. It is consequently no wonder that Baur drew the conclusions he did. In order to comprehend why this was so, we turn to the question why negative attitudes to Jews became such a prominent feature of the European cultural heritage. At the end of this extended discussion we will return to an evaluation of Baur's approach to Paul.

## Anti-Semitism in Antiquity

### *Pre-Christian Attitudes*

Is it possible to talk about anti-Semitism in antiquity? In a way it is, of course, anachronistic, since the term "anti-Semitism" was minted only at the end of the nineteenth century, probably by Wilhelm Marr,

referring to the then current anti-Jewish campaigns in Germany. However, if "anti-Semitism" is taken to refer to specific views on Jews or special actions taken against Jews, motivated by fictitious or real characteristics of Jews that are unproportionally distorted and not leveled against other ethnic groups in the same manner, we must admit that anti-Semitism existed already in antiquity.<sup>5</sup> In the following survey I intend to employ the terms "anti-Semitism" and "anti-Jewishness" as synonymous, according to the definition above.

As early as the third century BCE, Greek authors in Egypt commented on the Jewish exodus from Egypt and various distinctive Jewish cultural features such as circumcision and the Sabbath celebration. Some of this material was included in a clearly anti-Semitic literary tradition handed down throughout history. To a certain extent, such manifestations can be explained by the general Greek attitude toward foreign peoples, commonly considered uncouth and barbarian, at best suitable as slaves to the superior Greeks. During the Greek expansion, not least under Alexander the Great, Greek immigrants established cultural centers—*gymnasia*—where the specific Greek culture was cultivated and conveyed to the new generations. But in the Greek attitude toward Jews in antiquity, there was also an almost mythical conception. Motives such as Jewish xenophobia, misanthropy, and lack of respect for the gods of the Greeks created a grotesque picture of the Jewish people as a constant threat against the civilized, that is, the Greek world, in a way without parallel among other peoples.<sup>6</sup>

In Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, Jews and non-Jews had lived together for a long time, usually without any problems. Josephus relates, for example, that Jews were already part of the original population when Antioch was founded in 300 BCE, and indicates that they were recognized as a special group with special conditions (*AJ*, 12.119). If it was at all possible for Jews to live in the Greco-Roman cities, the civic authorities had to take into account that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population was unwilling to compromise regarding their faith in the one God. In the Shema, for example, this was strongly emphasized: "Hear, Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4, my translation).

In Greek and Roman religion, on the contrary, the divine was manifested in many forms, and worshipping many gods was the natural

religious expression. In addition to this, Greek, Roman, and other imported deities functioned well together as they basically belonged to the same religious system. Concurrent with the Roman conquest of new territories, foreign deities were adopted. In Rome itself, temples dedicated to Greek and Egyptian gods and goddesses were built.<sup>4</sup>

But it was, of course, quite inconceivable for a Jew who wanted to remain true to his or her religious heritage to take part in cults including other gods than the God of Israel. One might think that this should not create any problems, but an aggravating matter was that the Romans (and Greeks) imagined that good relations to the divine world—*pax deorum*—were maintained by the official cult.<sup>5</sup> Thus the entire well-being of a local city was dependent on the official religion. In practice, this meant that the individual inhabitant was expected to take part in religious feasts, and because there was no real distinction between politics and religion, one might say that loyalty to the political system was expressed through religion.

With this background, it is no wonder that tensions ensued between Jews and non-Jews in the great cities of antiquity, especially since the Jewish population could amount to as much as ten percent of the total population. In a city like Antioch during the first century CE, this meant that the majority of roughly 40,000 Jews were likely to refuse worshipping those gods who the non-Jewish population believed protected the city against natural disasters and plagues. When such things occurred—Antioch lies in an area often hit by earthquakes and flooding—it is easy to imagine who got the blame.

But Rome had really nothing to gain from trying to force the Jews to conform in religious matters, and as noted in the previous chapter, local regulations were normally issued giving them the right to practice their own religion and to be excused from participation in the official cult. Instead there were other opportunities for the Jewish communities to demonstrate their loyalty to the local city and to Rome, for example, by erecting monuments paying homage to the emperor.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, during the first century CE, several serious events occurred when underlying anti-Semitic feelings led to disastrous consequences. During the summer of 38 CE, a period of disturbances began in Alexandria that lasted for several years. The provoking incident was a visit by the Jewish King Agrippa, who stopped in Alexandria on his

way from Rome to his new kingdom in northern Israel. The royal visit probably gave rise to various nationalistic manifestations, provoking the non-Jewish population to start a true pogrom. Jews were burned alive or dragged through the streets until they died. Jewish homes and shops were pillaged, and in the synagogues, statues of the emperor, Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus—better known as Caligula—were placed. This, of course, made them useless as places of worship, but at the same time, the Jews did not dare to throw the statues out, as this could be regarded as a demonstration of unseemly disrespect against the emperor. In this delicate situation, this could be taken as a justification to continue the acts of violence.<sup>7</sup>

Only after the emperor was murdered in 41 CE could order be restored, and his successor, Claudius, issued an edict in which he confirmed the rights of the Jews to practice their own religion, but also warned them not to strive for more rights than they already enjoyed (*CPJ* 153; Josephus, *A.J.* 19.280-285). In Alexandria there had been a strong movement within the Jewish community demanding more influence, but endeavoring to combine Jewish identity with Hellenistic culture as well.

In connection with the Jewish War in 66–70 CE, new disturbances broke out in several places in Syria. Josephus (*B.J.* 7.46-55) describes how the loyalty of the Jewish population in Antioch was called in question: Jews were accused of planning to burn down the city, resulting in public executions. Jews were forced to sacrifice to Greek deities, and those who refused were killed. Order was not restored until Roman troops intervened. Rome could no doubt resort to strong measures against the Jews when necessary, for instance when they effectively and brutally quashed the revolt, captured and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. In the aftermath of the war, prisoners were paraded around the eastern part of the empire, exposed in the theatres, and publicly humiliated. Coins celebrating the victory over the vanquished Jews were struck. This should, however, not be regarded as a sign of anti-Jewish sentiment; it was rather the normal Roman way of treating conquered peoples. In fact, it lay in Rome's interest to normalize the relations to the Jewish population as soon as possible.

This ambition, however, may have contributed to increasing the tensions between Jews and non-Jews. During the riots, both in Alexandria

and Antioch, the Roman authorities intervened and prevented further violence. After the Jewish War ended in 70 CE (though the fortress Masada near the Dead Sea held out until 73), Josephus describes how the population in Antioch implored the Roman Emperor Titus to expel the Jews from the city. Titus refused and left, but when he returned shortly afterwards, he was invited to a public gathering, probably in the theater. In *Bellum judaicum* 7.110-111, Josephus writes:

So relinquishing their first request the Antiochenes turned to a second, petitioning him [Titus] to remove the brazen tablets on which were inscribed the privileges of the Jews. But this too, Titus refused, and, leaving the status of the Jews exactly as it was before, he set out for Egypt.

It is easy to imagine that the relations between Jews and non-Jews were somewhat strained after that. Under the surface, the hatred against the Jews simmered, as they not only refused to worship the gods of the city and had caused the war, but also because they enjoyed support by the occupying forces.

It seems clear that the period during and after the Jewish War was troublesome for the Jews in both the land of Israel and the Diaspora. But at the same time, it is necessary to remember that this is not the whole truth. While a pronounced suspicion against the Jewish population certainly was prevalent, sometimes resulting in downright persecution, there are many examples of an opposing tendency. As we briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, it seems that Judaism attracted large groups of non-Jews. Again, concerning Antioch, Josephus (*B.J.* 7.45) writes that the Jewish population exerted considerable influence on non-Jews: "[the Jews] were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves." In *Contra Apionem* 2.282, he claims that there is "not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread . . . and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed."

Josephus no doubt shows a certain apologetic bias, but there is no reason to doubt the basic accuracy of his statement. The Roman authors especially confirm this non-Jewish interest in Judaism, which they

found utterly contemptible and regarded as an improper cultural influence. The Roman author Seneca, for instance, gave vent to his misgivings in a statement quoted by the church father Augustine: "The customs of this accursed race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors" (*Civ.* 6.11). Similarly, the Roman satirist Juvenal heaped scorn on those whose fathers respected the Sabbath (*Sat.* 14.96-106): "They worship nothing except the clouds and spirit of the sky," he states and continues:

They think there is no difference between pork, which their fathers abstained from, and human flesh. In time, they get rid of their fore-skins. And with their habit of despising the laws of Rome, they study, observe, and revere the Judaic code, as handed down to Moses in his mystic scroll, which tells them not to show the way to anyone except a fellow worshipper and if asked, to take only the circumcised to the fountain. But it's their fathers who are to blame, taking every seventh day as a day of laziness and separate from ordinary life.

Josephus also reports that in connection with the outbreak of the Jewish War in 66 CE, the Jewish population in Damascus was brought together and slaughtered. However, when the non-Jewish men planned the massacre on the Jews, they had to keep their plan secret from their wives who could not be trusted, because, "with a few exceptions [they] had all become converts to the Jewish religion" (*B.J.* 2.559).<sup>5</sup>

In the aftermath of the first Jewish War, the non-Jewish population's interest in Judaism seems to have attracted the attention of the authorities. The historian Dio Cassius (67.14.1-2) recorded that Emperor Domitian had his cousin, the former consul Flavius Clemens, executed because of his interest in Judaism. Clemens's wife, Flavia Domitilla, also a relative of the emperor, saved her skin, but was banished. This incident is also mentioned by Suetonius (*Dom.* 15.1). Others who were accused of *atheism*, which in this context meant those who had neglected to participate in the official religion, had their property confiscated.

To sum up: non-Jewish interest in Judaism could be manifested in various manners. Some authors express admiration for Moses and some

were generally impressed by the long history of Judaism. As we also noted in the previous chapter, it was common for people to worship the God of Israel together with their own Greek, Roman, Syrian, or Egyptian gods. To ordinary non-Jews in the Mediterranean world, this was a completely natural line to take toward deities. It also happened that non-Jews supported Jewish communities financially and were rewarded for this with honorary titles, something that must be understood in terms of the patron-client system so widespread in antiquity. An inscription (CIJ 766) mentions that a certain Julia Severa built a synagogue. That she most certainly was not Jewish is evident from another source (*MAMA* 6.263), where she is mentioned as a priestess of the local shrine. Some non-Jews converted to Judaism—Acts 6:5 mentions the proselyte Nicolaus from Antioch—and ceased in every respect to be non-Jewish (even though they may have been looked upon with some suspicion). The vast majority of “Judaizing” non-Jews, however, remained non-Jews and lived their lives, to some extent, in two worlds.<sup>8</sup>

All these often contradictory attitudes to Jews and Judaism are important when it comes to understanding the specifically Christian anti-Semitism at the beginning of the second century CE, and Peter Schäfer is probably correct in his conclusion regarding the Roman attitude to Judaism:

Beginning with Cicero and Seneca, and reaching its climax with Juvenal and Tacitus, there is an ambivalence between dislike and fear, criticism and respect, attraction and repulsion, which responds to the peculiar combination of exclusiveness and yet success that characterizes Judaism in the eyes of the Roman authors. . . . On the whole, however, the peculiarity of the Roman attitude toward the Jews seems better expressed by the term “Judeophobia” in its ambivalent combination of fear and hatred.<sup>10</sup>

Thus at the end of the first century we are facing a situation characterized by contradictory views and attitudes concerning Jews. While Judaism fascinated some non-Jews, others feared its negative influence. Rome protected the Jewish population from overly brutal abuse, but at the same time took steps to limit Jewish influence in society.

Jews were hated for starting the war in Syria, which led to disturbances and serious confrontations between Jews and non-Jews, but their religion was admired on account of its ancient traditions. This is the complex situation in which the Jesus movement stepped into the world stage and in this context the anti-Semitic discourse would find quite new ways.

#### *Christian Anti-Semitism*

While Jesus probably saw himself as a Jewish prophet, modeled to a large extent on the prophet Elijah,<sup>11</sup> with a message predominantly to the Jewish people only,<sup>12</sup> some of his followers also turned their attention to reaching non-Jews. The belief among Jesus-believing Jews that they now were living in the messianic age probably brought to the fore universalistic ideas from the Bible on the salvation of the non-Jews and gave rise to the mission to the non-Jews.<sup>13</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, there were different opinions about what was going to happen to the non-Jews at the end of time. Some imagined that the non-Jewish nations would be vanquished by Israel or annihilated by God, while others thought that non-Jews also had a place in the world to come. Within parts of the Jesus movement a resolution was passed that non-Jews could be included in the salvation of the God of Israel by faith in Jesus without having to convert to Judaism.

As we noticed in the previous chapter, it was in Antioch that Jesus-believing Jews first turned to non-Jews outside Israel with the message of Jesus (Acts 11:19-21). The message that the death and resurrection of Jesus had opened a way for non-Jews also is likely to have attracted many God-fearers. In the Jesus movement, they would gain a well-defined place in the salvation history of the Jewish people without having to give up their non-Jewish identity, which would involve all manner of complications. In addition to this, Paul later emphasized that Jews and non-Jews had the same status before God, something that had far-reaching consequences for how Jews and non-Jews could interact within the Jesus movement.

One major problem, however, was the relation of the non-Jews to the official religion. We noted earlier that Jewish communities probably accepted that non-Jews fulfilled their religious obligations to the city

and to the empire. But because non-Jews within the Jesus movement now had been more closely linked to the Jewish people and, through Jesus, were considered, at least by Paul, to have the same status before the God of Israel, their relation to the Greco-Roman cult represented a serious problem. A crucial issue was, for instance, whether a Jesus-believing non-Jew could be present when Roman religious ceremonies were performed. Could a non-Jewish believer in Jesus take part in meals where wine sacrificed to Roman gods was served? Was it possible to combine faith in Jesus with the holding of political offices, which probably involved sacrifices to Greco-Roman gods?

The principal response was that an individual believing in Jesus had to abstain from "idolatry." Hence, the non-Jewish adherents to the Jesus movement were obliged to adapt to the Jewish attitude toward gods other than the God of Israel. It is reasonable to assume that the movement developed several pragmatic strategies in order to cope with this. One was that Jesus-believing non-Jews in fact posed as Jews vis-à-vis the authorities. If we assume that, even prior to having come in contact with the Jesus movement, they had adapted a Jewish lifestyle, it is not inconceivable that they took advantage of this in order not to be suspected of neglecting their religious obligations toward society.<sup>24</sup>

Those who in this manner chose to solve potential conflicts with the majority society became, as a result, more intimately bound to the Jewish faction of the Jesus movement. At the same time, one must note that their religious identity appears in a somewhat obscure manner. In their relations to the authorities, they appeared as Jews because they behaved like Jews. They celebrated the Sabbath, they probably ate Jewish food, and took no part in the official religious cults. But at the same time, in relation to the Jewish Jesus movement, their non-Jewish identity was maintained—even accentuated. According to Paul, non-Jews are included in the salvation of the God of Israel precisely as non-Jews and should under no circumstances convert to Judaism (1 Cor 7:17-20).

We should, however, also take into account that the Jewish leadership of the Jesus movement probably tried to arrive at compromises, making it possible for some adherents of the movement to maintain contacts with the non-Jewish society. Paul, in fact, seems to have encouraged

further contacts between Jesus-believing non-Jews and persons outside the Jesus movement. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, he writes:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons — not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."

On the other hand, Paul here seems to worry about social intercourse among those who belonged to the group but who did not live up to the moral norms of the movement, rather than general contacts with persons not belonging to the Jesus movement. Later on in the letter, Paul raised the issue of whether it was seemly for non-Jewish adherents to the Jesus movement to eat food that had been used in Greco-Roman sacrificial rituals. This probably meant most of the provisions for sale in the cities, for instance, meat. As with all religion in antiquity, Greco-Roman religion involved the sacrifice of animals, and all meat not consumed in course of the sacrifices was afterwards sold in the market. From the Jewish viewpoint such food had, of course, been offered to "idols." Paul's way of handling the issue can, however, be interpreted in such a way that he in principle did not object to consummation of such food. The issue is raised in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6:

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "no idol in the world really exists," and that "there is no God but one." Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as in fact there are many gods and many lords — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

As in reality no other God than the God of Israel exists, Paul insisted that idolatry in practice was impossible. The crucial issue was the attitude

of the individual, not the ritual action, or, as in this case, the consumption of food offered to Greco-Roman gods. What seems to be the problem was if someone ate the food *considering it to be sacrificed to Greek or Roman gods*. Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13:

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. "Food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

The principle seems clear: those who confessed faith in Jesus had to abstain from "idolatry." But completely in agreement with how the rabbis later reasoned in the Mishnah and Talmud, Paul went on by *defining* what was meant by "idolatry,"<sup>16</sup> and then specified the proper behavior. What Paul understood as "idolatry" was the conscious partaking in Greco-Roman cult, in which the individual regarded the rituals as a true expression of Greco-Roman religion. But if the individual, on the other hand, believed that no other god than the God of Israel exists, then he or she was principally free to eat any food whatsoever and take part in any social gathering that might involve Greco-Roman religious rituals. The only exception was that the person in question should make allowance for those who were unable to distinguish between the performance of empty rites and the true participation in Greco-Roman rituals. Hence, according to Paul, it was inappropriate to take part in meals that took place in Greco-Roman temples.

On the other hand, Paul seems to have considered it quite in order to accept dinner invitations from persons outside the Jesus movement. Paul gave the following piece of advice in 1 Corinthians 10:27-29:

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgment of someone else's conscience?

It is rather likely that such gatherings included, for instance, libation offerings of wine, honey, or oil, as well as prayers. We can here note the same principle as Paul applied to meals in Greco-Roman temples: once a person knows what he or she is doing, everything is permissible, but all people do not know this, and a person should consequently sometimes abstain from certain food out of consideration of others.<sup>16</sup>

Just as there were different views within the Jesus movement on how non-Jews should relate to the Jewish people, there were most certainly different opinions regarding the relations of the non-Jewish Jesus believers to the Greco-Roman society. It is likely, however, that the Jewish part of the Jesus movement brought about adjustments to make it easier for non-Jews to become part of the movement, since the participation of the non-Jews may very well have functioned as a kind of legitimization of the belief of the movement that it was really living in the messianic age. If this was the case, non-Jews should be seen screaming to the God of Israel, and to the same extent as this was observed, the fundamental ideas of the movement would be substantiated. Hence there was every reason not to raise the bar of entry too high.

During the last decades of the first century, however, the non-Jewish adherents of the Jesus movement found themselves in an increasingly complex situation. As noted above, the Jewish War caused underlying anti-Semitic sentiments to surface. Although Rome protected the Jewish population against assaults, it also laid a special tax on them, the so-called *fiscus Judaicus*, that all Jews between the ages of three and sixty (or sixty-two) were liable to pay. The money was supposed to be used to defray the costs for building a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus, which had burnt down in 69 CE. In reality this meant that the Jews had to buy their religious freedom by contributing to a temple that,

from a Jewish point of view, was the temple of an idol. At the same time, Rome intensified its ideological offensive against those who neglected to fulfill their religious obligations to the state. It was during this period that Emperor Domitian executed his cousin Flavius Clemens and banished the latter's wife, as mentioned above.

In this situation, the religious identity, or rather the lack of a well-defined religious identity, of the *Jesus-believing* non-Jews was brought to a head. Previously they could hide within the Jewish community and exploit the fact that the Jesus-believing Jews were part of first-century Judaism and as such exempt from participation in the official religion. Or they could enjoy social connections outside the movement and cope with any cultic matters in a responsible manner. In the relations to the authorities, this system probably worked rather well, and non-Jews could join the Jesus movement without encountering any major obstacles.

But in the aftermath of the war and the introduction of the special tax on Jews, the situation dramatically changed—now there was a very tangible price for their commitment to the Jesus movement, and this was not only a question of money. If the Jesus-believing non-Jews paid the tax, they would henceforth be regarded as Jews, enjoying the opportunity to avoid taking part in Greco-Roman religion while at the same time increasingly adopting a Jewish identity. It is quite likely that the Matthean community represents precisely this option as it seems that the community, in its original Jewish context, advocated Torah observance, circumcision of non-Jewish males, and generally took a negative stance toward non-Jews.<sup>37</sup> Thus it is quite possible that some non-Jewish Jesus-believers disappeared in communities like the Matthean one and became Jews.

However, parts of the Jesus movement had only recently agreed that the non-Jews were *not* to become Jews. In addition, to pose as a Jew in the current political situation could be downright dangerous and lead to persecution and even death. But the alternative—to break with the Jesus movement altogether and return to pagan society—was also fraught with considerable social complications. In *Bellum judaicum* 2.462-463, Josephus describes how the Syrians, on the eve of the outbreak of the Jewish War, kept an eye on those who sympathized with the Jews:

The whole of Syria was a scene of frightful disorder; every city was divided into two camps, and the safety of one party lay in their anticipating the other. They passed their days in blood, their nights, yet more dreadful, in terror. For, though believing that they had rid themselves of the Jews, still each city had its Judaizers, who aroused suspicion.

These Judaizers were probably non-Jews sympathizing with the Jews in their political ambitions to achieve independence from Rome or people who had adapted Jewish manners and customs. In both cases it is easy to see that situation worsened after the war, and those adherents to the Jesus movement who emphasized their non-Jewish identity ran considerable risk of getting into difficulties because of their former dealings with the Jews. They could also be accused of neglecting their religious obligations. The Roman author Suetonius (*Dom.* 12.2) describes being present "when the person of a man ninety years old was examined before the procurator and a very crowded court to see whether he was circumcised." This text is usually interpreted as an example of how the Roman authorities searched for Jews liable for paying the Jew tax. But as the man had long ago passed the upper age limit for taxation, *it is more plausible that the examination was done in order to ascertain if the man was non-Jewish and consequently, like Flavius Clemens, guilty of atheism.*

To sum up matters, we might say that the non-Jewish adherents to the Jesus movement were caught in a trap after the Jewish War, to the effect that both alternative lines of action could have disastrous consequences. This situation is probably what caused some non-Jewish members of the Jesus movement to attempt to find another solution, a third way, that eventually resulted in the separation between Jews and non-Jews. Since it was the Jesus-believing non-Jews' relation to Judaism that constituted the stumbling block, this could be overcome if they parted ways with Judaism, which in reality meant the Jesus-believing Jews.

Such an undertaking was, of course, not without dangers, as the legal status of the movement was dependent on the very presumption that the Jesus movement was basically a form of Judaism. The Jewish population, we recall, was excused from participation in the official cult,

a fact the non-Jewish Jesus believers previously had taken advantage of. Without the protection afforded Judaism, they would be at the mercy of the demands from the Roman authorities to demonstrate political loyalty by practicing the official religion. Even if the non-Jewish part of the Jesus movement could accept certain compromises, they generally seem to have considered it impossible to combine faith in the God of Israel with active participation in the cult of Greco-Roman gods and the imperial family. A new, equally impossible dilemma was apparently a fact.

In order to succeed, the non-Jewish Jesus believers had to stress their dissociation from the very same ethnic group that was responsible for the Jewish War—the Jews. In this case, they could even take advantage of the anti-Semitism prevalent in society, especially in the period after the war. But things were more complicated. Judaism had something the non-Jewish Jesus movement lacked, something that was extremely important when it came to convince the authorities of its raison d'être—ancient traditions stretching very far back in time.

It was possible to introduce new cults in the Roman Empire. This was often the consequence of incorporating new territories in the empire, or of immigration—new inhabitants in Roman cities brought their local cults with them. This usually caused no problems, but the Roman authorities were somewhat suspicious regarding new cults, fearing that they could be used as a guise, masking groups with subversive intentions. Of course, Judaism had ancient traditions, for which Greek and Roman authors had especially expressed admiration, but due to the war, the Jewish people had also become associated with rebellion against Rome. In order to have a chance to persuade the Roman authorities of its legitimacy, the non-Jewish Jesus movement had to succeed with the achievement of *both distancing themselves from the rebellious Jews and at the same time laying claim to the traditions of Judaism.*

If the basic presuppositions behind the process of separation were as I have described them here, we should find among representatives of the non-Jewish Jesus movement violent polemics aimed at the Jews, attempts to take over the religious traditions of the Jews, and efforts to convince the authorities of the excellent qualities of the new movement. This is, in fact, also the case.

In the beginning of the second century CE, roughly around 115, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, was arrested and taken to Rome. Here he

was bound to suffer martyrdom, something he, by the way, anticipated very much. In course of his journey to Rome, he wrote seven letters to different Christian communities in Asia Minor. In several passages in these letters, he touches upon the relations to Judaism, and it is evident that he represents a perspective from *outside* Judaism. A good example can be found in his letter *To the Magaccians* (8:1-2):

Be not be deceived by false opinions or old fables that are of no use. For if we have lived according to Judaism until now, we admit that we have not received God's gracious gift. For the most divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ. For this reason also they were persecuted. But they were inspired by his gracious gift, so that the disobedient became fully convinced that there is one God, who manifested himself through Jesus Christ his son, who is his Word that came forth from silence, who was pleasing in every way to the one who sent him.

Ignatius here established a clear-cut breach between Judaism and the religion he himself represents—which is clearly not Judaism. Previously, but no longer, he and his adherents lived according to "Judaism." The passage makes most sense if by "Judaism" we understand the Jewish part of the Jesus movement. If so, Ignatius refers to a period when his community was closely associated with the Jewish Jesus movement, whose teaching they now consider as "false opinions" and "old fables." The movement Ignatius now represents is in no way compatible with the Judaism he had previously adhered to, and "Judaism" is in fact contrasted against "God's gracious gift" in a way that foretells the subsequent development.

But Ignatius was unable to dissociate himself from everything Jewish—he still had to link up with the old traditions of Judaism in order to create a legal foundation for the continued existence of his non-Jewish movement. The strategy employed by Ignatius, and which subsequent Christian theologians also adapted, involved an extensive redefinition of the Jewish biblical tradition. This development is hinted at in *Mag.* 8:2, cited above, where Ignatius claims that "the most divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ," which is the reason as to why they were persecuted. In *Mag.* 9:2, Ignatius goes even further, stating that the prophets in reality were disciples of

Jesus "in the spirit" and "awaited him as their teacher." Thus the Magnesians are admonished to "lay aside the bad yeast, which has grown old and sour, and turn to the new yeast, which is Jesus Christ" (*Ign. Magn.* 10:2), and they should be aware that it is "outlandish to proclaim Jesus Christ and practice Judaism" (*Ign. Magn.* 10:3). Thus, as early as the beginning of the second century, the process of the non-Jewish overtaking of the whole Jewish religious tradition is fully operative, resulting in the creation of a new kind of "Judaism"—one completely without Jews.<sup>18</sup>

During the following centuries the themes we have seen elaborated by Ignatius can be found among other Christian authors. For example, some time during the later half of the second century, bishop Melito of Sardis invented the term "deicide"—the idea that the Jewish people collectively were guilty of the death of Jesus, and accordingly, of God. The basic theme of Melito's Easter sermon, *Peri Pascha*, is the presentation of the sufferings of Christ as a series of accusations against the people of Israel, written with God's faithfulness to the Jewish people as a background. Melito summarizes the theme thus (72):

It is he that has been murdered.  
And where has he been murdered? In the middle of Jerusalem.  
By whom? By Israel.  
Why? Because he healed their lame  
and cleansed their lepers  
and brought light to their blind  
and raised their dead,  
that is why he died.

From this it seems clear that Melito blames the Jewish people for the death of Jesus, but further on in the text (96), he gives this accusation a new dimension—the Jews have killed God himself.

He who hung the earth is hanging;  
He who fixed the heavens has been fixed;  
He who fastened the universe has been fastened to a tree;  
The Sovereign has been insulted;  
The God has been murdered;  
The King of Israel has been put to death by an Israelite right hand.

As a result of being responsible for the death of Jesus, the Jewish people are damned, an idea Melito already had prepared his audience for. Previously (43), he asserted that Judaism and the Jewish people really had merit—prior to the establishment of the church. In his day, he claims, "things once precious have become worthless, since the really precious things have been revealed." As early as in the middle of the second century, the non-Jewish part of the Jesus movement had successfully launched the idea that the church had superseded the Jews as the elected people.

Melito's *Peri Pascha* has exerted a tremendous influence on Christian anti-Semitism as it very likely has served as a model for the so-called *Imposperia*. These laments about Israel's disobedience were included in the Latin liturgy for Good Friday in the early Middle Ages. In spite of the fact that their aim was not specifically to point out accusations against the Jewish people but to incite Christians to self-examination, their actions had anti-Jewish consequences. In modern times, the Jewish population in Eastern Europe lived in terror of the Christian Easter, as the Good Friday liturgy generally incited members of local Christian congregations to commit violent acts against the Jews.

Christian anti-Semitism may have originated in a specific historical situation and constituted originally a kind of ideological resource in the struggle of the early church to develop a legally recognized religious identity. Quite soon, however, it became wrenched from its historical context and started to live a life on its own. The non-Jewish Jesus movement's plan to create a new religion and a legal basis for its activity had a protracted lifetime. It was only in the fourth century that real progress was made: in 311 the Emperor Galerius issued an edict of tolerance for all religions, including Christianity; in 313, the Emperor Constantine issued an edict at Milan stating that the empire should be neutral with regard to all religions, and in 380 Christianity became the only permitted religion in the Roman Empire.

However, in course of the development of Christianity from being a forbidden religion to becoming a state religion, the contempt of Jews and Judaism became a well-integrated part of the theology of the church. The main opponent of Christianity was not, as one might imagine, Greco-Roman religion, but Judaism. Thus what started as a Jewish messianic movement evolved within a comparatively short

period—roughly a hundred years—into a religious movement that in all essentials contradicted its origin.<sup>19</sup>

### Law versus Grace—Luther and Protestantism

#### *The Early Church and the Problem of Sin and Grace*

First-century Judaism seems to have been occupied with eschatological issues to a much higher degree than later rabbinic Judaism, and according to the Gospels, Jesus repeated the message of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt 3:2). The firm conviction within the early Jesus movement that non-Jews also could be saved led to extensive discussions, as we have seen above, about how this could come about, and several ideas seem to have coexisted within the Jesus movement.

When the Christian church emerged as a non-Jewish religion in the beginning of the second century, the theological reflection of the church underwent a radical transformation. While Paul mainly was interested in how the respective collective groups of Israel and the non-Jewish peoples were to be saved, the issue of the individual's redemption increasingly became a point of focus. As early as Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 220), we encounter the complex of problems that much later would culminate in the breach with the majority church in the West caused by the Reformation: the relation between grace and merit and the respective divine and human elements in redemption. Already here it is clear that the issues differ from the ones that occupied Paul's mind.

It was Augustine, however, (354–430) who laid the foundation to the doctrine of grace that Luther later formulated. Augustine mainly developed the theology regarding sin and grace in his controversy with the monk Pelagius, who appeared in Rome shortly before 400. Pelagius argued that it was possible to live a sinless life, as humanity is endowed with free will. In contrast to Augustine, he rejected all notions that humanity, through the fall of Adam, was marred by a defect—original sin—passed on from generation to generation. Sin, according to Pelagius, was only the result of single acts

of volition, and the individual will at last be judged on the basis of whether evil or good deeds have predominated in his or her life. "Grace" for Pelagius was both a kind of divine inspiration, helping people to make the right choices, and the new law, revealed in the New Testament.<sup>21</sup>

Against this notion, Augustine asserted the opposite. A person is totally unable to do anything that can affect his or her prospect of redemption. According to Augustine, humans lack not only the ability, but also the will to perform good deeds, and are hopelessly lost without divine intervention. No human effort to please God is possible, which in the long run means that God decides who is to be saved and who is predestined to perdition. This doctrine of double predestination caused extensive discussions and strife and resulted in what later came to be called Semipelagianism. The Semipelagians accepted Augustine's doctrine of original sin, but at the same time argued that humans carry the seed to do good deeds, which can be aroused by divine grace. In the redemption of a person, the grace of God thus acts together with the free will, and a person is capable of either accepting or rejecting the grace of God. Rejection, of course, leads to perdition, but this is against the will of God, who wants to include the whole of humanity in his salvation.

Semipelagianism at first prospered, and was confirmed at the Synod of Arles in 473. But this was not the last word on the subject. At the Synod of Orange in 529, the Semipelagian viewpoint was rejected in favor of a modified Augustinianism. In a formal sense, the dispute about sin and grace was settled, although discussions about the salvation of humanity continued for a long time and, of course, became one of the main issues during the Reformation. In practice, however, Semipelagianism became the official position of the medieval church, and the Occamist doctrine of grace, which Luther turned against, was largely characterized by Semipelagian ideas. The English theologian and philosopher William of Occam (ca. 1285–ca. 1349) reasoned in the same manner as Pelagius that a person was capable of loving God above all, as original sin had not destroyed his or her nature; only the sin of Adam was ascribed to the individual. Sin consists only of single volitional acts, and when a person, by his or her own effort draws near

to God and performs good deeds, God infuses the grace that leads to salvation as a reward.

### *Martin Luther, Grace, and the Jews*

It was precisely this theological element that led to the spiritual crisis causing Luther's radical reinterpretation of Paul. Martin Luther (1483–1546) had encountered the theology of Occam during his studies in the beginning of the sixteenth century. After his ordination as a priest in 1507, he studied Occamist dogmatics in the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. The notion of merit and reward that became more and more prominent in the late medieval doctrine of grace gave rise to a seemingly unsolvable conflict for Luther. Occamist theology implied that God would infuse his grace as a reward, provided that a person first did what was in his or her power. But what happens if a person is unable to meet the demands of God? With Luther the experience of not being able to offer God enough repentance and love led to the logical conclusion that he was predestined to condemnation. It was during this inner conflict he found the solution in Romans 1:17: "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

While previous theologians, influenced by a juridical theology that strongly emphasized the importance of the sacraments, had almost equated God's righteousness with his judgment, Luther interpreted Paul in an entirely different manner. According to Luther, the Christian gains access to the righteousness God possesses by faith *and faith alone*. This was, Luther claimed, what should be understood by the term "grace." As a consequence of this ascribed righteousness, good deeds follow, which in the long run means that the distance between the ascribed and the real righteousness diminishes and is completely wiped out in eternity. Luther thus puts the Occamist notion of sin and grace on its head. Good deeds follow as a result of grace and are not requirements for it. Additionally in spite of the fact that all humans are sinners, the Christian is declared righteous in the eyes of God and is consequently simultaneously a sinner and righteous (in Latin *simul justus et peccator*).

In Luther's theological system, the law has a very special function. The external fulfillment of the commandments is entirely abrogated in Christ. In this respect, the law was valid only for a certain people—the

Jews—and for a limited period of time—until the gospel was revealed in Christ. But according to Luther, the law also has a higher purpose and is completely in the service of the gospel. The law lays down what a person must do, but as it is impossible for anyone to fulfill the demands of the law, the contrition Luther himself experienced, and which Occam's theology could not relieve him of, sets in. The law defines sin, but in the individual's contrition and knowledge of his or her own wretchedness and inadequacy, God in Christ comes to meet him or her with unconditional forgiveness, being dependent on nothing but the grace of God.

With Luther, the law thus represents something good, in fact, the will of God, but its fulfillment is at the same time something unattainable. Anyone who imagines that he or she by means of the law can attain a relation to God is guilty of the most fundamental sin of all—self-righteousness—based on the false assumption that God can be pleased through human effort. For such a person, the law does not lead to grace and forgiveness, but to punishment and damnation.

It is important to realize that Luther's reading of Paul is by no means a historical reconstruction of the Pauline situation. The problems Paul wrestled with are different from those of Luther, and the historical situation in which Paul wrote his letters was quite different from Luther's. Even though Protestant biblical scholarship has been rather evasive regarding these matters, it is important to clearly state that Luther created theology—not a historical reconstruction—when he read Paul.

It is easy to see how this theology affected the view of Judaism. As even the mere thought of relating to God by means of the law by definition represents a hopeless endeavor, Luther's doctrine of grace and atonement implied the complete rejection of Judaism. The law is unable to bring forth any good deeds and can only provide knowledge of the sin that finally will result in damnation. As will be evident, this is exactly the conclusion Luther himself arrived at regarding Judaism.

In 1543, Luther published the pamphlet *Von den Jüden und iren Lügen* ("The Jews and Their Lies"), one of the most savage anti-Jewish documents ever written. It may be that Luther had expected the German Jews to convert to Protestant Christianity and that the rage that he expressed in this pamphlet in part was caused by the fact that they showed no eagerness to do so. Twenty years earlier, Luther had published another pamphlet, a missionary tract

addressed to a Jewish public. It resulted, however, in no conversions. Instead, Christians started to adapt Jewish customs in a way that bears resemblance to the situation in antiquity. *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* presents a veritable sample card of all the stereotypes passed on down through the centuries in European culture, primarily by the Christian church. In this respect, Luther's views on Judaism were by no means unique. He transmitted the standard medieval myths stating that Jews had kidnapped and maimed children, poisoned wells, and that they were mendacious, greedy, and striving for world domination. What was new with Luther was the motivation of the eternal damnation of the Jews.

A problem for Luther was that the law incontestably was given to the Jewish people. He solved the problem by arguing that there in fact were two kinds of Jews. The Jews Moses brought out of Egypt, to whom the Torah was entrusted, were the kind of Jews Luther seems to have viewed positively. The law given at Sinai was supposed to be kept by Israel until the day the Messiah revealed himself. But according to Luther, contemporary Jews were not descendants of these Jews, but of the ones who shouted "Crucify him!" in response to Pontius Pilate's question about what was to be done to Jesus.

Luther could not even accept that Jews in the land of Israel lived according to the Torah. Because everything Moses had established had fallen into decay, the law of Moses could hence no longer be in force. For this reason the Jews should nowhere be allowed to live according to the law. Instead, Luther recommended that their synagogues and houses be burned, all Jewish literature and property confiscated, and the rabbis forbidden to teach. It is perhaps no wonder that Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* included Luther among the great heroes of history and that excerpts from *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* was distributed by the Nazis in Germany. What Luther proposed in *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* Hitler later carried out to the letter, while giving a new and ghastly meaning to Luther's exhortation *to get rid of the Jews forever*.

Because of the role the law was given in the religion Luther created, there simply was no room left for Judaism. The normal way for Jews to relate to God—through the Torah—represents the inevitable road to perdition. Luther, of course, linked up with the anti-Semitic tradition the church had harbored for centuries, but at the same time he created a new theological foundation for annihilating Judaism. Of course

Luther cannot be held responsible for the atrocities during the Nazi regime, and his view of Jews and Judaism must surely be seen against the cultural climate of his own time and be related to his struggle with the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, it is certainly no exaggeration to characterize the religion Luther represented as anti-Semitic in principle.

### Nineteenth-Century Effects

Returning to the nineteenth century, then, it is no wonder that F. C. Baur found a fundamental and absolute contradiction between Judaism and Christianity in a cultural environment permeated with Lutheranism. The incompatibility of Judaism and Christianity, as well as the demonizing of the Jewish people, had been drummed into people in the course of history of the Christian church. The negative image of Jews and Judaism has simply become an integrated part of Western culture. During the nineteenth century, the specific Christian anti-Semitism merged together with a secular, putatively scientific anti-Semitism that was based on racial-biological ideas. In connection with nationalistic ambitions that surfaced at the time of the unification of the German states in the 1870s, this led to an increased marginalization of European Jewry, which was perceived as an alien body.

At the end of the nineteenth century, then, one might claim that the cultural climate as regards Judaism in Germany was characterized by the fact that Martin Luther had proved Judaism to be predestined to extinction. F. C. Baur had, with the help of Hegelian philosophy, scientifically proved the absolute superiority of Christianity in relation to Judaism, and the racial-biological research had substantiated that the Jewish race was inferior to the Aryan. It is quite self-evident that these circumstances influenced the research on Judaism that was carried out in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. How the concrete results of this were manifested we are now going to scrutinize more closely.

### *The Myth of Jewish Legalism: Ferdinand Weber and the Scales of Balance*

In 1880 Ferdinand Weber published *System der altsynagogalen palästinensischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* ("The Theological System

of the Ancient Palestinian Synagogue Based on the Targum, Midrash, and Talmud"). The depiction of ancient Judaism that Weber presents in this book would exert an extraordinarily strong influence on New Testament research during almost a century. The intention of Weber, who grew up in pietistic circles, was to start a missionary work aimed at bringing the gospel to the Jewish people, and for that purpose he began studying Judaism. Even though he never became a missionary, the results of his studies would for a long time constitute the standard view scholars used as a background for their work on the New Testament. Weber's basic view of Judaism was thus passed on in several other works, and because of this, a specific picture of Judaism that fit Protestant New Testament research like a glove was sanctioned.

The title of Weber's book already hints at a fundamental problem. Weber tried to create a systematic theology out of Jewish sources that in no way were suitable for the purpose. The Mishnah, finally edited around the year 200 CE, is a thematic collection of traditions dealing with how to apply the commandments of the Torah with regard to, for instance, purity regulations, the Sabbath, and the temple cult. In the Talmud, finally redacted in the sixth or seventh century CE, the Mishnah is commented on alongside various anecdotes and legends covering the most diverse fields. Midrashim are creative, sometimes playful interpretations of the biblical text, verse by verse, often aimed at discovering the deeper meaning of the divine revelation.<sup>21</sup> To try to describe a systematic "Jewish theology" using rabbinic literature is patently absurd. What Weber did was to graft the nineteenth-century Protestant theological system and its current theological issues onto the Jewish sources, and it is evident that prescientific points of departure governed his account. *Weber knew in advance that Judaism was the antithesis of Christianity*, and his studies also led him to this conclusion.

According to Weber, Judaism is characterized by legalism and the idea that God is distant from humanity. He found the basis of this conception in a rather bizarre interpretation of the fall of humanity. When the Jewish people entered into the covenant with God at Sinai, Weber argued the consequences of the fall of Adam were obliterated, and the relations between God and the Jewish people were restored. This condition, however, was short-lived, because the incident of the golden calf (Exod 32:1-14) resulted in a specific "Jewish fall" with ill-fated consequences. Weber

claimed that the Jewish people, due to the incident of the golden calf, were again separated from God, who henceforth became unapproachable and distant. The only option remaining for the Jew was now to try to return to the absent God by means of the Torah. Thus when the Torah is observed and the individual performs good deeds, the acquired merits are placed in one scale of balance, and each transgression is placed in the other one. The scale carrying the most weight when the individual enters eternity determines the final fate of that person.

This system, according to Weber, of course leads to a righteousness based on deeds, or at its worst, to self-righteousness and an emphasis on the ritual aspects of religion. Judaism is thus, Weber asserted, characterized by empty law observance with no inner commitment. In Judaism, the individual strives for redemption but can never really know how his or her relation to God is—one final transgression and the scale tips over. In Lutheran Christianity matters are of course different—salvation is freely offered by grace, and God in Christ is accessible to everyone. In contrast to this depiction of Judaism, created by means of a selection of texts, which in many cases were misread, Christianity appears as a superior religion in all respects. This was exactly the purpose of Weber's presentation of ancient Judaism and its success was guaranteed—at the end of the nineteenth century, Weber's distorted picture of Jewish legalism was the standard interpretation among New Testament scholars. Christianity had acquired a perfect dark background against which it could shine all the more brilliantly.

#### *The Influence of Weber*

Thus Weber's basic ideas of Judaism lived on and influenced several influential works. Between 1866 and 1890, the New Testament professor Emil Schürer (1844-1910) published a three-volume set on Judaism in the times of Jesus, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (*The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ*, 1897; 1973-1987), a work that in many aspects is a most useful handbook of geography, archaeology, religious groups, and literature of first-century Judea. When Schürer dealt with the relation of Judaism to the Torah, however, his dependence on Weber became evident. Judaism was seen as synonymous with legalism, according to Schürer, and

characterized by retributive, penal, and recompensive thought patterns, resulting in an emphasis on external behavior, not inner life. In order to demonstrate the absurdity of such a religious system, Schürer selected detailed descriptions from the Mishnah dealing with various Jewish customs, such as the Sabbath celebration and the purity laws. Against this backdrop, of course, the criticism of the Torah by Jesus and Paul appears as an excellent example of the superiority of Christianity.

At the end of the nineteenth century, New Testament scholarship was further advanced by the emergence of the so-called "history of religions school" (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) centered on a group of scholars at the University of Göttingen. Its purpose was to examine the biblical texts against the background of the near-Eastern environment by employing a historical-critical method. In this respect, the school portended a modern approach for analyzing the biblical texts, and some of the early findings have also had a durable value. But at the same time, one must keep in mind that this research was not carried out without a confessional bias. As pointed out by William Baird, the "s" in *Religionsgeschichte* does not indicate a plural, but a genitive singular.<sup>22</sup> The history of religions school was not concerned with "religions" but with "Christianity." Even though the school was basically a reaction against the criticism leveled at Christianity by the Enlightenment and an attempt to adapt the theological discourse to new epistemological conditions, apologetic traits were not absent.

In 1903, one of the members of the history of religions school, Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1903), a New Testament professor as well, published a work called *Die Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* ("The Judaic Religion in the New Testament Era"), with the overall purpose of depicting the background of Christianity. Bousset's picture of the Judaism contemporary with Jesus was unequivocally negative. Like Weber earlier, Bousset stressed that Judaism was characterized by a boundless chasm between God and humanity, a view for which he found support in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal Jewish literature. In Jesus, Bousset found the absolute opposite of Judaism, as Jesus bridges the chasm to God and calls him his heavenly Father. According to Bousset, a sense of alienation and inadequacy permeated Jewish piety. Moreover, the fundamental problem of Judaism was that it did not provide a system permitting the individual to reestablish a

broken relationship to God, as Judaism had neither sacraments through which the individual could reach God nor any means by which the grace of God could be channeled. In short: Judaism represented a perverted form of religion and its cardinal sin was that it was not Christianity.

The influence of Weber is also apparent among other scholars not only at this time, but also well into the twentieth century, as we will see later on. Jesus and Paul were generally seen against the background of a Judaism characterized by legalism and belief in an absent God. It was viewed as a religion that was simply unable to create a relationship between God and the individual. In stark contrast to the somber picture of the religion of both Jesus and Paul, Christianity was presented as the contradiction of all this. But it is important to notice that the picture of Judaism to which Christianity was compared was a *Christian theological construction*, the outcome of two thousand years of contempt for and persecution of the Jews, in combination with specific theological issues within the Christian church.

Before we look more closely at the reasons why this theological construction started to be called in question seriously within the field of New Testament scholarship, we will first see how the picture of a legalistic Judaism contributed to the creation of the traditional picture of Paul. In this process, Bousset played an important role, partially because it was through his works that the picture of Judaism became more generally available to New Testament scholars, and partially because one of the most influential scholars during the twentieth century happened to be one of his students — Rudolf Bultmann.