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Matt 27:25 in Ancient Christian Writings

Martin Meiser

There are many biblical texts which are employed in Christian self-definition against Judaism: words of prophetic comprehension, the quarrels between Jesus and his adversaries, Paul's polemical statements in 1 Thess 2:14–16; 2 Cor 3:6–18; Gal 4:21–31. To be sure, anti-Jewish polemics is one kind of polemics among others within ancient Christian literature, for example anti-pagan and anti-heretical polemics, and it is late New Testament texts which provide a common terminology for all of these types.¹ Pagans and so-called heretics too had to suffer from Christian behaviour, and very seldom do Christian authors recognize the antagonism between the spirit of Jesus and these deeds. But anti-Judaism involves special problems. Christian sociological and intellectual claims are based on an Old Testament exegesis that claims to be the only true one,² and on an interpretation of Jewish history and texts where Christians claim to have the only true interpretation of the recorded facts.

Christian anti-Judaism is widespread, and if some authors do not express anti-Jewish attitudes, this at best testifies ignoring the issue. Christian anti-Judaism does not necessarily require an exhaustive explanation of Matt 27:25 ("His blood be on us and on our children"). The Venerable Bede comments in his commentary on Matthew only the hand-washing of Pilate but not the answer of the Jews!³ In order to describe this anti-Judaism generally, it can be said that, "some geographic regions (Decapolis, Asia Minor, and Italy) were more fertile ground for expressions of anti-Judaism than others (Judaea and Greece) ... Some cultural contexts, particularly large cities with their religious rivalries ... encouraged anti-Jewish developments."⁴ The attractiveness of Judaism for pagans⁵ and Christians heated Christian fears of competition.

If we regard the gospel of Matthew as a text written by a Jewish-Christian who still lived within the Jewish community – there is an increasing tendency to read Matthew in this way –, the harsh critique of Matthew is an inner-Jewish one. Subsequent reception of this text by non-Jews, however, makes it an anti-Jewish text, especially when combined with other harsh statements as 1 Thess 2:15 or John 8:44. Concerning Matt 27:25, we have to keep in mind a fundamental change in the interpretation of this cry. In ancient times, it was understood as a part of history, as a real statement of the Jews, not as an invention by the evangelist. Due to 1 Thess 2:15, the cry for blood was itself evaluated as an act of killing, not only as a request for killing. Heinz Schreckenberg has collected the whole of anti-Jewish polemics through the centuries⁶, and Rainer Kampling, in his seminal monograph *Das Blut Christi und die Juden*⁷, has described the whole history of reception of this terrible text in the first half of the first millennium, at least in the Latin-speaking West. I will deal mostly with the reception history among Greek-speaking authors. In the first part, I will place historical relations, legislation,

1 The charge of blasphemy is directed against Jews (Acts 13:45; 18:6; Rev 2:9), pagans (1 Pet 4:4), and so-called heretics (Jud 9; 1 Tim 1:20 etc.).

2 In ancient times, 2 Cor 3:6–18 provides the ideological basis for Christian claims of theological superiority.

3 The Venerable Bede, in *Mt.* (PL 92, 121 D – 122 A).

4 P. Richardson, "The Beginnings of Christian Anti-Judaism, 70 – c. 245", in: *The Cambridge History of Judaism IV* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 244–258, 256.

5 M. Goodman, "Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora in the Late-Roman Period: The Limitations of Evidence", in C. Bakhos (ed.), *Ancient Judaism in its Hellenistic Context* (JSJSup. 95; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005, 177–203) 188f.

6 H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld* (1.-11. Jh.) (EHS 23/172; Frankfurt u.a.: Peter Lang, 1990).

7 R. Kampling, *Das Blut Christi und die Juden. Matt 27,25 bei den lateinischsprachigen christlichen Autoren bis zu Leo dem Großen* (NTA NF 16; Münster [Westphalia]: Aschendorff, 1984).

Christian historiography, and the reception of Matt 27:25 in chronological order; in the second part, I will name some Biblical pretexts and the method of this kind of reception.

I. Beginnings of Christian Anti-Judaism

1. *The second century*

In the second century, the Gospel of Peter and the so-called Acts of Pilate reinforce the tendency to heighten Jewish culpability and to exonerate Pilate; other writings attack Jews (Epistle of Barnabas) and Judaism (Ignatius) or ignore Judaism (1Clement). These writings are not part of the reception history of Matt 27:25; they offer, however, a background for the problematic reception of this text.

The Gospel of Peter is an example of a “‘normal’ way of telling the passion story, rooted in a kind of ‘non-reflected’ and ‘self-evident’ anti-Jewish sentiment.”⁸ There is no explicit quotation of Matt 27:25 but v. V/17 emphasizes that the Jewish élites were both filling up the measure of their sin and acting against themselves⁹ (καὶ ἐπλήρωσαν πάντα, καὶ ἐτελείωσαν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῶν τὰ ἁμαρτήματα). Verse VIII/28 evokes the thesis that the author hoped for the conversion of at least some Jews,¹⁰ but this thesis remains questionable. Among ancient Christian theologians, only Origen hopes for Israel’s salvation¹¹; apart from that, we have no references demonstrating that Christian authors really did have a positive hope for Israel.

The so-called “Acts of Pilate”, now included in the Gospel of Nicodemus, takes part in the tendency to discharge Pilate from any blame for the death of Jesus.¹² Matt 27:24–5 is received as proof for Jewish *mania* which is neither hindered by Pilate’s suggestion “Do not act in this way” in a secret communication to the elders, the priests and the Levites¹³ nor by Jewish witnesses who refer to Jesus’ healings. In the story later included on Joseph of Arimathea, the author rebukes the Jews for acting against Jesus. Whereas Pilate, “fleshly uncircumcised but circumcised in mind,” washed his hands and proved his innocence, the addressees of Joseph’s speech quarrelled against the governor, such that Joseph fears God’s wrath coming on the Jews and their children. After this rebuke, the Jews imprison Joseph.¹⁴ In this context, Matt 27:25 reinforces the notion of Jewish inanity.

8 J. Verheyden, “Some Reflections on Determining the Purpose of the ‘Gospel of Peter’”, in Th.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas (eds.), *Das Evangelium nach Petrus. Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (TU 158; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 281–299), 293.

9 This is also the point of view of the Syriac Stoic philosopher Mara bar Sarapion, who admonishes his son to follow wisdom; the murders of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus provoking negative consequences are examples of the damage of the lack of wisdom among the people (cf. Gerd Theißen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001], 86; Petr Pokorný, “Jesus as the Ever-living Lawgiver in the Letter of Mara Bar Sarapion,” in A. Merz, T. Tieleman (eds.), *The Letter of Mara Bar Sarapion in Context. Proceedings of the Symposium Held at Utrecht University, 10-12 December 2009* [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 129–139 [133–39]).

10 K. Greschat, “Justins ‘Denkwürdigkeiten der Apostel’ und das Petrus-evangelium”, in Th.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas (eds.), *Das Evangelium nach Petrus. Text, Kontexte, Intertexte* (TU 158; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007, 197–214), 210.

11 Jeremy Cohen, “The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation: Romans 11:25–26 in Patristic and Medieval Exegesis”, *HThR* 98 (2005), 247–281 (255–263, on Origen, based on Origen, *comm. in Rom.* 8.7–11). According to Cohen, Origen seems to assume “that the Jewish people as a whole will regain their status as a community of God’s faithful, that all Jews will ultimately be saved.” (p. 263). In addition, Cohen refers to Origen, *hom. Gen.* 5.5 (GCS 29:24); *hom. Exod.* 6.9 (GCS 29:199–200), referring to Exod 15:16 and Matt 3:9, etc. According to Cohen, these passages help to clarify Origen’s obscure comments on Romans.

12 This tendency is to be found also in Tertullian, *adv. Iud.* 8.18 (CCSL 2, 1363–4).

13 *Gos. Nicod.* 4.1, 2 (ACA I/1, 244f.).

14 *Gos. Nicod.* 12.1 (ACA I/1, 249).

2. Origen

Despite his familiarity with Jewish literature, Origen partakes in anti-Jewish thinking and attitudes and also makes a few quotations of Matt 27:25. A general anti-Jewish attitude is found in his reasoning for allegorical exegesis but this also has to be studied in exegetical details. Lev 4:3 (“When the anointed high priest sins and makes the people sin ...”) poses a problem when interpreted with regard to Jesus Christ – how could Jesus Christ cause sin? This leads Origen to Matt 27:25:¹⁵

The passion of Christ indeed brings life to those who believe but death to those who do not believe. For although salvation and justification are for the Gentiles through his cross, to the Jews it is nonetheless destruction and condemnation. For so it is written in the Gospels, ‘behold, this one was born for the ruin and resurrection of many’ (Luke 2:34). And in this way, through his sin, that is through the flesh given on the cross, in which he received our sins, he certainly freed from sin those of us who believe. But he made ‘the people who do not believe (cf. Rom 10:21)’ sin, for whom the impiety of sacrilege was added to the evil of disbelief. ... if ‘the Lord of majesty’ had not come in the flesh, he would not have reproved the Jews. Without a doubt, ‘his blood’ never would have come ‘upon them and their sons.’

There are two important aspects here: 1. The deed of the Jews was a sacrilege, and 2. the damage was terrible, especially for themselves.¹⁶

In his commentary on Matthew, written in Caesarea after 246,¹⁷ Origen interprets Matt 19:1–12 allegorically by comparing the synagogue to a former bride of Jesus Christ who forced him by her sacrilege to divorce her. In this context Origen develops a direct relation between the sacrilege against Jesus and the fate of later Jewish history, which can be described on the historical level by Matt 23:38 and on the theological level by the motif of the marriage of the synagogues to the devil, represented by Barabbas.¹⁸ In his comment on the passion narrative, Origen develops a theory according to which all Jews until the consummation of the world¹⁹ are guilty of Jesus’ death.²⁰ He writes:

[The Jews] were not only unwilling to clean themselves from the blood of Christ but even incurred it upon themselves. ... Therefore they are accused not only of the blood of the prophets but, filling up the measure of their fathers, they are accused also of the blood of Christ, so that they hear God saying to them, “When you stretch out your hands to me, I will hide my eyes from you; for your hands are full of blood” (Isa 1:15). Therefore the blood of Jesus came not only on those who lived at those times but also on all subsequent generations of Jews until the consummation (of the world). Therefore until now their house is desolate (Matt 23:38).

15 Origen, *Lev. hom.* 3.1 (GCS 29, 301; ET: Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus 1 – 16*, trans. by Gary Wayne Barkley, FaCh 83, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990, 53).

16 The second aspect is stressed also in Origen’s homilies on Joshua, cf. Origen, *Jos. hom.* 3.5; 26.3 (SC 71, 142. 498–500).

17 Kampling, *Blut*, 49.

18 Origen, *comm. in Matt* 14, 19 (GCS 40, 330 – 31).

19 There is no reference to Matt 27:25 in his passages on ultimate universal reconciliation in *de Principiis*, and, *vice versa*, no reference to his doctrine of reconciliation in his comment on Matt 27:25.

20 Origen, *comm. in Matt*, comm. ser. 124 (GCS 38, 259-260). Cf. Tertullian, *adv. Marc* 2.15.3 (CCSL 1, 492) and Kampling, *Blut*, 35.

This evaluation of Jewish history²¹ dominated the Christian view for a long time.²² Jerome, who expressed an everlasting curse upon the Jews,²³ was the transmitter of this evaluation in the European West. He combines Matt 21:43 (“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom”) and Matt 27:25 as the foundation for the theory of disinheritance.²⁴ Josephus’ report of the destruction of Jerusalem including the heavenly voices (Bell VI 299) becomes the ideological support for the common Christian view concerning the fate of Jerusalem and the death of Jesus.²⁵

3. Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius repeats the statement of Origen: The fate of the Jews is caused by their sacrilege against Jesus Christ²⁶ or his adherents,²⁷ especially by their godless cry “His blood be on us”.²⁸ He uses Matt 27:25 relatively often in his commentaries on the Psalms and on Isaiah (see below “IV. Exegetical aspects”), and he interprets Matt 27:25 often not only with regard to the defeat of 70 CE but also to the present desolate state of the holy places of Israel.²⁹ Once he compares the Passover celebrated by Jesus and the Passover celebrated by the Jewish élites who, despite their wish for purity (John 18:28), became impure by their murder of Jesus. They incurred Jesus’ blood not for themselves but against themselves.³⁰ At the Passover of Jesus’ crucifixion, the wrath from God came upon them, and the prophecy of Amos 8:10 (“And I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation”³¹) was fulfilled.³²

After Eusebius of Caesarea, actual relations between Jews and Christian are often mentioned only in the context of Julian’s attempt to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and in the context of anti-Christian persecution by the Persian king Sabor. We have to examine also a few of these authors’ general notions of Jews. The general attitude is filled with hate.

II. Anti-Judaism in the Ongoing Fourth Century

1. Anti-Jewish Legislation I

In its beginning, the so-called Constantinian turn was intended to make sure that Christians had the same rights as non-Christians. Typical of Roman emperors since the 3rd century, however, Constantine thought that the Christian God could save the unity and welfare of the Roman Empire, and therefore Constantine’s politics more and more tended to privilege the

21 Cf. e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, *or.* 41.17 (SC 358, 352): The imprisonments under Egypt and Babylon were solved, but the imprisonment under the Romans is not yet solved, due to their θρασύτης against the redeemer.

22 Cf. e.g. Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Is.* (PG 81, 229 B); Olympiodor, *in Lam.* (PG 93, 753 D); cf. further Theophylact of Ochrida, *in Mt.* (PG 123, 465 A): Because of their sacrilege against Jesus Christ, Jews were persecuted by all, and they have no παρησιία – Theophylact does not challenge his own position.

23 Jerome, *in Es.* 17 (CCSL 73 A, 733): *manet maledictio sempiterna*; id., *in Mt.* (SC 259, 282): *sanguis Domini non auferetur ab eis*.

24 Jerome, *in Tit.* (PL 26, 593); vde. Kampling, *Blut*, 129–30; Schreckenber, *Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 336–37.

25 Jerome, *in Ez.* (CCSL 75, 716f.).

26 Eusebius of Caesarea, *h.e.* 2.6.8 (GCS 9/1, 122).

27 Eusebius of Caesarea, *h.e.* 2.23.20; 3.5.2–6 (GCS 9/1, 172. 196–98).

28 Eusebius of Caesarea, *in psalm.* (PG 23, 541 CD).

29 J. Ulrich, *Euseb von Caesarea und die Juden. Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea* (PTS 49; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 211.

30 Eusebius of Caesarea, *de solemnitate paschali* 10 (PG 24, 704 C – 705 A).

31 With gratitude I used Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (ed.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), for the translations of the Septuagint quoted in this contribution.

32 Eusebius of Caesarea, *in psalm.* (PG 23, 858 B).

Christians. In 315 he forbade conversion from Christianity to Judaism,³³ and in 335 he forbade the circumcision of Christian slaves, following a tendency of forbidding circumcision found in the legislation of Antoninus Pius and Septimius Severus.³⁴ In 339 Constantius II declared it illegal for Jews to buy slaves of another religion. If the slave was circumcised, the owner was to be put to death and his property confiscated.³⁵ Marriages between Jews and Christian women working in textile manufacturing also were punished by death.³⁶ From 353, the possessions of people who converted from Christianity to Judaism were to be confiscated.³⁷ Laws intended to protect the Jews and their synagogues, however, were not always enforced due to the Christian mob. A Jewish revolt in Galilee in 351 was quickly put down.³⁸

2. Jerusalem

Still in the fourth century, Jerusalem was not inhabited by Jews, due to Hadrian's ban. Cyril of Jerusalem uses Matt 27:25 in his thirteenth catechesis (on Isa 53): Moses changed the river into blood, and Jesus discharged water and blood from His side (John 19:34), because of the two voices, the voice of the judge and the voice of those who shouted against him, or because of the believers and the unbelievers. Whereas Pilate washed his hands and said "I am innocent," those who shouted against Him said "his blood on us..." There is still another interpretation: the blood was for the Jews, the water for the Christians, for on the Jews came the sentence of condemnation, but to those who now believe salvation comes by water.³⁹

3. Syria

a) Antioch

The great Jewish community in Antioch was attractive also to non-Jews. In 341, the Christian synod of Antioch forbade the Christians to celebrate Easter at the date of the Jewish Passover. In Antioch, John Chrysostom held his homilies on the gospel of Matthew and his eight sermons against the Jews in order to prevent Christians from attending synagogues. In these sermons, he uses Matt 27:25 twice, first in arguing that Christians should not partake of Jewish festivals,⁴⁰ and second in an ἐγκώμιον on the Christian martyrs. According to the preacher, the martyrs would

derive great pleasure from my conflict with the Jews; they might well listen most intently to a discourse given for God's glory. For the martyrs have a special hatred for the Jews since the Jews crucified him for whom they have a special love. The Jews said: 'His blood be on us and on our children;' the martyrs poured out their own blood for him whom the Jews had slain. So the martyrs would be glad to hear this discourse.⁴¹

In his *Homilies on Matthew*, John Chrysostom makes a short comment. He asks the Jews „For be it that you cursed yourselves, but why did you draw down the curse also to your children?”

33 Schreckenberg, *Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 259, referring to Codex Theodosianus 16.8.1.

34 P. Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden in der Antike. Die Juden Palästinas von Alexander dem Großen bis zur arabischen Eroberung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 216, referring to Codex Theodosianus 16.9.2.

35 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 3.17.4 (GCS 50, 131); cf. Codex Theodosianus 3.1.5 (SC 531, 60).

36 Codex Theodosianus 9.7.5 (SC 531, 132).

37 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.7 (SC 497, 380).

38 L. Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition. A History of the Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1991), 208–09. Cf., however, Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden*, 217–8.

39 Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 13.21 (Rupp 78).

40 John Chrysostom, *hom. Adv. Iud.* 1.5.1 (PG 48, 850).

41 John Chrysostom, *hom. adv. Iud.* 6.1.7 (PG 48, 905; ET Paul W. Harkins, Saint John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* [FaCh 68], Washington D.C.: The Catholic Press of America, 1979), 149.

Then he continues: God does not confirm “their sentence upon their children . . . , but from the one and from the other received those that repented, and counts them worthy of good things beyond number. For indeed even Paul was of them, and the thousands that believed in Jerusalem...” (Acts 21:20).⁴² This last motif includes the possibility for single Jews to be redeemed when they convert to the Christian faith. Sometimes this motif is also substantiated by Acts 2:37–41.⁴³

b) The Border Region of Persia

Aphrahat

During the anti-Christian persecution under the Persian king Sabor, numerous Christians intended to convert to Judaism in order to avoid any distress. This introduced anti-Jewish polemics into Aphrahat’s writings. Aphrahat refutes the salvific claim of Jewish rites and describes the Christian faith as the culmination and consummation of Old Testament promises.⁴⁴ In *Demonstratio* 21.20, Matt 27:25 is the culmination of a long series comparing Jesus with the persecuted, namely Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Jephthah, David, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Josiah, Daniel, Hananiah and his brethren, and, at the end, Mordecai. This comparison closes in the following way⁴⁵:

The blood of Mordecai was required at the hand of Haman and his sons; and the blood of Jesus, His persecutors took upon themselves and upon their children.

Ephraem the Syrian

A synagogue in Nisibis is attested by the Targumim. The existence of a Jewish school at Nisibis confirms the social cohesion of the Jews. The attractiveness of Judaism also for non-Jews could make Ephraem’s polemics understandable.⁴⁶ In his *Hymni de azymis*, Ephraem states⁴⁷:

16. Don’t take that matza, brethren, / from the People with blood-spattered hands
17. Lest some of that filth in which their hands are steeped / should cling to that unleavened bread.
18. Even if meat is clean, no one eats / from what’s been sacrificed, since it’s defiled.
19. How much more unclean is matza, / kneaded by hands that killed the Son!
20. It’s an abomination to take food / from a hand defiled with animal blood.
21. Who would take anything from the hand / utterly defiled with the prophets’ blood?
22. My brethren, don’t eat the matza of the People / – deadly poison – together with the elixir of life
23. For the blood of the Messiah is present, mixed into / the People's matza and our Eucharist
24. Anyone who takes it in the Eucharist takes the elixir of life: / Anyone who eats it with the People takes a lethal drug
25. For that blood of which they cried, ‘Let it be upon us!’ / is mixed into their feasts and their Sabbaths.
26. Whoever joins in their feasts / he too becomes spattered with the blood.

42 John Chrysostom, *hom. in Mt.* 86.2 (PG 58, 766; ET: NPNF 10, 513); similarly Apollinaris of Laodicea, see *Catena Graecorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, ed. John Anthony Cramer, vol. I (Oxford 1840 = Hildesheim: Olms 1967), 233.

43 Augustinus, *s.* 229f. (PLS 2); Beda Venerabilis *expos. in Ac.* (CCSL 121, 22); Leontius of Byzantium, *hom.* 7 (CCSG 17, 244–5); vde. Kampling, *Blut*, 187.

44 Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes / Unterweisungen. Aus dem Syrischen übersetzt und eingeleitet von Peter Bruns*, Vol. I (FC 5/1; Freiburg: Herder, 1991).

45 Aphrahat, *dem.* 21.20 (Translation NPNF II 13/2, 400).

46 Ephraem der Syrer. *Kommentar zum Diatessaron, übersetzt und eingeleitet von Christian Lange*, Vol. I (FC 54/1; Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 17f.

47 Ephraem, *Hymni de azymis* 19.16–28 (trans.: http://www.Johnjr.div.ed.ac.uk/Primary%20Sources/rabbinic/salvesen_ephrem.html, visited 02.10.2013).

27. The People that did not eat pork / is a blood-stained pig.

28. Flee from it, keep your distance as it shakes itself / lest it stain you with a spattering of the blood.

Both pork and blood are highly unclean from a Jewish point of view, and Ephraem does not hesitate to slander the Jews in such a way!

The Jews in Edessa held an influential position for a long time; they even owned a synagogue near the main market. It was Rabbula of Edessa (bishop from 412 to 435) who transformed this building into a church.

c) Asia Minor

In the works of Gregory of Nazianzus, I found nothing concerning our theme. Gregory of Nyssa offers just one quotation of Matt 27:25 but a terrible one. In a highly emotional and rhetorically styled sermon on Easter morning he asks repeatedly: When was Jesus without honour? In the midst of this series of questions he says: Christ was without honour when the Jews cried Ἄρον, ἄρον, το αἷμα ... οἱ κυριοκτόνοι, οἱ προφητοκτόνοι, οἱ θεομάχοι, οἱ μισόθεοι, οἱ τὸν νόμον ὕβρισται, οἱ τῆς χάριτος πολέμιοι, οἱ ἀλλότριοι τῆς πίστεως τῶν πατέρων, οἱ συνήγοροι τοῦ διαβόλου, τὰ γεννήματα τῶν ἐχιδνῶν, οἱ ψιθυρισταί, οἱ κατάλογοι, οἱ ἐσκοτισμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ, ἡ θυμὴ τῶν Φαρισαίων, τὸ συνέδριον τῶν δαιμόνων, οἱ ἀλάστορες, οἱ ἀμφραυλοὶ, οἱ λιθασταί, οἱ μισόκαλοι.⁴⁸ In this harsh polemic, he combines biblical motifs and anti-atheist pagan polemics (θεομάχοι), as well as Christian anti-pagan polemics (... τῶν δαιμόνων). Heinz Schreckenberg rightly comments that considering Gregory's normal restraint, this passage is hardly comprehensible.⁴⁹

d) Alexandria

Within the works of Athanasius, I found no reference to Matt 27:25. He bases the fact of the present Jewish diaspora on a reference to Ps 68:26 ("Let their steading become desolated, and let there be no one who lives in their coverts"; NETS).⁵⁰

III. Anti-Judaism in the Fifth Century

1. Anti-Jewish Legislation II

At the beginning of the fifth century, some anti-Jewish legislation was repeated, e.g. the banning of the circumcision of Christian slaves.⁵¹ New oppressions were introduced in 404, including the exclusion of Jews from the Roman army⁵² and in 423 a ban on building or restoring synagogues.⁵³ Also the so-called *caelicolae*, perhaps God-fearers, were subjects to the following legislation: According to a law from 407, their buildings were to be confiscated and transferred to the churches.⁵⁴ Hostile relations between Christians and Jews became apparent when, on the one hand, Jews at Purim, burning an effigy of Haman, hang him on a cross in order to mock the Christian faith.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Christian anti-Judaism dominated

48 Gregory of Nyssa, *hom. in luciferam sanctam Domini resurrectionem* (GNO 9, 317).

49 Schreckenberg, *Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 300.

50 Athanasius, *in Psalm*. (PG 27, 312 B).

51 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.23 (SC 457, 410).

52 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.16 (SC 507, 392).

53 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.24 (SC 497, 412).

54 Vde. Goodman, *Jews*, 191f.

55 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.18 (SC 457, 394).

not only theology but also politics. In spite of some laws that were supposed to protect Jews⁵⁶, the anti-Jewish attitude found in legislation is remarkable: terms like *taetrum Iudaeorum nomen* and *perversitas iudaica*,⁵⁷ *superstitio*⁵⁸ or *impiissimorum ... dominium*,⁵⁹ related to Jewish slave-owners, demonstrate that there was no neutrality in official statements made by the government. Before 429 the Jewish patriarchate was cancelled.⁶⁰

In 438, Jews were oppressed anew by anti-Jewish laws. The erecting of new synagogue buildings was forbidden, as was the circumcision of non-Jews. Jews were excluded from the army and also from all public ministries. Due to inner-Christian struggles after 451, "Palestine's Jews suffered much less interference in their affairs."⁶¹ Synagogues were built in Galilee and in the Golan, and Jews could even return to Jerusalem. Justinian I regarded himself as guardian and saviour of Christian orthodoxy, as his legislation disadvantaged both miaphysitism and Judaism. Slaves who intended to convert to orthodox Christianity had to be set free. In Codex Justinianus (529), he does not include earlier laws protecting synagogues, and in 535, the Jewish cult in Africa was outlawed.⁶²

2. Christian Historiographers

The following section does not include specific texts in which Matt 27:25 is quoted but depicts the background of the reception of Matt 27:25.

a) Sozomenos

Sozomenos, born ca. 400 in Gaza, hails the Christian emperors after Constantine I as adherents and patrons of true religion due to their restriction of Jews from buying slaves of another religion. If the slave were circumcised, the owner had to be put to death and his property would be confiscated.⁶³ He considers that the Jews were envious of the Christian faith by nature⁶⁴ and accuses them of initiating the persecutions of Christians in Persia under King Sabor.⁶⁵ In his report of Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, he comments again on the irreconcilable Jewish hate shown to Christians.⁶⁶ The quarrel over the proper date of Easter also causes anti-Jewish sentiments when he says that the Quartodecimanians⁶⁷ or – at Ambrose' time – the Novatians⁶⁸, especially the adherents of Sabbatius⁶⁹, celebrated Easter according to the date of the Jewish Passover. Sozomenos felt that Judaism was still an attractive alternative to pagans who wanted to leave paganism behind.⁷⁰

56 Cf. Codex Theodosianus 16.8.9 (SC 497, 382): The governor should treat severely those who, claiming to be Christians, destroy synagogues. Cf. also Codex Theodosianus 16.8.11 (SC 497, 384): He who reproaches the Jewish patriarchate publicly shall be punished.

57 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.19 (SC 457, 396), 409 CE.

58 Codex Theodosianus 16.8.24 (SC 457, 406), 418 CE.

59 Codex Theodosianus 16.9.5 (SC 507, 424), 423 CE.

60 Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden*, 185.

61 Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 213.

62 Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden*, 227–29.

63 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 3.17.4 (GCS 50, 131).

64 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 2.9.1 (GCS 50, 61) characterizes the Jews as τρόπον τινὰ φύσει ἀπὸ βασκανίας πρὸς τὸ δόγμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἐκπεπολεμωμένους.

65 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 2.9.1 (GCS 50, 61f.); cf. *h.e.* 2.12.2 (GCS 50, 66).

66 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 5.22.2 (GCS 50, 229).

67 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 7.18.11 (GCS 50, 329).

68 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 6.24.6 (GCS 50, 269).

69 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 7.18.1 (GCS 50, 327).

70 Sozomenos, *h.e.* 3,17,5 (GCS 50, 131f).

b) Theodoret of Cyrus

In his *Church History*, written after 449, Theodoret of Cyrus mentions the Jews in the context of Julians' attempts to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem – an attempt motivated not so much by the emperor's friendship with the Jews⁷¹ as by his anti-Christian sentiments.⁷² He characterizes *en passant* the Jews as enemies of God⁷³, as murderers of Christ.⁷⁴ An occasion for mentioning Jews in the *History of Monks* was a detail from the life of Simeon Stylites: Christians had destroyed the synagogue in Antioch, and Theodosius II intended to restore the building, but Symeon Stylites hindered the emperor Theodosius II from doing this. Theodoret hails Simeon and vituperates τὴν Ἰουδαίων θρασύτητα.⁷⁵ Theodoret does not mention any other events concerning the relationship between Jews and Christians, and the word index of the critical edition of his epistles does not mention the lemma Ἰουδαῖοι at all.⁷⁶ In his *Commentary on Psalms*, the bishop contrasts the fate of Babylonia with the fate of the Jews: Babylonia became a desert according to the Jewish prayers but the Jews had to suffer the same because of their rebellion against their benefactor (εὐεργέτης) and redeemer Jesus Christ.⁷⁷ In his *Questions on Leviticus*, he repeats the ancient pagan polemical rebuke of Jewish leprosy and refers this rebuke to the synagogues; Lev 14:34 (“When you come into the land ... and I shall give a leprous disease in the houses”) leads him to this exegesis. Everybody who enters a synagogue enters a house of leprosy!⁷⁸ Theodoret feared an improper Jewish orientation in the Christian communities as to both praxis and piety (Ἰουδαῖζειν).⁷⁹

c) Anonymus of Cicycus

This unknown author presupposes Eusebius of Caesarea and Theodoret of Cyrus. In his work, Jews and Judaism appear only in a few respects.⁸⁰ Without any concrete motivation he interprets the last sentence of Isa 9:4 (“they wish they would be burned”) as a prophecy of the Jews' fate, despite the context.⁸¹ The quarrel over the proper date of Easter was also laced with anti-Jewish sentiments: The majority did not wish to celebrate Easter at the same time as the Jewish people celebrate Passover.⁸² At one point he compares heretics with Jews: Heretics tried to abolish the memory of Athanasius just as the Jews planned to abolish the memory of Jesus.⁸³

d) Evagrius Scholasticus

Evagrius Scholasticus, living in the second half of the 6th century as the secretary of the Chalcedonian bishop in Antioch on the Orontes, does not mention the great Jewish

71 Cf. M. Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1973), 287: “When Julian crossed the eastern frontier, he failed to capture Ctesiphon and, far from doing the Jews any good, reduced Machuza and its Jewish academy to ruins.”

72 Theodoret of Cyrus, *h.e.* 3.20 (GCS NF 5, 198–200). According to Philostorgius, *h.e.* 7.9 (GCS 21, 95), Julian intended to prove the falsity of Jesus' prediction in Mark 13:2.

73 Theodoret of Cyrus, *h.e.* 3.20.8 (GCS 44, 200).

74 Theodoret of Cyrus, *h.e.* 4.22.35 (GCS 44, 260).

75 Theodoret, *h.mon.* 2.26.27 (SC 57, 212).

76 Théodoret de Cyr, *Correspondance III, texte critique, traduction et notes par Yvan Azéma* (SC 111, Paris: Cerf, 1965), 259.

77 Theodoret of Cyrus, *psalm.* (PG 80, 1409 A).

78 Theodoret of Cyrus, *qu. Lev.* 18 (PG 80, 324 A).

79 Schreckenberg, *Adversus-Judaeos-Texte*, 384.

80 The most neutral mention is a theological comparison: The Deity is not one person according to the notion of the Jews but three persons (Anonymus of Cicycus, *h.e.* 2.12.2, FC 49/1, 184).

81 Anonymus of Cicycus, *h.e.* 2.16.19 (FC 49/1, 208).

82 Anonymus of Cicycus, *h.e.* 3.37.13 (FC 49/1, 346).

83 Anonymus of Cicycus, *h.e.* 3.15.7 (FC 49/2, 434).

community in Antiochia at all. For him, the doctrine of Nestorius is heretical, Ἰουδαϊσμός⁸⁴, but the doctrine of the so-called Miaphysites is also unacceptable. He does not mention the Miaphysite church or the persecutions of these groups. His hatred of Jews is apparent. He praises the Elder Simeon Stylites who hindered the emperor Theodosius II from doing justice to the Jews and giving them back the synagogues the Christians had occupied.⁸⁵

3. *The Reception of Matt 27:25*

a) Cyril of Alexandria

In 414, during the rule of Cyril of Alexandria, a conflict between Cyril of Alexandria and Jewish leaders resulted in mutual violence. As a consequence, many Jews were expelled from the city, and their property was plundered by a Christian mob lead by Cyril.⁸⁶

Concerning Mt 27:25, he shares in the exegetical tradition according to which the cry is part of Israel's resistance against the prophets. The punishment was foreseen by Jesus Christ (Luke 23:28) and is the fulfilment of Isa 1:7.⁸⁷ In his Easter homilies, in the context of several anti-Jewish polemics,⁸⁸ he in one place refers to Matt 27:25: This cry is followed by the mocking of Jesus (Matt 27:40), which is inspired by the father of the Jews, the devil (John 8:44).⁸⁹

b) Theognostos

Theognostos concludes his chapter on the real deity of Jesus Christ by quoting Old Testament texts which refer to Jesus Christ (Isa 7:14; 9:5; Bar 3:36, 38; Gen 49:10). The Jews have no ruler of their own, and after the murder of Christ "their house is desolate" (Matt 23:38). For him, the cry, "His blood be on us and on our children" rings true even in his own times.⁹⁰

c) The Gospel of Gamaliel

In the so-called Gospel of Gamaliel, Matt 27:25 forms a part of anti-Jewish polemic but in different ways. The Coptic version offers an auctorial allusion to Matt 27:25.⁹¹ In the Arabic version, it is Pilate who, after the death of Jesus, accuses the high priests of Jesus' death, and they answer: "His blood be on us and on our children for a thousand generations!" Pilate is astonished because of this obduracy, but the high priests defend their deed saying that they fulfilled the law.⁹² The expansion "for a thousand generations" underlines the blindness of the

84 Evagrius Scholasticus, *h.e.* 1.1 (FC 57/1, 118). He insulted Nestorius as ἡ θεομάχος γλῶσσα, τὸ Καϊφάρα δεύτερον συνέδριον, τὸ τῆς βλασφημίας ἐργαστήριον.

85 Evagrius Scholasticus, *h.e.* 1.13 (FC 57/1, 158–161).

86 Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, London: Routledge, 1999, 7.

87 Cyril of Alexandria, *in Zach.* (PG 72, 53 AB).

88 Anti-Jewish polemics are to be found in Cyril of Alexandria, *hom. pasch.* 1.6; 4.4-6; 8.4; 10.5; 20.4; 21.3; 24.4; 29.3 (PG 77, 421 A – 425 B; 460 D – 469 B; 566 B – 567 B; 632 A – 633 A; 848 B – 849 A; 853 B – 856 A; 97 A – 901 A; 965 B – 968 A).

89 Cyril of Alexandria, *hom. pasch.* 10.5 (PG 77, 632 D). – In his *Fragments on Matthew*, there is no explanation of Matt 27:25 (vde. PG 72, 462 D), nor in his *Fragments on Luke 23:27–31* (PG 72, 936 B – D).

90 Theognostos, *Thesaurus* 8 (CCSG 5, 40).

91 *Lâha Mâryâm (Lament of Mary)* 8,13, M.-A. van den Oudenrijn, *Gamaliel. Äthiopische Texte zur Pilatusliteratur* (SpicFri 4, Freiburg/Switzerland, 1959), 59.

92 *Gos. Gamaliel arab.* 3.2 (A. Mingana, *The Lament of the Virgin and the Martyrdom of Pilate*, BJRL 12 [1928] = WoodSt 2, 1928, 211–240: 222). German Translation in Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter (eds.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung I/2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1323.

high priests. In the Ethiopic version, after Jesus' death Pilate attacks the high priests because of their cruelty and, quoting Matt 27:25, emphasizes their responsibility for their own fate.⁹³

IV. Exegetical aspects

1. *The Wording of the Introductory Formula*

The simple Matthean εἶπεν and κράζειν (Matt 27:23) are not the only verbs introducing the saying of the Jews, but also βοᾶν⁹⁴, ἐξαιτεῖσθαι,⁹⁵ συκοφαντεῖν;⁹⁶ even *inprecari*⁹⁷ and εὔχεσθαι are used.⁹⁸ It is not very difficult to describe the effect on the reader: Along the lines of Matt 27:23, the reader gains the impression of an uncivilized mob crying for blood; this is not the behaviour of the intellectual élite but of the uneducated mass. The use of εὔχεσθαι indicates the blindness of the Jewish masses: they pray for their own punishment. The alleged Jewish dullness is mixed with raggedness, and for the Christian self-definition of the “we” it seems to be important to define oneself with a higher intellectual status than the “they”. The theological terms ἀρά⁹⁹ and πώρωσις¹⁰⁰ and the general terms τόλμημα¹⁰¹ and μανία¹⁰² stand alongside one another.

2. *Biblical Pre-texts*

Biblical pre-texts are to be found mostly within the Psalms and Isaiah. Within the Psalms, the main pre-texts are those psalms used in the New Testament to illustrate the fate of Jesus: Ps 21, e.g. ad vocem ἤνοιξαν ...¹⁰³; Ps 68 and the so-called Judas-Psalms 108, ad vocem ἠγάπησεν κατάραν, καὶ ἤξει αὐτῷ (v. 18)¹⁰⁴; Ps 17:41 (*odientes me disperdisti*);¹⁰⁵ Ps 58:3 ad vocem ἄνδρες αἱμάτων¹⁰⁶; Ps 63:6 ad vocem *Firmauerunt sibi uerbum malum*¹⁰⁷; and Ps 78:3 ad vocem ἐξέχεαν τὸ αἷμα αὐτῶν.¹⁰⁸ To be sure, Ps 68 [69]:26 sometimes leads to quotations of Matt 23:38 or is used as “proof” for the contemporary Jewish diaspora.¹⁰⁹ However, how do ancient Christian authors exegetically interpret the so-called Judas psalm 108 with regard not only to Judas Iscariot but to Jews in general? Eusebius of Caesarea demonstrates the method: Ps 108:6 names a single adversary, Ps 108:15 a group. According to Eusebius, David switches from the singular to plural and thus the psalm refers to all disbelieving Jews.¹¹⁰

93 Gos. *Gamaliel ethiop.* 3.2 (van den Oudenrijn). German Translation in Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter (eds.), *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* I/2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1341.

94 Eusebius of Caesarea, *psalm.* (PG 23, 208 D).

95 Eusebius of Caesarea, *de solemnitate paschali* 10 (PG 24, 705 A); id., *dem.* 9.11.14 (GCS 23, 430).

96 Hesychius, *in psalm.* (PG 93, 1253 AB).

97 The Venerable Bede, *expos. in Ac.* (CCSL 121, 22.31).

98 Maximus Confessor, *qu. Thal.* 64 (CCSG 22, 219).

99 Eusebius of Caesarea, *dem.* 10.3.20 (GCS 23, 460); John Chrysostom, *hom. in Matt* 86,2 (PG 58, 766).

100 Ps.-Basilus, *in Is.* 1,37 (PG 30, 192AB).

101 Cyril of Alexandria, *hom. pasch.* 10.5 (PG 77, 632 D).

102 Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Is.* (PG 81, 229 B).

103 Eusebius of Caesarea, *psalm.* (PG 23, 208 D – 209 A), with a hint also of John 19:15; The Venerable Bede, *psalm.* (PL 93, 594 CD).

104 Augustine, *en. Ps.* (CCSL 40, 1595-96); The Venerable Bede, *psalm.* (PL 93, 1031 C).

105 Cassiodor, *in psalm.* 17,41 (CCSL 97, 165).

106 Cassiodor, *in psalm.* 58,3 (CCSL 97, 521).

107 Cassiodor, *in Psalm.* 63,6 (CCSL 97, 558).

108 Hesychius, *in psalm.* (PG 93, 1253 AB).

109 Athanasius, *in psalm.* (PG 27, 312 B); Augustine, *en. Ps.* (CCSL 39, 9214); Cassiodor, *in Psalm.* (CCSL 97, 617). *in Mt.* This kind of comment is missing in Theodoret of Cyrus, *psalm.* (PG 80, 1408 C – 1409 B).

110 Euseb of Caesarea, *psalm.* (PG 23, 1337 B). - Cf. Athanasius of Alexandria, *in psalm.* (PG 27, 457 B), in his comment on Ps 104:14 (May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD). David adds to the

In the book of Isaiah, there are pre-texts including the term αἷμα, namely Isa 1:15;¹¹¹ 59:3;¹¹² 63:3, 6¹¹³; Isa 1:21 ad vocem φονευταί¹¹⁴; Isa 3:8 ad vocem γλώσσα μετὰ ἀνομίας¹¹⁵; Isa 5:7 ad vocem κραυγή¹¹⁶; Isa 56:10 ad vocem κύνες ἐνεοί (silent dogs) *e contrario*¹¹⁷; and Isa 59:3 ad vocem χεῖλη.¹¹⁸ But there is a difference: In Isa 1:15; 59:3; and 63:3, 6 the motif of αἷμα evokes rebuke whereas Isa 49:26 (“those who afflicted you shall eat their own flesh, and they shall drink their own blood like new wine and be drunk”; NETS) is interpreted as an announcement of the future that the wicked have brought upon themselves.

We also have to include some other Biblical pre-texts: Micah 3:9-10 ad vocem αἷμα¹¹⁹ and Zech 3:9b ad vocem ψηλαφήσω πᾶσαν τὴν ἀδικίαν τῆς γῆς ἐκείνης ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ (“I will search out all the injustice of that land at one day”; NETS).¹²⁰

In general, there are some aspects of Matt 27:25 which lead ancient Christian authors to intertextual constructions: 1. Those who cry out bring negative consequences upon themselves.¹²¹ Sometimes Matt 27:25 is alluded to even with the hostile κατά + gen. instead of the more neutral ἐπί. So we see that ideology even ruled out the clear reading of the text.¹²² 2. The wording “and on our children” evokes the inclusion of an indefinite number of future generations. Therefore Israel’s defeat by the Romans is seen as a possible fulfilment of Matt 27:25. According to Luke 23:28, Jesus Christ had announced this defeat.¹²³ The relation to the destruction of the temple and the following dispersion is favoured also by Matt 23:38, the announcement of the devastation of “your house”.¹²⁴ 3. The cry for blood creates a narrative tension with Jesus’ prayer for forgiveness in Luke 23:34¹²⁵ and with Pilate washing his hands as a testimony to his innocence, according to Matt 27:24.¹²⁶ This contrast evokes polemics. Sometimes the depth of repentance mentioned in Acts 2:37–38 is emphasized by reference to the contrasting behaviour in Matt 27:25.¹²⁷ 4. The negative future of the Jews is contrasted by the fate of the believing Gentiles.¹²⁸ 5. In this way, Matt 27:25 is the culmination of Israel’s opposition to the prophets according to Matt 23:35 and Acts 7:52–3¹²⁹ and to Jesus — expressed in the charges that he was possessed by Beelzebul and was a Samaritan.¹³⁰

announcement regarding Judas also the sacrilege of his nation, i.e. the murder of the prophets according to Matt 23:37.

111 Ps.-Cyprian, *Iud.* 8.4. (CCSL 4, 276); Ps.-Basilios, *in Is.* 1,37 (PG 30, 192AB); Jerome., (SC 259, 282); Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Is.* 1:15 (SC 276, 170); anonymi auctoris Theognosiae *Dissertatio contra Iudaeos* (9./10. sec.; CCSG 14, 153).

112 Jerome, *in Es.* 16 (CCSL 73 A, 679).

113 Jerome, *in Es.* 16 (CCSL 73 A, 733).

114 Cyril, *in Is.* I,1 (PG 70, 52 AB), with a hint also of Acts 7:52f.; Procopius of Gaza, *in Is.* (PG 87/2, 1857 B).

115 Eusebius of Caesarea, *in Is.* 1.29 (GCS 56, 23).

116 Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Is.* (PG 81, 256 AB). Cyril of Alexandria, *in Is.* I 3 (PG 70, 145 A), refers to John 19:15.

117 Eusebius of Caesarea, *dem.* 10.8.82 (GCS 23, 467).

118 Eusebius of Caesarea, *in Is.* 2.48 (GCS 56, 362).

119 Eusebius of Caesarea, *dem.* 8.3.8 (GCS 23, 393).

120 Cyril of Alexandria, *in Zach* (PG 72, 53 AB).

121 Cf. Ps.-Gregory of Nazianzus, *Christus patiens* (SC 149, 190): Οὔτοι γάρ, ὡς ἔδρασαν, εὐρωσιν κακά.

122 Eusebius of Caesarea, *in psalm.* (PG 23, 313 A).

123 Cyril of Alexandria, *in Lc.* (PG 72, 936 C), referring also to Mt 23:38; The Venerable Bede, *Lc.* (CCSL 120, 400), referring also to Mt 24:26.19.

124 Theognostos, *Thesaurus* 8 (CCSG 5, 40).

125 Leontius of Byzantium, *hom.* 7 (CCSG 17, 244–5).

126 Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 13.21 (Rupp 78).

127 Beda Venerabilis, *expos. in Ac.*, (CCSL 121, 22); cf. Kampling, *Blut*, 187, on Augustine, *s.* 229.

128 Ps.-Basilios of Caesarea, *in Is.* (PG 30, 553 C).

129 Ephraem, comm. in diatess. 18.9 (FC 54/2, 510f.); Cyril of Alexandria, *in Is.* (PG 70, 40 A); Procopius of Gaza, *in Is.* (PG 87/2, 2600 D – 2601 A).

130 Jerome, *in Es.* 16 (CCSL 73 A, 643); Procopius of Gaza, *in Is.* (PG 87/2, 2600 D – 2601 A).

2. Matt 27:25 and Biblical Obstacles

In the view of ancient Christian authors, Matt 27:25 is not a fictional polemical text written by the evangelist but a statement made in actual history. Therefore, ancient Christian authors are unable to regard other biblical texts as means of mollifying the anti-Jewish polemics in the New Testament.

How did ancient Christian authors define the relation between Matt 27:25 and Luke 23:34, Jesus' prayer for forgiveness? Not theology but history is the rationale for Leontius of Byzantium: Jesus prays for forgiveness because he knew that many would convert after his passion (cf. Acts 2:37–8).¹³¹ Close to this kind of argument is the statement of John Chrysostom quoted above: God did not impose this judgment but has showered with benefits those who have converted to him. For Jerome, the fact of Jewish conversion post-Easter confirms Isa 27:9 (*dimittetur iniquitas domui Iacob*).¹³² On the other hand, the Venerable Bede restricts the coverage of Jesus' plea to those who "have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge (Rom 10:2; NASB): For those, however, who, stimulated by arrogance, preferred to kill Jesus instead of confess him, there is no plea, according to the distinction between sins leading to death and sins not leading to death (1John 5:16).¹³³

With regard to Ps 108:14, John Chrysostom asks why not only the sinner himself has to die but also his wife and his children¹³⁴ – this question may have resulted from reading Ezek 18¹³⁵ –, but the bishop does not really deal with this problem.

The hope of the eschatological redemption of Israel according to Rom 11:25-26 is sometimes mentioned,¹³⁶ but does not have any self-critical implications.

Acts 21:20, referring to "believing Jews", was not regarded as an obstacle. John Chrysostom emphasizes the prudence and modesty of James who did not claim the conversion of these Jews to his own merit.¹³⁷ Ammonius of Alexandria remarks only in general that the Jews who became believers in Jesus Christ wished to observe the law.¹³⁸ Neither author reconciles Acts 21:20 and Matt 27:25. Cassiodorus, the Venerable Bede and Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca do not comment on this verse at all.¹³⁹

131 Leontius of Byzantium, *hom.* 7 (CCSG 17, 244–5).

132 Jerome, *in Es.* 8 (CCSL 73, 349).

133 The Venerable Bede, *Lc.* 6 (CCSL 120, 403).

134 John Chrysostom, *in psalm.* (PG 55, 260).

135 Ezek 18 and Ezek 33:10–20 did not function as obstacles. In their homilies on Ezek, Origen and Gregory the Great do not deal with Ezek 18 or 33 at all. But neither Jerome, *in Ezech.* (CCSL 75, 225–248; 469–472) nor Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Ezech.* (PG 81, 972 A – 980 C ; 1144 C – 1148 A) offer any reference to the problem discussed here. Theodoret of Cyrus characterises the "son who does not follow his father's wicked ways" (Ezek 18:14) in the following way: "who keeps himself clean of idolatry and does partake in the *παρανομία* of the house Israel, who does not intrigue in foreign marriages and avoids all semblance of avarice ..." Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Ezech.* (PG 81, 973 D).

136 Vde. Kampling, *Blut*, 123–25. In the following commentaries on Rom 11:25–32, Matt 27:25 is not quoted: Origen, *comm. Rom.* 8.12 (FC 2/4, 300–318); Ambrosiaster, *in Rom.* (CSEL 81/1, 380–392; at best, he concedes that the disbelief of the Jews happened not *de malivolentia* ..., *sed de errore* [CSEL 81/1, 382]); John Chrysostom, *hom. in Rom.* 19.5–7 (PG 60, 589–592); Theodoret of Cyrus, *in Rom.* (PG 82, 180 B – 181 C: He interprets "all Israel" as referring to the believers who are cognates of Israel, naturally or by faith); Cyril of Alexandria, *in Rom.* (PG 74, 849 D, who interprets "all Israel" as referring to the hitherto rejected Israel).

137 John Chrysostom, *hom. in Act.* 46.1 (PG 60, 321).

138 Ammonius of Alexandria, *Frgm. in Act.* (PG 89, 1585 A).

139 A comment would be expected in Cassiodorus, *in Act.* (PL 70, 1399 D) and The Venerable Bede, *expos. Act.* (CCSL 121, 85) and in *retract.* (CCSL 121, 157); Ps.-Oecumenius of Tricca, *in Act.* (PG 118, 264 C). In other commentaries on Acts (e.g. Didymus of Alexandria; Cyril of Alexandria; Theodor of Mopsuestia), interpretations of this chapter have not been preserved.

The Gothic bishop Maximinus imagines that also Christians could say “his blood be on us”, but Christians say it in humility, praying for salvation, Jews say it in a rave, inducing their own condemnation.¹⁴⁰ Despite this, I did not find anyone anywhere conceding that the actions of the Jews help fulfil salvation history, probably due to Matt 26:24: “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”¹⁴¹ Along these lines, ancient Christian authors distinguish between the positive effect of “blood” in salvation history and the negative intention of the Jews crying for Jesus’ crucifixion.¹⁴²

V. Conclusion

My conclusion deals with both contextual and exegetical observations.

1. Sometimes we can see an immediate relationship between local situations and polemics, when theologians feared the attractiveness of Judaism for Christian believers, especially laymen. However, very often we find polemics far removed from any local motivation, and we have to note Christian indoctrination even without any “danger” of Jewish influence. Anti-Jewish attitudes are part of the ancient Christian construction of its own identity; Christians could not understand why Jews remained Jews despite Christian preaching and despite Jewish history after two anti-Roman revolts.

2. It was not only Matt 27:25 but also Acts 7:52-53 and Paul’s statement in 1 Thess 2:15 which led Christians to accusations against the Jews with regard to sacrilege against Jesus Christ and against the prophets sent from God to his people. Due to these New Testament parallels, the harsh cry for crucifixion was interpreted as the act of killing itself. Matt 27:25 implied both the motif of sacrilege and the motif of judgment upon those who called out for the crucifixion, as expressed also in Matt 23:38 and Luke 23:28.¹⁴³

140 Vde. Kampling, *Blut*, 114-15.

141 Eusebius of Caesarea, *comm. in Ps.* 68:26 (PG 23, 756 D – 757 A). On the one hand, Isa 53:4 is true; the murderers of Jesus Christ, however, did not have Isa 53:4 in mind but acted in unrighteousness.

142 Origen, *Jos. hom.* 3.5 (SC 71, 142); Eusebius von Caesarea, *psalm.* 68:26 (PG 23, 756 D – 757 A), both without an explicit quotation of Matt 27:25.

143 With gratitude I mention Riemer Roukema and Phillip Davis who improved my English.