



Faulty exegesis driven by rhetorical conventions in Early Christian polemics against judaizing practices had given occasion for anti-Semitism. This edition looks at an example from John Chrysostom.

Christian Sons and Jewish Dogs: The Patristic Roots of an Anti-Semitic Epithet

In the sad history of anti-Semitism the Jews have been compared with and degraded to dogs time and again. In the Middle Ages, for instance, a “Jewish execution” meant that Jews were executed by hanging at the gallows between dogs. In Nazi Germany the sign “Für Hunde und Juden verboten!” (Dogs and Jews prohibited!) forbade Jews to enter public buildings or sit down on park benches.

In his recent monograph *Jewish Dogs* (Stanford 2006) Kenneth Stow demonstrates that “dogs” as a pejorative reference to Jews probably originated in the Patristic period, namely with John Chrysostom (349-407 C.E.) who in *Jud. I,2* labeled Jews “dogs.” However, Stow is also open to considering the Apostle Paul (Phil 3:2) as the origin of the anti-Jewish epithet “dogs” (Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 4).

The goal of this article is threefold. It attempts to (1) study *Jud. I,2* in more detail than Stow does; (2) draw attention to similar statements of John that are not mentioned by Stow; and (3) demonstrate that Paul cannot be considered the author of the anti-Jewish metaphor “dogs.”

In his eight discourses against judaizing Christians (386/387 C.E.), John, who at the time was the presbyter of Antioch, polemically and repeatedly calls the Jews “dogs.” The most interesting reference is found in *Jud. I,2*. Here John employs the metaphors sons/children and dogs to express the idea of supersessionism: “Although those Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) had been called to

the adoption of sons, they fell to kinship with dogs (πρὸς τὴν τῶν κυνῶν συγγένειαν ἐξέπεσον); we who were dogs (κύνες) received the strength . . . to rise to the honor of sons. How do I prove this?” After quoting Mt 15:26 John continues, “Christ was speaking to the Canaanite woman when He called the Jews children and the Gentiles dogs (κύνας). But see how thereafter the order was changed about: they became dogs (κύνες), and we became the children. Paul said of the Jews (περὶ αὐτῶν): ‘Beware of the dogs (κύνες) . . . For we are the circumcision’” (Phil 3:2-3).

With regard to John’s exegesis of Mt 15:26 and Phil 3:2-3 the following three observations can be made. First, in order to adjust Mt 15:26 to Phil 3:2 John changes the Matthean diminutive κυνάριον into the harsher metaphor κύων. In doing so he prepares the application of the metaphor κύων to the Jews that he is about to make. Elsewhere he states that in contrast to the Gentile dogs of Mt 15:27 the Jewish ‘dogs’ cannot expect to receive anything from the master’s table: “But that they might not have this advantage, since even dogs are at the table, he [Paul] adds that, whereby he makes them aliens (ἄλλοτριῶν) also, saying, Beware of the evil workers” (*Hom. in Phil. h. 11.1*).

Second, according to John, the Apostle Paul applied the metaphor to the Jews in general (περὶ αὐτῶν). However, in Phil 3:2 Paul—a Jew himself (cf. Phil 3:5)—does not refer to Jews as such but only to his judaizing enemies. Thus, John wrongly reads a general reference to the Jews into Phil 3:2. Elsewhere he does the same with regard to Is 56:10-11: “In fact Isaiah called the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) dogs (κύνας καλεῖ) and Jeremiah called them mare-mad horses” (*Jud. IV,6*). However, in Is 56:10-11 (LXX) the metaphor κύνες probably refers only to the Jewish leaders/prophets who—as watch dogs—do not warn their people of enemies as they are supposed to do (cf. Ex 11:7).

Third, even though Paul polemically calls his enemies κύνες he does not go so far as to speak of their συγγένεια τῶν κυνῶν. By applying this phrase to the

Jews, John is going somewhat further in his polemics (cf. Mt 3:7).

In view of these three considerations it can be said that John’s equation of Jews and dogs has no Scriptural warrant. Thus, John is (probably) the first Early Christian who called all Jews “dogs.” He does so by way of what can be called a rhetorical exegesis of Mt 15:26 and Phil 3:2 (and Is 56:10-11). For John, the Jews are ἄλλοτριῶν if not inhuman (συγγένεια τῶν κυνῶν). Therefore they can and should not expect to receive anything good from Christian tables.

It has been attempted to explain the harshness of the anti-Jewish metaphor “dogs” by way of pointing out that (1) John’s anxious concern for the church of Antioch led him to employ such strong wording (cf. Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 4); and (2) such terminology was in accordance with the rhetorical conventions of the fourth century AD (Rudolf Brändle). However, such remarks fail to excuse John of his faulty exegesis of both the New Testament and the Greek Bible. In the passages mentioned in this article (and other references to the Jews) John Chrysostom certainly did not prove himself to be a man with a golden mouth.

According to Elliott Horowitz, John’s labeling of Jews as dogs is an example of “how theological anti-Judaism could give way to racial antisemitism” (“Circumcised Dogs from Matthew to Marlowe,” *Prooftexts* 27 [2007]: 542). In the Nazi regime John’s works were re-edited. For the Nazis, these works served as welcome tools to justify their anti-Semitic atrocities (cf. Walter Laqueur, *Gesichter des Antisemitismus* [Berlin 2008], 63).

-Boris Pasckhe
 Research Assistant, NT

Reviews & Annotations

Nguyen, V. Henry T. *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus.*

WUNT 2:243. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 272 pp.

Henry Nguyen has added an admirable volume to the growing list of titles relating to Christian identity in the first century world. His Ph.D. work at Aberdeen, under Andrew Clarke (who is noted for his research into the socio-historical context of NT leadership), resulted in two earlier articles. Dr. Nguyen now teaches New Testament at Loyola Marymount University and Biola University in Los Angeles, USA.

This study is an excellent demonstration of a comparative study of the New Testament and selected classical sources from a socio-historical perspective. Since identity is a buzzword in the social sciences, and increasingly in Biblical studies, the author carefully chooses a definition of identity that suits his project ("Social identity is our understanding of who we are and or who other people are" and vice versa, p. 1). Surprisingly, this concept finds ancient parallels in the Latin *persona* and the Greek *πρόσωπον*, which can also mean 'social identity.' Realizing the limitations of word studies, including such treasured lexicons as Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich or Liddell & Scott, the author offers his own analysis of key literature. He covers Valerius who wrote in Rome during the first part of the first century AD, Paul who wrote in the middle part of that century in Corinth, and Epictetus who wrote in the late first and early second century in Nicopolis in the Greek East.

Valerius and Epictetus are relatively underinvestigated, so Nguyen provides what few details we have of their lives, their

audiences and their literary work. Both can be described as moral teachers, who are critical of the moral environment of their day, especially of the Roman elite who are mostly preoccupied with their *persona*--which relates to their outward appearance, status, and glory. In order to offer the needed corrective, Valerius' moral handbook *Facta et dicta* includes over a thousand historical and literary examples of memorable deeds and sayings. His aim is to inspire individuals to be transformed and to replace the thirst for glory and honor with true Roman values. Epictetus also aims to transform his pupils through his *Dissertationes* (collected by Xenophon, a student of his), but his criticism cuts deeper. He presents Roman ambitions related to vain externals as a fever running through society, and encourages his audience to seek a life of freedom with one's own will at the center. Epictetus not only challenges Roman abuse of a search for honor in external matters, but he challenges its very roots. He would replace this sickly orientation with his own human ideal: the Stoic philosopher who is unaffected by externals, since he is governed instead by his mind and will. These two writers thus offer historical examples, lists of virtues and vices, and what they consider the proper view on Roman or human identity. It is not difficult to spot similar rhetorical strategies in Paul's letters.

Using many current studies on Corinth, Nguyen demonstrates that Paul combats similar concerns in Corinth, which is especially visible in 2 Corinthians. Paul is evidently well aware of the Roman connotations of *πρόσωπον* in the meaning of 'social identity,' and he contrasts it with the heart (2 Cor. 5:12). In fact, much of 2 Cor. 2:14 - 7:4 turns out to be a long dispute against the preoccupation of the Corinthians with externals such as outward appearance or rhetoric,

so that Paul had to designate his suffering as well as his rhetorical shortcomings as inconsequential. Nguyen's analysis of these chapters is a masterful (but all too brief) exposition that contrasts outward and inward orientations. And yet, Paul is not presented as only interested in an internal spirituality, for he also wants Christians to behave in certain ways so that their identity becomes visible not only to other believers but to the whole world.

In short, for Valerius *persona* or social identity is rooted in the socio-political roots of Roman tradition; for Epictetus it is rooted in the life of the true philosopher; but for Paul it is rooted in the life, suffering and death of Christ.

This book is one of a number of growing studies that approach the issue of identity from various angles. What it lacks in clarity from the social sciences (for instance in a more robust explanation of 'social identity'), it makes up for in its presentation of the three ancient authors. The book is fairly technical and requires knowledge of Greek, while a few quotes in French or German can be skipped without losing the line of argument. As a supplementary textbook for the exegesis of the Corinthian letters, or for a more in-depth view of how to interpret the difficulties of 2 Corinthians in preparing one's own studies or sermons, this book offers excellent resources. The only major drawback is that it's a paperback book for the price of an expensive hardback, but hopefully that will be remedied soon.

- Jack Barentsen
Teaching Assistant, NT