

## NOTES

### ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE GOSPEL

Much and all as the article "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel" by Dominic M. Crossan, O.S.M., is to be welcomed,<sup>1</sup> it is unsatisfactory on a number of points, some of which are quite important. The thesis of the article was that "the often-repeated statement"<sup>2</sup> that the Jewish people and not merely "a small hard core of Palestinian Jewish authority" rejected Jesus and had Him crucified is "historically indefensible,"<sup>3</sup> as is the view that Diaspora Judaism approved of this rejection and crucifixion.

In discussing the New Testament sources which seem to support and in fact "have fostered"<sup>4</sup> this interpretation, Fr. Crossan deals at length with the presumption that at the trial of Jesus "the authorities" were able "to gather and arouse a mob or a crowd to agree with their intentions. From this the inference is that this must have been somewhat representative of the feelings of the majority of the people in Jerusalem and possibly of all of Palestinian Judaism."<sup>5</sup> Against this "Jerusalem mob theory" Crossan points out "historical and textual difficulties,"<sup>6</sup> but does not discuss the issue of the respective guilt of Pilate and the Jewish opponents of Jesus (however they are to be understood). As regards the weight of responsibility which the Roman and Jewish sides must bear for the death of Jesus, the Evangelists do not give uniform answers—a variation which very likely reflects changing relations between the Christian Church, the Jewish people, and the Roman authorities in the middle and late first century. The guilt of the Jewish side is heavily stressed, for example, by material special to Matthew. There is the message from Pilate's wife to her husband ("Have nothing to do with that innocent man; I was greatly disturbed on his account in my dreams last night" [27:19]), Pilate's washing his hands ("He took water and washed his hands before the people, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to that yourselves'" [27:24]) and the reply ("The whole people answered: 'His blood be on us and on our children'" [27:25]). The last passage, which probably has done more than any other sentence in the New Testament to feed the fires of anti-Semitism, is simply ignored by Crossan. He rightly asks: "Where in a city where the authorities feared the people in Mt 26:5 did they obtain the crowd in Mt 27:20?"<sup>7</sup> But he omits to ask what Matthew intends by enlarging "the crowds" (*tous ochlous*) of 27:20 to "the whole people" (*pas ho laos*) of 27:25 and by having "the

<sup>1</sup> THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 26 (1965) 189–214.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.   <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.   <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.   <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

whole people" use a traditional expression for assuming full responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Is it easy to reject the comment of W. D. Davies, who—from the passages "in which Matthew makes clear that the Old Israel has been rejected in favour of a new community"—singles out 27:15–26 as the section "where the guilt of the people of Israel as such is prominent"?<sup>9</sup>

In treating Paul's relations with Diaspora Judaism, Crossan rightly draws attention to Luke's "apologetico-polemical intent" in stressing "the innocence of Paul"<sup>10</sup> vis-à-vis the charges brought against him before the officials of the Roman rule. Facing a reason which "may be very painful for the Christian conscience to bear,"<sup>11</sup> Crossan queries whether Paul can be cleared of all blame for his "tragic clash"<sup>12</sup> with Diaspora Judaism. "Does it not seem that Paul was in far too much of a hurry, and that if one must speak of rejection, such action was somewhat mutual between Paul and Diaspora Judaism?"<sup>13</sup> Crossan goes on to emphasize "this speed, this almost intransigent haste, which makes what happens outside Palestine differ so sharply from what happens within the land in Acts."<sup>14</sup> Among the Palestinian Jews "things were going well."<sup>15</sup> First, the early Church made "very good progress in Palestine and even in Jerusalem itself. Acts constantly mentions the fact of the increase in Jewish converts within the Church."<sup>16</sup> "All the evidence . . . points to the conclusion that the Jews of Jerusalem and Palestine were accepting the Church in large numbers."<sup>17</sup> Second, "Acts insists on the good will" of the ordinary people towards "the infant community."<sup>18</sup>

The following comments can be made on this case against Paul. (1) If Luke emphasizes in Acts the witness of Roman officials to the innocence of Paul, it is necessary to recall a parallel apologetic stress in Luke's Gospel. More than Matthew and Mark, Luke stresses Pilate's testimony to Jesus' innocence and his desire to release him (23:4, 14–16, 20, 22). This underscoring of Roman witness to the guiltlessness of Paul (and Jesus) is intended not so much to emphasize the culpability of the Jews as to persuade Roman readers of the innocence of Christianity before the law of the Empire.<sup>19</sup>

2) Can we find proof for a deplorable "intransigent haste" in Paul's

<sup>8</sup> Cf. 2 S 1:16; 3:29; Ez 18:13; Acts 18:6.

<sup>9</sup> *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge, 1964) p. 290. Cf. R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (Munich, 1963) p. 146.

<sup>10</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 207.      <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.      <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.      <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.      <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209–10.      <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.      <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1963) p. 10; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1952) pp. 30–31.

apostolate from the fact that "the Jews of Pisidian Antioch are given only two Sabbaths (13:42-44) . . . those of Thessalonica are given three Sabbaths (17:2) and . . . those of Ephesus are given three months (19:8)"? <sup>20</sup> We can hardly take the Ephesus case too seriously, especially when we recall that Paul had paid a previous visit to the synagogue in that city (18:19). If we criticize Paul on the basis of the remaining two cases, what are we to say of Peter, if—as presented in Acts—he called on the Jerusalem crowd to receive baptism at the end of his first sermon to them (2:37-41)? What are we to think of Philip, who baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch at the end of a single conversation with him and then is snatched away by "the Spirit" for some apparently rapid preaching on his way to Caesarea (8:26-40)? Whatever speed and haste Paul does show on his missionary journeys can find its ultimate justification in the sayings which Mark records as given by Jesus to the Twelve before their trial missionary journey (6:6-13; cf. parallel passages in Mt 9:35; 10:1, 9-11, 14; and Luke 9:1-6). These sayings, which were doubtless felt to be relevant to the post-Pentecost missionary activity and reflect the early Church's practice, are "breathless with a sense of urgency." <sup>21</sup>

3) Crossan complains of Luke's "polemical intention," which makes him "pass very lightly" <sup>22</sup> over those in Diaspora Judaism who were accepting Paul's message, but in fact Crossan tends to do the same thing himself, emphasizing "the tragic clash of Paul and Diaspora Judaism while the Church in Palestine was making many Jewish converts." <sup>23</sup> Is it possible to prove that among the Diaspora Jews Paul and his group won over to Christianity a number of converts that was proportionally smaller than the number gained by the Christians in Palestine?

4) It is misleading to say without qualification that Acts "insists on the good will" of the ordinary people towards "the infant community"; it does so only up to chapters 6 and 7. A change comes with chapter 8, when Jerusalem ceases to be a field for Christian missionary activity. There are no further references to this "good will."

5) In his account of Paul's clash with Diaspora Judaism, Crossan makes no reference to the solemn words of Paul with which Luke brings Acts to a conclusion:

How well the Holy Spirit spoke to your fathers through the prophet Isaiah when He said, "Go to this people and say: You will hear and hear, but never understand; you will look and look, but never see. For this people has grown gross at

<sup>20</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London, 1952) p. 302.

<sup>22</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

heart; their ears are dull, and their eyes are closed. Otherwise, their eyes might see, their ears hear, and their heart understand, and then they might turn again, and I would heal them." Therefore take notice that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles: the Gentiles will listen" (28:25-28, NEB trans.).<sup>24</sup>

This comment on the obduracy of Diaspora Judaism, which is paralleled by the words of Jesus about the disbelief of His Palestinian hearers (Mt 13:14-15; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:40), sums up a key theological theme of Acts: the passing of the gospel from obdurate Israel to the Gentiles.<sup>25</sup>

Luke's theologizing brings us to what seems an unsatisfactory presupposition of Crossan's argument, viz., the belief that we can solve the question of "anti-Semitism in the Gospel" by explaining the use of the terms "crowds" in Luke's Gospel and John's expression "the Jews" and by settling the "historical" facts of Jesus' trial and Paul's clash with Diaspora Judaism. By all means let us clarify terminology and try to establish, so far as it is possible, what "really" happened at the trial and on Paul's missionary journeys. But we must also explore the significance which Matthew, Luke, Paul, and other New Testament writers attach to these events and their theology of the obduracy of Israel. Only then can the Gospel be shown to supply no justification for anti-Semitism.

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<sup>24</sup> Luke stresses the significance of these words to the Roman Jews not merely by their position at the end of his work but also by the particularly impressive introductory formula. Remember, too, that Luke has Paul deliver a formal statement of rejection to the Jewish Diaspora in each of the three main areas: Asia Minor (13:46), Greece (18:6), and Rome.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Gnilka, *Die Verstockung Israels* (Munich, 1961).