

Art Katz:

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From time to time one reads of how Jewish commentators are chafed by the world's holding of Israel to a higher standard or account. Their irritation evidently stems from a secular and rational mentality that does not regard Israel as in any way exceptional with regard to other nations, and therefore not deserving of any criterion for judgment than that by which all other nations are held. The following takes an entirely different biblical view, which if it is the nearer approach to the divine perspective is deserving of our consideration. Eugene Peterson, now retired, was a professor at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, author of numerous books and is well known and appreciated in the evangelical community. All the emphases are mine. In the February 28 selection of Eugene Peterson's devotional, *Praying with the Prophets*, his text is Jeremiah 12:9: "Is the hyena greedy for my heritage at my command? Are the birds of prey all around her? Go and assemble all the wild animals; bring them to devour her."

He comments, "Judah...was intended to be a blessing to the nations—like salt, like leaven. Under the conditions of her rebellion and disobedience [that very] difference is only [instinctively and intuitively] an offense that rouses her neighbors to anger and attack."

My comment: This is paradoxically the inverse consequence of that which is intended for blessing. It underlies and compounds all grievances in those who should have been the recipients of God-intended blessings—grievances, conscious or unconscious, that can be kindled unto rage! That rage, I am suggesting, is called anti-Semitism. It has haunted us as a people throughout our history [even prior to the advent of Christendom] to the present day. Can it, considering the text, be viewed as judgment? Judgment, not only in the punitive sense but in the redemptive, in that it should act as a spur to restore us in our call to the nations to "bless all the families of the earth"; to be that priestly nation that teaches the people the difference between the sacred and the profane; not only by our words, but, necessarily, by our example?

Can this be the real root of anti-Semitism? Can our failure to recognize or even consider this be the very evidence that our condition as a people ["incorrigibly rebellious" in the words of Norman Podhoretz, *The Prophets*, p.274] has not changed from Jeremiah's time? Nowhere do we hear that we should look within ourselves, but rather the cause is always the 'other,' and we the victim! If God has not changed, what we construe as a global anti-Semitism, may well be the action of God that "assembles all the wild animals...to devour [us]." While this unpalatable thought might be dismissed as irresponsible conjecture, should we not, in view of our tragic recent past and threatening present, make it a first consideration before considering any other?

To sum up, I am suggesting, on the basis of this and other biblical texts, that what we construe as anti-Semitism, and attribute to negative references to the Jews in the New Testament and to other sociological and historical factors, may have their root in our own failed call. The underlying dynamic being the resentment of the gentiles for the intuited loss of blessedness that would otherwise have been theirs by divine intention, had we been faithful. These spiritual factors are operative even when not consciously understood and the consequences flowing from them are intended to bring us to a proper awareness of that failing and to renewed return. The fact is that even truth can be used for incendiary purposes, so that the cause lies not in what is employed but the underlying factors that provoke their use. The truer remedy then is not in safeguarding against the malevolent but in our repentance and return to a spurned call and the God who gave it.

This thesis seems to be supported by the account of the Millennial blessings which eschatologically follow that return, reversing the pattern of all the past, so that, "the sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee, shall [in gratitude] bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated...I will make thee an eternal; excellency, a joy of many generations" (Isaiah 60:14-15).

Little wonder that suggestions for the solution of anti-Semitism are so sparse. If the root of the problem is spiritual, so also must be its solution. That virtually no mention is made of God in every public discussion that I have attended painfully reveals the truth of our Jewish condition, yarmulke wearing or no. We are at best deists if not effectual atheists, and do not expect, or all the more desire a divine intervention. Hence we continue to misconstrue the problem even as it mounts. For all our clever analysis and critique, only prophetic insight and prophetic proclamation offer the prospect of hope.