Acts of God in History According to Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Historiography

The Contribution of Ancient Historians to the Philosophical and Religious Controversy About Divine Revelation and Its Theological Implications

1. Acts of God in Thucydides
a. Mythical Stories
b. Predictions of the Future
c. Thucydides' Notion of God

2. Acts of God in Plutarch
a. Predictions of the Future
b. The Parting of the Pamphylian Sea
c. Miraculous Phenomena in Connection with Statues
d. The Ascension of Romulus
e. Plutarch's Notion of God

3. Acts of God in Old Testament Historiography
a. Predictions of the Future
b. The Parting of the Red Sea
c. Resurrections and Ascensions
d. The Notion of God in the Old Testament

4. Acts of God in Flavius Josephus
a. Predictions of the Future
b. The Parting of the Red Sea
c. Resurrections and Ascensions
d. Josephus' Notion of God

5. Acts of God in New Testament Historiography
a. Predictions of the Future
b. Nature Miracles
c. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension
d. The Notion of God in Luke-Acts

5. Conclusion

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Armin D. Baum (Gießen/Leuven)
www.armin-baum.de

Models of Inclusion and Exclusion in Joshua

David G. Firth

St John's College, Nottingham

Can One Speak of Joshua and Inclusion?

Joshua is regarded by many readers as one of the least inclusive texts in the Old Testament, especially because of the practice of חרם that it describes, something often understood as more or less equivalent to genocide. However, more inclusive readings have been suggested by Howard and Zehnder, and this paper provides additional support for this through a consideration of the final form of Joshua's narrative strategy.

Inclusion and Exclusion in Joshua 1-12

a. Creating Instability in Joshua 1:1-5:12

Joshua 1 creates a series of direct links to Deuteronomy, so readers coming from Deuteronomy expect that Deuteronomy will provide a controlling perspective for what follows. But by employing external focalisation through to 5:12, in which the narrator refrains from making explicit comment, readers are left without clear guidance on how to interpret certain events, most notably the agreement with Rahab. Failure to note this means scholarly readers disagree over the significance of this, but in reality the information to assess it is not provided until later, so how Deuteronomy controls this is left unclear.

b. Incomplete Resolution of Instability in Joshua 5:13-12:24

These chapters move from external focalisation to zero focalisation, where the narrator provides the information needed for interpretation, gradually revealing the acceptance of Rahab in contrast to the exclusion of Achan and the inclusion of the Gibeonites. Inclusion and exclusion are thus made complex, but 11:15 makes clear that this is all to be understood as consistent with Deuteronomy, meaning that readers need to reassess their interpretation of Deuteronomy and the חרם.

Conclusion

Joshua remains a difficult text and it does still assert that some Canaanites were destroyed. However, it leaves open means by which inclusion is possible. This pattern is continued in chapters 13-24, so that the call to choose Yahweh in 24:15 must be read as a challenge to a mixed population, a final summons to inclusion.

Jože Krašovec

THE WORD IN DIALOGUE AND INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS
(Hand-out)

Summary

The semantic and hermeneutic range of the biblical concept of the word determines religious hermeneutics, directions of developing systematic theology and research directions, and indicates under which aspects the Jewish-Christian concept of the word complements the general concept of the word and, consequently, of communication and dialogue. To understand the meaning of "word" in the Bible in all its multiple representations and interpretations, it is important to consider the relationship between descriptive or narrative and normative or doctrinal ways of expressing beliefs and values. Considering the Bible as a whole leads to recognition of a remarkable diversity of descriptive and normative ways of expression that are interrelated and support each other. Priorities in this or the other direction determine considerably interreligious relations. This issue will be illustrated through the use of the concept of justice and related words in the forensic sense of divine retribution and in its redemptive sense of righteousness and grace when related to God. When related to the human subject the issue is the alternative of justice as a norm and of righteousness in the sense of faith. A comparison between the use of the term of justice or righteousness in the Old and New Testaments will be especially helpful.

Words are integral to communication in general and to divine-human interaction in particular. While other forms of communication might be cited, speaking and hearing, listening and responding, are central to the divine-human conversation. God can speak and the creatures can hear and understand, human beings can speak to God (e.g. in prayer) and God can hear and respond. God's speaking is seen not simply as a matter of the conveyance of a certain content, but important in itself as integral to God's faithfulness within a relationship. The word of God is therefore fundamentally a relational category by means of which the relationship between God and people can be realized more fully. The content of the word of God also is to be understood in relational terms. God speaks to the people for the sake of fullness of relationship. Interaction with those addressed is essential for the creation to be what it is called into being to be: in genuine relationship with its Creator. The post-word interaction among God, word, and receptors of the word, will shape the effects of the word in the world.

The holistic understanding of the word in the Old Testament is based on the conviction that it is God's intention and responsibility to care for the world and for the wellbeing of humankind. Out of his love God speaks primarily and most universally through creation, but most specifically he speaks through elected persons for various intermediary functions. The Letter to the Hebrews opens with the message: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (1:1–2). All chosen ancestors, prophets, and especially the Son of God, were completely bound to God by obedience and spoke only what God commanded them to speak. God cares for salvation, and in a special way for the health of his people. Both objectives may be accomplished through direct divine action or through a human agent, whether through the prophets or Jesus or the apostles, and in few cases, through physicians.

The unique role of the word in the Bible in all its dimensions makes it clear that no one-sided and exclusive approach is justified. The principle "sola Scriptura" is acceptable only as a way to critical investigation of the Bible which helps all scholars and general readers of the texts to discover complementary relations of natural and supra-natural order in both the universe and in spiritual relations between God and humans. These complementary relations explain why biblical texts endow the reader with a sense of mystery and transcendental value and why persuasion of reality affects people on emotional, intuitive, experiential, instinctive and subliminal levels. Within New Testament belief there are two foundations for a deeper and complementary understanding of biblical dimensions of the concept of "word": Creation and Incarnation. Creation implies the "word" in terms of inward, spiritual self-communication of God to the creature. The advent of the incarnate Logos of the Father is being seen as the most radical case of a mighty, creative salvific, word (*dabar*) of God in general – as the supreme manifestation of God's grace, which is fundamentally God himself. As the Gospel according to John states right at the beginning: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (1:1–3). There is therefore an essential connexion between the inner word of grace and the external, historical, social word of revelation.

The literal and the metaphorical meanings have in common an area of shared meaning. When abstract ideas are replaced by something specific and concrete we can speak of "incarnation" of the word in everyday living experience within the entire life perspective. In speech and in writing, metaphors are important stylistic means that employ analogy, which is important for the poetic imagination and as a persuasive device in rhetorical speeches. Words and phrases that suggest the likeness of one entity to another entity relate to objects, events, ideas, activities and attributes. As cognitive images, metaphors are foundational to our conceptual system as a framework that is implicit in the language as a system and in literary forms. Symbols evoke the feeling and awareness that, in the relation between the divine and the human, there is similarity of relation. The state-of-the-art in investigations about the place and the role of symbol in Judaism and Christianity opens ways to ecumenical convergence in the broadest possible sense. Symbols represent the primary foundations and the possibility for intense ecumenical discussion.

The doctrine of justification by faith is a crucial term of theological debate among Protestant and Catholic scholars. The established Protestant formal insistence on justification by "faith alone" (*sola fide*) normally induced their antagonists to see between Catholics and Protestant a profound antithesis in theology of justification. This situation demands amid differences in views more precise formulation of key terms. During the past decades remarkable results of extensive ecumenical dialogue have been achieved on the doctrine of justification. The most remarkable document is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* created and agreed to by the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999. In this document, the results of ecumenical dialogue on this subject have been for the first time submitted for formal, official reception. The joint declaration seeks to summarize the results of the ecumenical dialogue on this doctrine over a period of some 30 years.

Plurality of Theologies in Bible and Church-life, by Erhard S. Gerstenberger

There sure is a need for unified confessions and coherent theology both in individual lifes, communities and larger church bodies. We need to state clearly reasons and contents of our faith, as well as the guide-lines of daily behavior. But in reality we are constantly faced with concurring and even conflicting spiritual and theological insights. The Bible as a whole offers some "orthodox" or rather "orthopractic" threads (e.g. Deuteronomic, Priestly, Pauline, Evangelic, Apostolic theologies), and they are intertwined with colorful theological textures of very different origin, meaning and outlook. Why does a canonic Holy Book contain so diversified statements of faith, conceptions of the Divine, ethical orientations? One reason certainly is the progression of time, reflected in the growth and composition of the Bible, and concomitant social and cultural changes undergone by the community of faith. Another motif of diversity is given by human idiosyncrasies in constructing religious beliefs and the general disability of the mind to comprehend the Absolute.

The paper, after a more personal introduction to the issue of "uniformity" and "diversity" of creeds (1) touches upon the basic incapacity of our minds and selfs to grasp the Absolute and Eternal (2) and then delves into the "plurality of Biblical witnesses": the conceptual theological and ethical differences of determined social groupings as they are visible in the Old Testament (family, village, tribe, nation, parochy: 3.1). In consequence we have to take into account our modern social structures, cultural, economic, political situations and the many ways they influence our theological thinking. The last section of my paper, then (3.2) can only hint at various parameters which we have to investigate critically. Our aim should be, under the auspices of the One (Unknowable?) Creator and Savior of our global world, to overcome divisions and strifes.

"... prophecies, they will come to an end; ... tongues, they will cease; ... knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophecy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end." (1 Cor 13,8-10).

We do live in a confessionally and religiously deeply divided world. How can we position ourselves and our congregations? Do we claim exclusiveness and supremacy for our faith? A self-examination of our customary ways to construct doctrinal systems of faith – unheard of in pre-Christian antiquity – must accompany all deliberations.

Interreligious Relations. The Case of Jesus and Hanina ben Dosa

Dr. Hilde Brekke Møller, MF Norwegian School of Theology

Abstract:
This paper explores the possibility that one talmudic healing story, featuring Hanina ben Dosa, is the result of influence from the Jesus movement. The story in *b. Ber.* 34b has striking similarities with John 4:43–53. While the figure of Hanina ben Dosa is known from the Mishnah (200 CE), this particular healing story first occurs in the Palestinian Talmud (400 CE). Chronologically, therefore, the Jesus story predates the Hanina story by centuries. Besides, there has been interaction between followers of Jesus and (other) Jews, and Jacob Neusner and Peter Schäfer, among others, suggest that rabbinic sources were indeed shaped in response to the Jesus movement. In light of this, the most likely explanation of the similarities between *b. Ber.* 34b and John 4:43–53 is that the rabbinic story is modelled on the Jesus story. As such, it is an example of how interreligious relations from the first millennium CE made its mark on written tradition, and it is a case that illustrates strategies that are used in interreligious settings.

1. The Bavli: Hanina heals from a distance

Once the son of R. Gamaliel fell ill. He sent two scholars to R. Hanina b. Dosa to ask him to pray for him. When he saw them he went up to an upper chamber and prayed for him. When he came down he said to them: Go, the fever has left him.
They said to him: Are you a prophet? He replied: I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I learnt this from experience. If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he is accepted: but if not, I know that he is rejected. They sat down and made a note of the exact moment. When they came to R. Gamaliel, he said to them: By the temple service! You have not been a moment too soon or too late, but so it happened: at that very moment the fever left him and he asked for water to drink (*b. Ber.* 34b, Soncino edition).

2. The New Testament: Jesus heals from a distance

In Mark 7:24–30 a Syrophoenician woman comes to Jesus and begs him to cast out an unclean spirit from her daughter. And he does. In Matt 8:5–13 it is the son or servant (παῖς) of a centurion (ἑκατόνταρχος) who is healed. Luke 7:2–10 also recounts a story about a centurion (ἑκατόνταρχος) and his sick slave (δοῦλος). In John 4:46–53, Jesus heals the son (υἱὸς) of a royal official (βασιλικὸς) who was dying. Jesus declares the son healed. On his way home, the slaves of the official meet him and tell him that his son is alive and that the fever left him at the same hour that Jesus had declared him well.

Luke 7:2–10 (NRSV)
A centurion there [Capernaum] had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death.

When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave . . . And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him . . .

(dialogue: Jesus and friends)

When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

John 4:46b–56a (NRSV)
Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum.

When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

(dialogue: Jesus and official)

Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live."

***b. Ber.* 34b (Soncino)**
Our Rabbis taught: Once the son of R. Gamaliel fell ill.

He sent two scholars to R. Hanina b. Dosa to ask him to pray for him. When he saw them he went up to an upper chamber and prayed for him. When he came down he said to them: "Go, the fever has left him"
(dialogue: Hanina and scholars)
"I [Hanina] learnt this from experience. If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that he is accepted: but if not, I know that he is rejected." They sat down and made a note of the exact moment. When they came to R. Gamaliel, he said to them: "By the temple service! You have not been a moment too soon or too late, but so it happened: at that very moment the fever left him and he asked for water to drink

4. Development of Hanina traditions

***m. Ber.* 5:1**
The early pious (*hasidim harishonim*) used to tarry for a time, and then pray, so that they might direct their hearts to the place. Even [if] a king greets him, he should not respond. Even [if] a snake is coiled around his heel, he should not interrupt.[1]

***m. Ber.* 5:5**
It was related of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa that he used to pray for the sick and say, 'This one will live, that one will die.' They said to him: 'How do you know?' He replied: 'If my prayer emerges fluently, I know that it is accepted, but if not, then I know that it is rejected'

***t. Ber.* 3:20**
[If] one was standing and praying in a street or broad way - Lo, he passes [= steps aside] before an ass, an ass driver, or a wagon driver and does not interrupt. They said concerning R. Hanina that [once] he prayed, and an *arvad* [= a deadly lizard or snake] bit him and he did not interrupt. His students went and found it dead on the mouth of the hole. They said, "Woe to the person whom an *arvad* has bitten. Woe to the *arvad* that has bitten ben Dosa" .[2]

***y. Ber.* 9a**
They said concerning R. Hanina ben Dosa that [once] he stood and prayed, and a *havarbar* came and bit him, and he did not interrupt his *tefillah*. And they went and found that *havarbar* dead lying upon the mouth of its hole. They said, 'Woe to the person whom the *havarbar* has bitten, woe to the *havarbar* that has bitten R. Hanina ben Dosa.' When it injures a human, if the human reaches water first, the *havarbar* dies. And if the *havarbar* reaches water first, the human dies. His students said to him, 'Master, did you not feel [anything]?' He said to them, 'Let [evil] befall me—as my heart was concentrating on the *tefillah*—if I felt [anything].' Said R. Ishaq b. Eleazar, 'The Holy One Praised Be He created a spring under the soles of the feet to fulfil that which has been written, 'He fulfils the wishes of those who fear Him; He bears their cries and saves them'[3]

***b. Ber.* 33a**
Our rabbis taught a case concerning a place there was an *arvad* and it injured the people. They came and informed R. Hanina ben Dosa. He said to them, 'Show me its hole.' They showed him its hole. He placed his heel over the mouth of its hole. That *arvad* came out, bit him, and died. He took it on his shoulder and brought it to the house of study. He said to them, 'See, my children, it is not the *arvad* that kills, rather sin kills.' At that moment they said, 'Woe to the person who met an *arvad,* and woe to the *arvad* that met R. Hanina ben Dosa[4]

5. Hanina heals from a distance; the Palestinian version

Once Rabban Gamaliel's son fell ill and he sent two students to R. Haninah ben Dosa in his town [to find out from him what his son's fate would be]. He [Haninah] said to them [the

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[1] Rendered like this inBaruch M. Bokser, "Hanina ben Dosa," 45.

[2] Translated by Bokser. He has added the explanations marked with [=]. See Bokser, "Hanina ben Dosa," 46. Because Bokser is concerned with the literary developments of the Hanina traditions, he pays attention to the fact that each rabbinic composition employs different words for the creature that Hanina encounters. This is of lesser importance for our study of the *hasid* theory.

[3] Quoted from Bokser, "Hanina ben Dosa," 55–56. The quotation from Scripture is from Ps 145:19.

[4] Bokser, "Hanina ben Dosa," 69.

students], 'wait for me while I go up to the attic [to pray].' He went up to the attic, came down, and said to them, 'I am certain that Rabban Gamaliel's son has recovered from his illness.' [The students] made note [of the time of day that this happened]. [Later they confirmed that] at that very moment [back in Gamaliel's town, his son recovered] and asked for food (*y. Ber.* 9d).[5]

6. Attribution: Hanina ben Dosa
b. BK. 50a: Hanina ben Dosa saves the daughter of Nehuniah
y. Shek. 48d: Pinhas ben Yair

Two maxims attributed to Hanina ben Dosa in *m. Abot* 3:10 and *m. Ber.* 5:5 are attributed to R. Akiba in *t. Ber.* 3:3

Derek Eretz Rabbah 1:6, also called *Arayot* 6 (*Arayot* is the scribe's title of this first chapter) renders a halakhic teaching.

a) The Kaufmann A 50 manuscript reads: "the following exposition was given by R. Hanina ben Dosa before the Sages in the name of Rabbi Nathan . . .")
b) Ms. Munich, reads "Hanina ben Uri" where Ms. Kaufmann 50 A reads "Hanina ben Dosa," and suggests the alternative reading "Nehunja ben Haqanah" in place for "Hanina ben Uri."[6]

7. Magical bowls
M156[7] from Babylonia, line 7: "I adjure and put an oath upon you, you evil spirit who happened upon R. Hanina ben Dosa. R. Hanina ben Dosa recited to the evil spirit that happened upon him at that time that biblical verse, as it is written: 'You bring on darkness and it is night, when the beasts of the forests stir.'"[8] M163 (same collection): Trinitarian formula?[9]

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[5] Translation: Zahavy, *Yerushalmi Berakhot*, 218.

[6] Translations are from Abraham Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* (2 vols.; London: Soncino, 1965), 531 and Marcus van Loopik, *The Ways of the Sages and the Way of the World: the Minor Tractates of the Babylonian Talmud: Derekh 'Eretz Rabbah, Derekh 'Eretz Zuta, Pereq ha-Shalom* (TSAJ 26; Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 35.

[7] The text of this bowl (along with photographs, translations and some comments) was first published in Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), and most recently in Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls* (Magical and Religious Literature of Late Antiquity 1: Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection 20; Leiden: Brill, 2013). The language, content, and appearance of the magic bowl are consistent with other Babylonian bowls; cf. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*, 3. The label of the bowl, M156, is provisionally given by Levene. "M" signifies that this is a bowl from the Moussaieff collection. The text of the bowl appears to display a similar situation as *b. Pes.* 112b. This rabbinic tradition renders a discussion between Hanina and an evil spirit, Agrath, daughter of Mahlath. Because of the demon's plea, Hanina allows her to be active two nights a week.

[8] Translation: Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*, 116. There are many other Jewish religious elements in this text, such as quotations from the Hebrew Bible and the words *sela*, *amen*, and YHWH. The quote refers to Ps 104:20.

[9] Translation from Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*, 127. Levene remarks that the spelling of "Jesus" (אישו) is unattested in other sources and that the "holy spirits" might be reconstructed as "holy spirit" (137–138). Shaul Shaked discusses the implications of this reference to the Trinity. He remarks that although the script and language of the bowl is consistent with what one finds in Jewish bowls, the Trinitarian ending of the text and the explicit reference to Jesus reveal some knowledge of Christian practice. Due to the names, spellings, language, and script of the bowl, Shaked suggests that it is written by a Jew and that it was ordered by Zoroastrian clients to harm a Christian opponent (Shaul Shaked, "Jesus in the Magic Bowls. Apropos Dan Levene's '...and by the name of Jesus...'," *JSQ* 6 [1999]: 309–319, 315 in particular). There are few Babylonian magic bowls that mention Jesus. Markham J. Geller, "Jesus' Theurgic Powers: Parallels in the Talmud and Incantation Bowls," *JJS* 28 (1977): 141–155, 149–155 discusses potential exceptions to this rule.

Creation and Covenant: God's Direct Relationship with the Non-Israelite Nations in the Old Testament

Dr Robin Routledge, Mattersey Hall, UK

Abstract

Jonah 4:2 appears to extend an orthodox expression of Israel's covenant faith (Exod. 34:6–7a) to non-Israelites, suggesting a broader covenant relationship between God and the world. This can be related to the covenant with Noah, which may also embody a covenant implicit within the act of creation itself. The formula's close association with Sinai, and the link between creation and the exodus, suggest that this relationship with creation underlies God's covenant with Israel, which might be viewed as a model for his intention for all creation. This opens the possibility of God's direct action in the history of non-Israelite nations, paralleling his dealings with Israel. This paper considers two examples: that other nations have 'exodus' experiences and are allocated land by God (Amos 9:7 cf. Deut. 2:3–23); and that he has also apportioned 'gods' to them (Deut. 4:19; 32:8–9). It concludes that the OT does not support pluralism: the covenant with Israel remains the unique model for what God intends for the world. However, the possibility of direct divine engagement with non-Israelite nations has implications for attitudes towards other religious groups, and for the possibility of sharing a limited range of theological insights.

1. Introduction

- As Creator, God has entered into a relationship with all creation.
- Therefore, all people may perceive insights into the nature and character of God.

2. A Covenant with Creation

2.1 Jonah's complaint (4:2): a covenant formula (cf.).

- Exod. 34:6–7 – an orthodox confession of faith linked with the Sinaitic covenant.
- *Ḥesed* – a covenant term
- Links with Sinai are not fully explained solely in terms of a covenant with creation

2.2 Exodus, creation and redemption

- Exodus: a creative act. Creation: a redemptive/salvific act … cf. Ps. 74:12–17; Isa. 51:9–11
- Flood, cf. Gen. 8:21–22 – God's commitment to the stability of the natural order
- Judgement on sin leads to a return to chaos (e.g. Jer. 4:23; Zeph. 1:2–4)
- Primordial redemption becomes a pattern for God's redemptive dealings with Israel and the world (e.g. exodus, return from exile, new heavens and earth).

2.3 Israel and the nations:

- God: has entered into a creative and redemptive covenant with the world.
- Israel's life in relation to God is a model/microcosm of what God intends for the whole earth.

3. Direct engagement with non-Israelite nations

3.1 God, exodus and land

- God deals with the nations in ways that mirror his dealings with Israel
- Amos 9:7 – other nations have exodus experiences
- Deut. 2 – land given to Edomites (2:4–5), Moabites (2:9), Ammonites (2:19), Philistines (2:23).

3.2 God and the 'gods'

- Deut. 4:19 – Yahweh has allocated 'gods' to the nations (cf. 32:8; Ps. 82:2–5).
- However, the OT does not give credit to other deities; e.g. Cyrus.
- Revelation through dreams: attributed to God; often related to the well-being of God's people, but communicated through those who are not part of that religious community.

4. Implications

- The Christian Church does not exist for itself.
- God is already at work within the lives of individuals and groups, and within the history of nations.
- Theological insights may be found in other religious systems.
- There may be spiritual engagement with God outside the framework of organised religion.
- The OT does not support pluralism.

Christians, Jews, and Pagans in the Book of Revelation:
Persecution, Perseverance, and Purity in the Shadow of the Last Judgment
Eckhard J. Schnabel

Introduction: methodological remarks

1. The Book of Revelation is a mixed genre: apocalypse, prophecy, letter.
2. A date Revelation between A.D. 80–100 remains plausible, an earlier date is possible.
3. Revelation originated in the area of the cities mentioned in 1:11-12 and 2:1–3:22.
4. John writes to followers of Jesus in mixed congregations of Jewish and Gentile Christians.
5. The believers writes face social, economic, and religious pressure and persecution from both Jews and pagans, at times in connection with the emperor cult, but certainly not limited to it.
6. John uses the phrase "the inhabitants of the earth" (3:10; 6:10; etc.) for people irrespective of ethnic or cultural identity, grouping people according to their allegiance or opposition to Jesus Messiah. One could therefore reduce the discussion to an exploration of how followers of Jesus see and should treat unbelievers.

1. Greeks and Romans and God's coming judgment

John's readers would have been very much aware of the fact that Jesus had been sentenced to death by Pontius Pilatus, the prefect of the province of Judea. They would have known that members of the local elites in the cities of Asia Minor had persecuted Paul (Acts 13:50; 14:5; 16:19; 17:6, 8). They would have known that Peter and Paul had been executed in Rome during Nero's principate. They would have know what happened to Christians in Rome under Nero (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44). John speaks of believers in Jesus having died on account of their faith in 6:9-11; 14:13; 17:6; 18:4; 19:1, and he anticipates further executions (11:7-8; 13:10, 15).

Rev 2:13: Pergamon "where Satan's throne is ... where Satan lives":
Reference to the fierce opposition of local authorities to the followers of Jesus (2:10.13).
As the Jewish tradition saw Satan as the attacker of God's people, any group who attacked the believers in Jesus Messiah could be associated with Satan, whether Jews, Greeks, or Romans.

Heaven, earth, and sea (12:12): God's ultimate sovereignty over his creation; in parody fashion depicts the claims and the reality of the Roman empire.
The great red dragon (12:3)
The beast rising out of the sea (13:1)
The beast that rose out of the earth (13:11-17)
Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abomination (14:8; 17:5)
Three lists of people doing wrongful actions (9:20-21; 21:8; 22:15)
The future and the ultimate fate of the people who are loyal to the beast: judgment (19:18; 20:14-15)

The Christians would have readily understood John's protest against idolatry and moral corruptability. Biblically literate Christians would have understood John's political protest in the light of Israel's prophets who spoke up against political and morally corrupt kings, whether they be Israel's or Judah's kings or foreign rulers. The point of John writing about Rome is not reform or rehabilitation, but the hope for its destruction and its replacement by the genuine city of God. John's polemic is not simply a literary device in the service of impressing upon the believers the absolute need to remain uncompromisingly faithful: he writes in a historical context in which execution on account of one's faith in Jesus was a real possibility. For John, the dangers of being co-opted by Rome, whether explicitly or implicitly, were such that accommodation and compromise were not possible. Rome had killed Christians (2:13; 6:9-11; 14:13; 17:6; 18:4; 19:1), and he knows that more Christians will face execution (11:7-8; 13:10, 15).

2. Jews and the activities of Satan

The early Christian movement began with Jesus in Jewish Galilee. The first disciples were Jews, as were the first converts, arguably in all towns and cities in which communities of followers of Jesus were established in the first century. The relationship with the non-believing Jewish community was characterized with tensions already during Jesus' ministry, climaxing in Jesus' trial which was initiated by the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem who demand Jesus' execution. The activities of Peter, the Twelve, and other believers such as Stephen triggered legal action and expulsion. Between A.D. 30–41, Luke relates eight occasions of the persecution of followers of Jesus by Jews, persecution understood as aggressive harassment, deliberate ill-treatment, ranging from initiating court proceedings to beatings, flogging, banishment from a city to execution or lynch killings (Acts 4:1–22; 5:17–41; 6:9–7:60; 8:1/11:19; 9:1–14; 9:23–24; 9:29–30; 12:1–19).

Persecutions of Christians initiated by Jews: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Thessalonike, Corinth.
Paul: 1 Thess 2:14-16; Gal 1:13-14,23; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6, including himself as former persecutor
John: Jews oppose the Christians in Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and Philadelphia (3:9)

Rev 2:9-10: Jews of Smyrna slandered the Christians; prospect of imprisonment before trial.

"Those who say that they are Jews and are not": Jews who collaborate with pagan idolators in denouncing Jesus' followers with the goal of having them tried, convicted and punished.

"Synagogue of Satan": OT and Jewish tradition of the transcendent figure opposing the pious as heavenly accuser or as God's adversary (Job 1:6-9, 12; 2:1-4, 6-7; Zech 3:1-2; Sir 21:27; T. Dan 3:6; 5:6; 6:1; T. Gad 4:7) who provokes affliction in order to undermine loyalty to God (Job 1–2; Wisd 2:17-20) and who brings death into the world (Gen 3:1-24; Wisd 2:23-24). Possibly this is also a comment on the payment of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, required of all Jews after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in A.D. 70, with the monies going to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.

Whether the polemics is dangerous or offensive depends on what others do with John's text, including the Christians for whom he is writing.

Polemical language directed against Jews is used only with regard to the Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia: "the polemics of this local conflict cannot be extended to Jewish-Christian relations more broadly" (Koester). Followers of Jesus comprised a very small minority compared with the Jewish population of the Roman empire, they would not have been in a position to endanger the livelihood of local Jews. John's ethos discourages militant moves against any opponents.

Intra-Jewish polemic in Qumran: "assembly of Belial" (1QH X, 22 [II, 22]; 1QM IV, 9).

Jerusalem as "Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (11:8): in the light of Isa 1:9-10; Ezek 29:3,5 LXX), John portrays Jerusalem and thus the Jews who attack believers in Jesus as God's enemy

In contrast to Greeks and Romans on whom John pronounces God's judgment in the strongest terms, there is no explicit reference to God judging the Jews; Rev 3:9 can be compared with Paul's position who regards both Gentiles (Rom 1:18-32) and Jews (Rom 2:1–3:20) as ungodly and unrighteous sinners (Rom 1:18) who can receive salvation only through acceptance of God's revelation in Jesus, Israel's Messiah and savior of the world (Rom 1:3-4, 16-17). The one factor that triggers "otherness" and opposition from Jews, both for Jewish believers in Jesus and for Gentile believers, is faith in God explicitly and inextricably connected with faith in Jesus.

3. The followers of Jesus and the challenge of perseverance and purity

Expected response to the challenges presented by contemporary society and by representatives of the local Jewish communities who denounced them to the authorities:

John comforts his readers:

Believers in Jesus Messiah should remember who they are; they will be secure as a result of the blessings that God bestowed upon them through Jesus, the Lamb.

Pronouncement of God's blessing on all who "keep what is written" in the book, i.e. who continue to be faith to God and Christ (1:3, 8), who are obedient to God's commandments (12:17) and who behave in a manner that is acceptable to Jesus Christ (2:26). Cf. 22:7, 10-14.

Assurance of Christ's love for them, demonstrated in liberating them from their sin on account of his crucifixion (1:5).

Reminder that they have been made "a kingdom and priests" (1:6): they are under the protection of God, the King of the nations (15:3) and the King of kings (17:14). Cf. 19:16.

Reminder that as faithful believers, they will one day "eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God" (2:7); see also 2:10-11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

Reminder that as they belong to the Lord God the Almighty, they participate in his holiness (4:8), in his glory, honor, and power (4:10; cf. 7:11).

Assurance that one day "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:15-17; 21:3-4) and that they will be rewarded by God (11:17-18; cf. 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-10).

Celebration of the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God and the authority of his Messiah as the power of Satan has been broken by Jesus' death and by their missionary work (12:10-12).

John seeks to consolidate the identity of the believers in the one true God and in Jesus Messiah as people who live in a pluralistic, permissive society and who face economic, social, and political pressure and persecution. This goal is served by the warnings that he presents to his Christians readers.

John challenges his readers to remain faithful:

Imperatives in Rev 2–3 admonish repeatedly to repent, to do the works of faithful believers, to not fear suffering but to be faithful, to hold fast to the gospel.

Imperatives to fear God, to give him glory and worship him (14:7), to come out of Babylon (18:4), to do right and to be holy (22:11).

John exhorts Christians to be faithful to God and Jesus Christ, to maintain their faith, to remember the blessings that God has bestowed upon them through Jesus, to preserve their purity. John knows that the ethos of life in the presence of the holy God separate from the unholiness of life in the cities of Asia Minor, a theological and ethical separation that has social, economic, and political consequences, even the possibility of being executed for one's faith. Cf. 13:10.

John advocates preparedness for martyrdom. He does not advocate militant opposition. While Jesus is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah", his present significance is that of the "Lamb" that has been slaughtered but now stands (5:6). The conquering Messiah will indeed be a military victor (19:11-21), but in the past and present he "conquers" through his sacrificial death for the redemption of all nations (5:9-10). The most political text of the New Testament does not provide justification for Christians to use military force or personal violence in order to advance the purposes of God's kingdom. As followers of the Lamb that was slaughtered for the salvation of the nations, they are willing to endure martyrdom as they continue to be witness for the truth of the gospel.

John expects active missionary outreach:

The opening reference to Jesus' coming (1:7) refers to "all the tribes of the earth" who grieve over Jesus, which is most plausibly seen as depicting repentant Gentiles: John expects people who are hostile to God, to Jesus, and to Jesus' followers to repent and become followers of the Lamb.

As Jesus Messiah who "the Lion from the tribe of Judah" (5:5) conquers sin and evil as "Lamb standing as one who had been slain" (5:6), John expects Jesus' followers to conquer in the same way: through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their own witness, even if their proclamation of the gospel costs them their lives (2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21).

Christians who refuse to accommodate their lives to the evil, idolatrous and immoral system of contemporary society "conquer," i.e. break the power of the opposition by their witness to God and Jesus – by keeping Jesus' works, which is your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance (2:19). They "conquer" Satan "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (12:11).

As the churches are called to repent of eating what had been offered to idols (2:16, 21-22), of complacency (3:3, 19), and of a lack of love (2:5), a call that implies not only the need but the possibility of repentance, the judgments described in the visions of the seven seals (6:1-17 / 8:1-5), the seven trumpets (8:6–9:21 / 11:15-19), and the seven bowls (15:1–16:21) should be interpreted as designed to bring repentance.

The interruption of the first two cycles of judgments in 7:1-17 and 10:1–11:14 indicate that the judgements that God inflicts on nations and rulers and people throughout history are designed to lead people to repentance. The martyrs are told that God has delayed the final judgment "until those who were their fellow servants and their brethren – who were to be killed as they were – were finished" (6:11). God's purposes will be completed (10:7) only after the faithful have finished given their witness (11:7).

The references to the fact that people did not repent despite God's judgments (9:20-21; 16:9, 11) make room for repentance. Cf. 14:7; 15:4. There is hope for the conversion of the nations.

John's description of the nations of the world with the phrase "every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15), which expresses ethnic, tribal, social, and political identity, both of the Christians and of their oppressors.

Tribe (*phylē*)): family clan and the *phylai* of the cities. Language (*glōssa*) : tribes and nations who are distinguished by the languages that they speak. People (*laos*): groups connected through cultural bonds and ties to a specific territory, including the populace of the cities and the village people. Nation (*ethnos*): groups of people united by kinship, culture, and common traditions, including foreigners and members of associations.

John implicitly describes the task of the churches and their evangelists and missionaries: to proclaim the goods news of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ to all people, in every tribe and language and people and nation.

If it is true that John's visions are characterized by a "zutiefst antirömischen Affekt" (Frey), it is also true that John promotes humility, worship, and ongoing missionary outreach to all people.

Followers of Jesus do not exact revenge against those who mistreat them, whether they are Gentiles or Jews: they follow a crucified Messiah and they continue to be Jesus' witnesses in their cities and in the world (11:1-14). At the same time, the stark reality remains that unbelievers who oppose God, Jesus, and the assemblies of Jesus' followers, will face certain, decisive, and irrevocable judgment (19:11-21; 20:11-15; 22:11) – unless they accept the invitation to "come" (22:17, 20), repent, change sides from the "beast" to the "Lamb" and receive the free gift of the water of life (22:17).

Inter-Religious Relations and the Challenge of Multiculturalism.

Cornelis Van Dam

9.45-10.30 on 11 August 2015
Norwegian Summer Academy for Biblical Studies

Introduction

With the emergence of multicultural societies there is a great need for meaningful inter-religious dialog.

Presuppositions of Multiculturalism

1. All cultures are morally equivalent and compatible.
2. Diverse cultures can always coexist peacefully.
3. Respecting others means that one must also esteem their native culture.

What is a Nation?

Nationhood is ordained of God, has geographic and ethnic aspects and involves a meta-narrative. God established nations "so that men would seek him" (Acts 17:27).

Multicultural Israel

The nation of Israel was multicultural with people of many different backgrounds. God gave clear instructions how to treat the resident alien (*gēr*) and the foreigner (*nokrî*).

Resident Aliens
They were roughly equivalent to our immigrants. They had to be treated fairly and benefit from many of the same blessings as the native Israelite. They were subject to Israel's prohibitive religious laws lest the land be polluted but were not compelled to worship the God of Israel. They were encourage to integrate.

Foreigners
These had no interest in integrating into Israel's society and were treated less generously.

Applying Biblical Principles

The Importance of a National Identity
Having a national identity as a nation which a country is prepared to defend is honorable. Government has an obligation to safeguard a nation's character.

The Need to Welcome and Integrate Immigrants

Integration, not necessarily assimilation, should be the goal for immigrants. This expectation should be clearly communicated to them. Those wishing to integrate should be treated more generously than those not wanting to do so.

In welcoming immigrants, the host country should also protect their individual liberties, including freedom of religion.

Inter-religious Relations and Mutual Understanding

Widespread support for multiculturalism appears to be collapsing.

There is an urgent need for honest inter-religious dialog without being hampered by so-called political correctness. Difficulties and clashing cultural expectations and values should be openly discussed.

In dialoguing with others, we need to keep in mind:

1. Western culture and immigrant cultures have much in common. We need to build on this.
2. We need to insist on a cultural minimum to which all should agree on.
3. In the case of Islamic culture, Sharia law should not be officially recognized.
4. The rights of all immigrants need to be acknowledged and protected.
5. All newcomers from other religions should be encouraged to participate in the public square and contribute to the well-being of the nation.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In all inter-religious relations, the legitimate interests and character of the host nation should be protected and honored. At the same time every effort must be made to show love and justice to non-western immigrants, respect their identity, but also encourage them to integrate into their new homeland.

Tor Vegge, Kristiansand

Text
Ephesians

Eph 1
4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ)
[...]
With all wisdom and insight 9 he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ φρονήσει, 9 γνωρίσας ἡμῖν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν αὐτοῦ ἣν προέθετο ἐν αὐτῷ 10 εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ)
[...]
17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (19 καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ. 20 Ἣν ἐνήργησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ ἐγείρας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ καθίσας ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις 21 ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου, οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι· 22 καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, 23 ἥτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου.)

Eph 2
You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. 3All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. 4But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
10For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.
11So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human

hands— 12remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Interreligious Relations in the Future as Described in the Latter Prophets

Markus Zehnder, Kristiansand

An Overview of Relevant Passages: From Exclusion to Inclusion

1. Judgment over Israel and the Nations
2. The Future Salvation of Israel

a) Exclusion of the Non-Israelites from the Salvation of Israel

b) Israelites Judging and Dominating Non-Israelites

c) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (I): Recognition of YHWH by the Non-Israelites

d) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (II): Recognition of YHWH, Related to a Pilgrimage to Zion

e) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (III): Recognition of YHWH, Related to Bringing Back the Dispersed Israelites to Zion

f) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (IV): Recognition of YHWH, Related to a Participation in the Rebuilding of the Temple

g) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (V): Integration into the People of God

h) Inclusion of Non-Israelites (VI): Conversion as a Result of Israel's Active Mission

i) Micah 4.5

j) The Book of Daniel

The Use of Biblical Texts in Ecclesiastical Documents on Interreligious Relations, with a Special Focus on the Latter Prophets

1. The Roman-Catholic Tradition:

Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Second Vatican Council, 1965)

2. The Orthodox Tradition:

a) Theorthodoxchurch.info

b) The 10th Meeting of the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, Common Declaration (Damascus 2007)

c) An Orthodox Christian View of Non-Christian Religions, Rev. Dr. George C. Papademetriou

3. The Protestant Tradition:

a) EKD: Christlicher Glaube und nichtchristliche Religionen: Theologische Leitlinien (2003)
b) A Statement on Muslim-Christian Relations from the Alliance of Baptists (2003)
c) Southern Baptist Convention: Resolution on the Finality of Jesus Christ as Sole and Sufficient Savior (1993)

There are relatively few texts in the Hebrew Bible that directly address the topic of interreligious relations in the narrow sense of the phrase with a view to the (eschatological) future; there are, on the other hand, quite a large number of texts that describe the future destiny of Israel on the one hand and of the nations on the other, and more particularly the relationship between Israelites and non-Israelites in ways not necessarily focusing on the religious dimension of that relationship explicitly or primarily.
These relations are basically described in two different ways: exclusion of non-Israelites from the future salvation of Israel on the one hand, and different types of participation of non-Israelites on the other hand, reaching from an uneasy forced submission to a much brighter voluntary inclusion. Active mission on the side of the Israelites is not a major focus, at least not in explicit terms.
At the same time, we note that none of the texts comes close to central aspects of modern concepts entertained with respect to interreligious relations. There is no dialogue between partners meeting on an equal level showing mutual respect, and no positive appreciation of other religions.
The dominant picture that emerges is not that of inclusivism or religious pluralism, but of a particularism with universally extended borders. It is ultimately the God of Israel who – as such – will be venerated by all those who survive God's judgments, without any space for a rival religious cult.

This depiction of the future as presented by the writings collected in the Latter Prophets informs ecclesiastical documents only to a very little degree.
The ecclesiastical documents under scrutiny here show both commonalities and differences. The shared traits are a primary focus on the New Testament at the

expense of the Old Testament, and a tendency to make a difference between Islam and other non-Christian religions. In the views on exclusivism, inclusivism and religious pluralism, there is no common ground. Dialogue is mostly seen as important, but not always. Some kind of mission is also supported in some of the documents, but again not in all. Passages of the Latter Prophets that deal with interreligious relations are referred to only peripherally; where such reference takes place, it is done in a way that seems to be at odds with these texts' main thrust.