

# ***The Jewish Annotated New Testament:*** **A Review Article**

**Craig A. Evans**

Acadia Divinity College | [evansca@eastlink.ca](mailto:evansca@eastlink.ca)

*JJMJS* No. 1 (2014): 154–166

*The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (New Revised Standard Version), edited by A.-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xxvii + 637. US \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-19-529770-6

*The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (*JANT*) makes a wonderful contribution to Jewish appreciation of the New Testament, on the one hand, and Christian appreciation of the Jewish dimension of New Testament literature, Jesus, and his disciples, on the other. Editors Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler and *JANT*'s many contributors are Jewish, and most are well known scholars of early Judaism and related movements and literatures. Some of these scholars include Alan Avery-Peck, Herbert Basser, Shaye Cohen, Michael Cook, Pamela Eisenbaum, Adam Gregerman, Tal Ilan, Adele Reinhartz, and Claudia Setzer. This is the first time that something of this nature has been undertaken.

The principal components of *JANT* comprise an Editors' Preface, introductions to and annotations on all 27 books of the New Testament, 18 essays at the end of the book, and a very helpful glossary. Most of the essays are written by yet another roster of distinguished Jewish scholars, including Daniel Boyarin, Martin Goodman, Lee Levine, Daniel Schwartz, and the late Geza Vermes, among others. The topics of these essays are well chosen, including "The Law," "The Synagogue," "Messianic Movements," "Afterlife and Resurrection," "Paul and Judaism," and several other important subjects. *JANT* uses the New Revised Standard Version.

All of the New Testament writings are individually introduced with two or three (and sometimes more) pages that discuss authorship, date, setting, place in the New Testament, major themes, and relationship to Judaism. The introduction is followed by the New Testament writing with annotations gathered at the bottom of each page, linked to given passages. These annotations occupy anywhere from one quarter to one half of a given page. The annotations

emphasize the Jewish nature of the New Testament passage under review, though important non-Jewish background and parallels are also provided. Several shaded text boxes, maps, and diagrams are included. The cover, the type face, the layout, and the aforementioned boxes, maps, and diagrams create a very attractive book.

Before reviewing a selection of the New Testament writings and the way they are treated, I should say a few things about the Editors' Preface, which so helpfully lays out the goals of *JANT*. The first goal is to highlight "aspects of first- and second-century Judaism that enrich the understanding of the New Testament" (p. xi). These aspects include customs, literature, and interpretation of biblical (i.e., Old Testament) texts. The annotations and essays frequently appeal to extra-biblical Jewish works, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Philo and Josephus, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the Targumim (i.e., Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible), and early rabbinic literature, such as the Mishnah.

The editors point out what is obvious to scholars—but not always to non-experts—when they inform readers that Jesus and his earliest followers, such as his apostles and Paul, were Jews and that New Testament writings such as Matthew, John, James, Revelation, and others were in all probability composed by first-century Jews. Even the non-Jewish writer who composed Luke-Acts was heavily influenced by Jewish tradition and was steeped in the Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture, the Septuagint. The so-called "parting of the ways" between Jews who rejected Jesus and Jews and non-Jews who embraced Jesus had not yet occurred at the time of the writing of the New Testament books. Levine and Brettler rightly and helpfully remark that "understanding the diverse Jewish populations of the early Roman Empire—their habits, their conventions, their religious practices—is as crucial to understanding the New Testament writing as is general familiarity with the Roman world" (p. xi). Academics know this; the general public often does not.

The editors provide a second reason for the word "Jewish" in the title of *JANT*. They and their colleagues "highlight connections between the New Testament material and later Jewish (especially rabbinic) literature, so readers can track similar as well as distinct ideas across time" (p. xi). By doing this, Jewish and non-Jewish readers will discover how often New Testament literature bears witness to the development of Jewish ideas, bridging the gap, as it were, between the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic tradition. New Testament literature, moreover, does not simply bear witness to this tradition, it often presupposes it and regards it as normative. (David's close association with the Psalter is cited as an example.)

A third and very important goal of *JANT* is to address “problems that Jewish readers in particular find in reading the New Testament, especially in passages that have been used to perpetuate anti-Judaism and the stereotypes that non-Jewish readers sometimes bring to the texts” (p. xi). The editors explain that passages that seem to promote anti-Jewish polemic, such as we find in Matthew, John, and even in a passage or two in Paul, are given special attention. In some cases the contributors to *JANT* show that these polemical texts are typical of the rhetoric and hyperbole often employed in late antiquity, and in other cases the contributors show that polemical texts have been misunderstood and misapplied by Christians and others in later times. (Below I shall look at some of these texts and consider how they are interpreted.) The editors generously remark that the “annotations and essays should provide guidance to Christian teachers and preachers, so that when they proclaim the ‘good news’ . . . of Jesus, they will not stain the good news by anti-Jewish stereotypes” (p. xii). Christian scholars will heartily agree.

There is little doubt that the annotations and essays fulfill the editors’ three stated purposes. But the Editors’ Preface has a lot more to say. “Indeed, for many Jews, including the editors of this volume, study of the New Testament also has made us better, more informed Jews” (p. xii). What a delightful statement. As a Christian scholar, I readily agree with it. But I also know that for many Jews such a statement will be difficult to accept. This is because many Jews hold to very negative stereotypes of Christians and Christian Scripture, just as many Christians hold to very negative stereotypes of Jews and, sometimes, even the Hebrew Bible itself.

The editors, of course, are fully aware of how controversial their statement about being made “better, more informed Jews” by careful study of the New Testament will be. They quickly go on to point out that “many of the passages in the New Testament provide an excellent encapsulation of basic, ongoing Jewish values” (p. xii), such as love of God and love of neighbor, righteousness, longing for the kingdom of God, and repair of the world. The editors remark that it is “very possible for the non-Christian to respect a great deal of the (very Jewish) message of much of the New Testament, without worshipping the messenger” (p. xii). There is much about the New Testament and the Christian tradition in general that can (and should) be respected and appreciated without necessarily embracing the Christian faith. The editors remind readers of the contributions that Christians have made to art, music, and literature, among many other things.

The editors hope, from a Jewish point of view, to remove the fear of reading the New Testament. Indeed, they “strongly believe that Jews should

understand the Christian Bible” (p. xii). The editors provide good reasons for this belief, asserting that “it is difficult for Jews to understand their neighbors, and the broader society of which Jewish citizens are a part, without familiarity with the New Testament” (p. xii). They point out the reciprocity in this thinking: “Just as we Jews wish our neighbors to understand our texts, beliefs, and practices, we should understand the basics of Christianity” (p. xii). How very true.

The editors provide yet more reasons that justify the production of *JANT*. They note that increasing numbers of Jews are undertaking serious academic study of the New Testament and the early Christian movement—and they are doing this from a sympathetic, not antagonistic, point of view. The mere fact of so many Jewish scholars with competence in New Testament studies makes a project like *JANT* possible. Only a generation ago scholars like David Daube and Samuel Sandmel were something of a rarity. Not so today. The editors further assert that “there is much in the New Testament that we find both beautiful and meaningful” (p. xiii). Paul’s definition and description of love (1 Cor 13:4–7) is then quoted.

The editors conclude by expressing their hope that readers “will learn to appreciate that significant sections of the New Testament derive from the heart of Judaism, and that they will be able to understand these texts without importing false notions of the tradition of Jesus and his earliest followers” (p. xiii). Every Christian scholar shares this hope. The editors add their “hope that this volume will make the New Testament more welcoming to Jewish readers” (p. xiii). This hope is noble and generous.

As might be expected, I begin my review of the respective introductions and annotations with the Gospel of Matthew, the most Jewish of the four New Testament Gospels. Aaron Gale has written the introduction and annotations. The principal points of his introduction (pp. 1–2), if conventional, are concise and balanced. He dates the Gospel of Matthew to 80–90 C.E., which I think is unnecessarily late, but other scholars will agree with him. Gale finds a setting in Syria plausible, though he acknowledges the possibility of a Galilean setting. He rightly notes the five discourses of Matthew, each concluding with the Mosaic phrase, “when (Jesus) finished.” Gale further notes how extensively the Matthean evangelist engages with Scripture, citing or alluding to it some 50 times, and making a number of comparisons between Jesus and Moses.

Gale’s summary of Matthew’s Christology is as accurate and insightful as it is concise: “Matthew presents Jesus as the divine Son of God who will save his people. . . . The concept of Jesus as the *shekhinah*, the physical manifestation of the divine presence, frames Matthew’s entire Gospel . . . as the Son of God and

the incarnation of the divine on earth, Jesus thus replaces the Temple as the locus of the divine presence” (p. 2).

Gale treats the controversial “blood cry” in Matt 27:25 (“His blood be on us and on our children,” ESV, used throughout) with nuance, carefully considering the historical setting. Gale, along with virtually all Christian interpreters, does not see in this cry a condemnation of Jewish people for all time. In fact, it is not a condemnation at all. For the evangelist Matthew, the cry reflects the calamity of 70 C.E., when Roman troops captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and killed or took prisoner thousands of Jews. Having rejected God’s Messiah, whose mission is to save God’s people (Matt 1:21), those who cried for Jesus’ death have chosen the very alternative of which Jesus warned: destruction. In no wise does this “blood cry” apply to all Jews for all time. Indeed, it probably alludes to Jer 26:15 (as Gale notes in his annotations), where Jeremiah warns the people of Jerusalem in his time: “Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.” The prophet narrowly escapes death but the city of Jerusalem does not. Matthew, who is fond of typology, sees Jewish history repeating itself. Just as first-temple Jerusalem rejected God’s prophet and so suffered destruction, so second-temple Jerusalem has rejected God’s prophet and again has suffered destruction. Behind the words of Matt 27 is no anti-Semitism and no categorical rejection and condemnation of the Jewish people. Such an idea would have been abhorrent to the evangelist Matthew. Indeed, when the risen Jesus sends forth his apostles to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18–20), the mission to Israel is still very much in view. “The mission to Israel,” Gale rightly comments, “is never abrogated” (p. 54). The mission that had originally been limited to Israel (as in Matt 10:5–6) has been expanded to include Gentiles.

Adele Reinhartz’s introduction to and annotations of the Gospel of John are remarkably insightful and nuanced. At six pages (pp. 152–57) her introduction is one of the longest in *JANT*. Like most Johannine scholars, Reinhartz sees in John a complicated history of composition, completed c. 85–95 C.E. Like most scholars, again, she doubts the tradition that ascribes the Gospel to John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ original apostles. More controversially, Reinhartz thinks it likely that the author was not one of Jesus’ original followers or an eyewitness. I think it is probable that the author was an eyewitness, though neither a Galilean nor one of the Twelve. The suggestion of Lazarus, which is made from time to time, is worth considering. After all, if I may appeal to Reinhartz herself, the “Gospel of John reflects deep and broad knowledge of

Jerusalem, Jewish practice, and methods of biblical interpretation” (p. 154). I fully agree. The best explanation for this “deep and broad knowledge of Jerusalem” in John is eyewitness tradition. This does not mean that the author of the final version that we have was an eyewitness—the conclusion of chapter 20, not to mention the appended chapter 21, suggests that the authority behind the Johannine tradition was in fact not the author of the Gospel—it only means that a core of eyewitness tradition lies at the heart of the material that in time came to be shaped as the Gospel we now have. This perspective is also consistent with the sensible conclusion Reinhartz reaches with regard to the question of John’s relationship to the Jewish people.

Of great importance in the study of the Gospel of John is the thorny question of the author’s relationship with and attitude toward the Jewish people. This question is pressing, for several times the Gospel refers very negatively to the “Jews” (*Ioudaioi*). Are these negative references evidence of an anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic stance on the part of the author and his community? A number of scholars think so. The view taken by Reinhartz, however, is far more nuanced and qualified. She of course acknowledges that the “negative role played by ‘the Jews’ in the narrative suggests that the text was written in a context of overt conflict between Jews and the members of the Johannine community” (p. 154). That there is sharp conflict, even bitter recriminations, there can be no doubt. But does this conflict grow out of Gentile hatred of the Jewish people? Not at all. Reinhartz reasonably surmises that the “Gospel of John reflects a stage in the process by which Johannine believers came to see themselves as separate from and, to some extent, over and against Jews and Judaism . . . the Gospel reflects an inner-Jewish controversy but not a widespread or even local parting of the ways” (p. 154).

In this connection one should recall the angry polemic found in the Hebrew Bible itself, where the prophets (who are Israelites!) castigate fellow Israelites. An angry Isaiah says of his own people: “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly” (Isa 1:4a). Elsewhere the prophet describes Israel as “a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord” (Isa 30:9a). The later Isaianic tradition adds to the invective: “But you, draw near, sons of the sorceress, offspring of the adulterer and the loose woman. . . . Are you not children of transgression, the offspring of deceit . . . ?” (Isa 57:3–5). A century later, Jeremiah declares: “All the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart” (Jer 9:26). Isaiah is so angry at Israel’s sin that he petitions God not to forgive them (2:9). Similarly, Jeremiah declares that God commanded him not to pray for

Israel (7:16; 11:14). Jeremiah even asks God to hand Judah and Jerusalem over to destruction (18:21).

The prophets even speak of Israel's rejection: "For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob" (Isa 2:6); "The Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel" (2 Kgs 17:20); and, from Hosea:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;  
because you have rejected knowledge,  
I reject you from being priest to me.  
And since you have forgotten the law of your God,  
I also will forget your children. (4:6)

There are no statements in the New Testament that approximate these angry expressions. Unlike Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jesus commanded his disciples to forgive (Matt 6:14–15). Unlike Jeremiah, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for their enemies (Matt 5:44). Indeed, according to Luke (23:34), Jesus prayed that those who called for his death be forgiven. Never does Jesus ask God to deliver up to death Israelites, or any people (cf. Luke 9:51–56). He warns of coming judgment, and weeps because of it (Luke 19:41–44; cf. 13:34; 23:28–31). Never do Jesus or any of the writers of the New Testament say that Israel has been rejected. Indeed, Paul proclaims the precise opposite: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Rom 11:1).

Criticisms and vilifications such as these are given even sharper and more insulting forms in the literature of Qumran. According to the *Rule of the Community*:

And let him undertake by the Covenant to be separated from  
all perverse men  
who walk in the way of wickedness.  
For they are not counted in His Covenant:  
For they have not inquired nor sought Him concerning His  
precepts  
in order to know the hidden matters in which they have  
guiltily strayed;  
and they have treated with insolence matters revealed that  
Wrath might rise unto judgment  
and vengeance be exercised by the curses of the Covenant,  
and solemn judgment be fulfilled against them unto eternal  
destruction,  
leaving no remnant. (1QS 5:10–13)

Harsh statements such as these are found elsewhere in the *Rule of the Community* and in other sectarian writings from Qumran (including the *Hodayot*, the *Pesharim*, and the *Damascus Covenant*).

The polemic found in the writings of Qumran surpasses in intensity that of the New Testament. In contrast to Qumran's esoteric and exclusive posture, the early church proclaimed its message and invited all to join its fellowship. Never does the New Testament enjoin Christians to curse unbelievers or opponents. Never does the New Testament petition God to damn the enemies of the church. But Qumran did.

Very sharp polemic is also found in Josephus, who criticizes fellow Jews in very harsh ways. He calls Justus of Tiberias "a charlatan and a demagogue and a deceiver" (*Life* 40). Of the zealots who attempted to liberate Israel from Roman authority (66–70 C.E.), Josephus says: "What deed that (Moses) has cursed have you left undone? . . . In rapine and murder you vie with one another" (*J.W.* 5.400–402). The zealots and Sicarii are "imposters and brigands" (2.264), "slaves, the dregs of society, and the bastard scum of the nation" (5.443–444). (For a full discussion of this kind of polemic and vilification, see L. T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 [1989]: 419–41.)

The polemic that we find in Matthew, John, Paul, and the book of Revelation is mild stuff compared to the polemic of the classical prophets and the later literature that is approximately contemporary with Jesus and the early church. The polemic of the New Testament needs to be viewed in its context and its rhetorical and hyperbolic nature appreciated for what it is. Reinhartz does just that in her treatment of the Gospel of John.

Reinhartz views the polemic of John as localized, inner-Jewish polemic. She rightly recognizes that references to "the Jews" (*hoi Ioudaioi*) usually are regional, that is, Judeans, as opposed to Galileans or Samaritans. But "the Jews" sometimes stand in contrast to those who follow Jesus. "The effect is to distance the reader from any group designated as *hoi Ioudaioi*, regardless of the specific referent" (p. 156). In this I think Reinhartz is correct.

Even the angry denunciation of the Pharisees in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires," is not seen as anti-Semitic. It is reflective of the polemic and rhetoric we have observed in some of the examples found in the Hebrew Bible, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in Josephus. None of the writers of these literatures is anti-Semitic; neither is the Johannine evangelist. At most the Gospel of John is "'anti-Jewish,' insofar as it declares that Jews who do not believe in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God thereby relinquish their covenantal relationship with God" (p. 156). That is, John



opposes the Jews who reject Jesus, but the Gospel “is not anti-Semitic in a racial sense” (p. 156). Reinhartz’s distinction is an important one. The author of the Gospel of John in essence is saying, “I reject your theology, your understanding of God’s requirements, your understanding of salvation.” He is not saying that he rejects the Jewish people.

The pathos we find in Paul’s Letter to the Romans exemplifies in some ways what we have observed in the Gospels of Matthew and John. Paul the apostle, formerly Saul the Pharisee, zealous for the law of Moses, declares his love for his people Israel, the very people who have rejected Jesus the Messiah. He is willing to be lost that his fellow Israelites be saved (see Rom 9:1–5; 10:1–4). He warns Gentile Christians not to be arrogant with respect to Israel, affirming that Israel’s spiritual blindness is only temporary and that someday “all Israel will be saved” (11:17–27). God has certainly not rejected his people (11:1–2). Ethnic Israel remains “beloved” of God, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:28–29). It is hard to make it much clearer.

At first glance Paul’s angry outburst in 1 Thessalonians seems inconsistent with his deeply expressed love for the Jewish people expressed in Romans. In 1 Thess 2:14–16, Paul angrily denounces the Jews, “who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!”

The suddenness and intensity of this passage have led some scholars to suspect that it is a non-Pauline interpolation. David Sandmel, who introduces and comments on 1 Thessalonians and who acknowledges the scholarly discussion concerning 1 Thess 2:14–16, rightly in my opinion accepts the passage as genuinely Pauline. Sandmel notes that Paul sometimes expressed sharp criticism and polemic and that in the present passage Paul likely is referring only to some of the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea who had opposed, at times violently, the young church. (See Sandmel’s shaded text box on p. 374.) The passage is polemical to be sure, but it is not anti-Semitic.

Pamela Eisenbaum observes that the Letter to the Hebrews “is often perceived as the New Testament’s most anti-Jewish text” (p. 406). Some think this because Hebrews can easily be read as promoting supersessionism, that is, the idea that the Jewish people are no longer God’s people but have been replaced by Christians (an understanding, I might add, that is not consistent with what Paul states in Rom 11). Eisenbaum notes that recently, “scholars have made efforts to address the problem of anti-Judaism in Hebrews and have attempted to offer alternative understandings” (p. 407).

What lies at the heart of a supersessionist reading of Hebrews is not simply Christology, in which Jesus is declared superior to angels, Moses, the prophets, and the priesthood. It is the claim that the old covenant (i.e., the Sinai covenant) has faded away and has been replaced by the “new covenant” established in Jesus’ sacrificial death and continuing heavenly priestly intercession (see esp. Heb 8:13). But this theology is hardly anti-Jewish; it is simply the claim that the promised new covenant of Jer 31:31 has been fulfilled in Jesus. Even some of Qumran’s scrolls speak of a “new covenant” (e.g., CD 6:19; 19:33; 20:12; 1QpHab 2:3) or the covenant “renewed” (e.g., 1QSb 3:26; 5:5, 21). The men of Qumran believed that in their community and in their study of Scripture and the re-establishment of righteous law-based works, the new covenant was in the process of being brought about. This does not mean that the Jewish people were being “replaced”; it means the new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke is coming to fulfillment. To view Hebrews as anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic in any kind of racial way is to foist an alien and anachronistic perspective on this book.

Lastly, I want to review briefly what David Frankfurter has to say about the book of Revelation, a book that has intrigued and baffled interpreters ever since it was first circulated. Because twice in Revelation we hear angry reference to a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9; 3:9), some interpreters think we have here evidence of anti-Semitism, as though we have Gentile Christians vilifying Jewish congregations as synagogues of Satan. Frankfurter completely disagrees with this line of interpretation. In his view, the “synagogue of Satan” of which the author of Revelation (whose Jewish name is John) speaks is made up of non-Jews, who falsely claim to be Jews or follow Jewish practices very inadequately: “John criticizes those who are *not* Jews but only label themselves so” (p. 464). Frankfurter avers that “Revelation shows no sense of a Christianity, or even of a Jesus-devotion, unmoored from Judaism” (p. 464). He is surely correct, for this perspective explains the pervasive Jewish symbolism that runs throughout the book of Revelation. The chosen are said to be twelve thousand souls from each of the twelve tribes (Rev 7:4–8). The “names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel” will be inscribed on the twelve gates of the new city of Jerusalem (Rev 21:12). Taken at face value, such language presupposes a thoroughly Jewish community focused on Jesus and anticipating his return and the restoration of Jerusalem (perhaps in response to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E.).

Of the several essays that bring *JANT* to a close the first one, by editor A.-J. Levine, is probably the most important. The provocative title of this essay is sure to catch every reader’s attention: “Bearing False Witness: Common Errors

Made about Early Judaism” (pp. 501–4). This essay, more than all the others, primarily has in mind Christian readers of *JANT*. Levine rightly comments that often “out of ignorance many pastors and religious educators strip Jesus from his Jewish context and depict that context in false and noxious stereotypes” (p. 501). She is quite correct; I myself have many, many times cringed at the distortions and caricatures in comments made by well-meaning and sincere Christians, by laity and clergy alike, and, alas, even by academics. Levine is not talking about technical aspects of scholarly discussion, where new discoveries can lead to new, more precise insights. All of us from time to time will have our understanding updated and modified. What Levine is talking about is gross ignorance of Jewish thought, beliefs, customs, practices, traditions, and history, about which anyone can read if one makes some effort and spends some time. So why the ignorance? Levine offers five reasons.

First, Levine points out that few Christian seminaries and divinity schools educate their students about Judaism, whether from the time of Jesus or later. She notes that the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada, the body that accredits divinity schools, does not require students to learn “how to avoid anti-Jewish preaching and teaching” (p. 501). I fully support her concern. In my view, teaching students about Judaism in the time of Jesus and in the early centuries of the Christian church will not only instruct students in how to avoid anti-Jewish teaching, it will also provide them with very positive and necessary context for appreciating the writings of the New Testament more fully. In other words, in addressing the problem Levine has identified, the actual goals of Christian divinity curriculum will be realized more fully. There is no downside here.

Second, Levine notes that although some church denominations and bodies do have guidelines relating to how to represent Jews and Judaism, their clergy do not always know these guidelines. Surely this problem can be addressed. Levine also calls our attention, thirdly, to the new challenges faced as Christianity grows in Africa, Asia, and in other contexts where Western education and its knowledge of the Holocaust are less pervasive. She scores a very important point here. In some of these settings there are present tribalism and ethnic hostilities, in which forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, could easily take root. Fourth, Levine worries that preaching, in which the Bible is applied to current social issues, is not always careful to distinguish past quarrels and controversies involving Judaism from contemporary Judaism, with which the church really has no quarrel. Fifth, Levine worries that ahistorical preaching and teaching often treat time-specific statements, like the blood cry in Matt 27 or the anti-Pharisaic polemic in John 8, as gnomic utterances that apply to all Jews

in all times. Careless preaching and teaching like this can unwittingly foster anti-Jewish thinking.

Levine also identifies a number of stereotypes that should be avoided. These include above all the false dichotomy between law and grace (i.e., Judaism is all about law; Judaism has no grace). Growing out of this false dichotomy is a whole series of unfair generalizations. These include the ideas that Judaism is all about works; that the purity laws of Torah are unjust and burdensome; that Judaism was misogynist; that Jewish divorce law was unfair to women; that Jewish society was harsh and callous toward the marginal; that most Jews longed for a militant, violent Messiah; that God was transcendent and remote; that the temple system was hopelessly corrupt; and that Judaism was narrow, clannish, and exclusivistic. Levine's catalogue offers a great deal of grist for the mill. I appreciate her generosity of spirit when she explains, in conclusion, that more careful study of the New Testament and the Jewish world of which it is a part should "prevent the false teaching that deforms the 'good news' of Jesus" (p. 504).

The remaining essays are informative and helpful. Early Jewish literature, the history between the Old and New Testaments, what Judaism is, the meaning of *Ioudaioi*, the law of Moses, food and table fellowship, and Jewish family life are some of the topics these essays address. *JANT* is so well conceived and written it could serve as a textbook in courses that introduce the New Testament, as well as in courses concerned with Jewish and Christian beginnings. Indeed, Christian teachers should consider using *JANT* as the recommended version of the New Testament for all New Testament courses, whether introductory or upper-level electives.

I could easily go on and on, but it's time to bring this review to a close. I know editors Amy-Jill Levine personally and Marc Brettler by reputation, and have always found them to be careful, competent, fair scholars and very cordial and respected colleagues. We owe them and their many contributors our thanks for putting together such a useful and positive contribution to New Testament interpretation and to much better, more accurate, and fairer Jewish and Christian understanding. I recommend this book enthusiastically and without reservation.

Before concluding this review I should briefly mention a related book that is well worth consulting. I refer to *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation* (Shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies; West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011), edited by Zev Garber. Some of the contributors to *JANT* appear in this book (e.g., Herbert Basser and Michael Cook). Many of the contributors are Jewish, though not all. All contributors are recognized scholars of either Judaica or the Judaic background of the early Christian movement and

its literature. The purpose of *The Jewish Jesus* is basically the same as that of *JANT*: to improve Jewish understanding of Jesus and to make Christians more aware of the Jewish heritage of Jesus and his movement. As does *JANT*, *The Jewish Jesus* succeeds in its purpose.