

**Peter J. Thomson**

***Presumed Guilty: How the Jews were Blamed for the Death of Jesus***

*Trans. Janet Dyk (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2005)*

The author of this book is professor of New Testament and Patristic in the theological faculty of the University of Brussels. The book was sponsored for publication through Fortress press by the Netherlands based, Foundation for scientific research on Christian Literature on Jews and Judaism. This foundation is dedicated to 'publish scholarly studies on the religious roots of anti-Semitism' (p. viii). The fundamental belief is that historically Christians have played a part in manifestations of anti-Semitism around the globe and this owes partly to the manner in which the Jews have been depicted both in some texts of the New Testament and in the development of historical Christianity. This book bearing an apt title is a sort of an 'abstract' of the major work by the author published in English by the

Sheffield Academic press (2001).

The fundamental questions addressed in the book concern the relationship of Jesus to the Jews and 'Christians'. The assumption of the book is two fold: that Jesus was a Jew; his early followers followed him as Jews and that the early separation between 'Christians' and the Jewish followers of Jesus marks the point of disjunction and 'hostile competition'. These are addressed in the nine chapters: 'Jesus through the Ages', 'The Quest for the 'Real' Jesus', 'The Jews in the Roman Empire', 'Jesus and his Disciples', 'Jesus' Trial', 'The Apostles' Testimony', 'The Impact of the War with Rome', 'The Writing of the New Testament' and 'the Readers of the new Testament'.

Although the author recognises that the New Testament contains material that displays 'significant differences within and among the writings', he appears to lay special responsibility for anti-Semitism on Paul, the alleged true founder of Christianity. Readers are however, not absolved of the responsibility

as they reflect the simplification and homogenisation of the 'complex' message and attitudes of the New Testament writers. In other words, it is held that the New Testament is 'packaged' in a certain manner that elicits a certain kind of response from Christians towards the Jews. In his last chapter, the author proceeds to expound this response in terms of his five 'codes' that 'programme the reading'. This reading is deemed to affect the attitude and actual responses of Christians towards the Jews: Faith, Scripture, Church, Liturgy and the Gospel.

It is obvious that this book is meant for popular reading. Indeed, it does succeed in persuasively putting ideas and arguments across in simple English. This is the strength of the book. The book also succeeds in re-highlighting an immensely disturbing and painful memory of the holocaust where Christians apparently chose to collude with the oppressors or ignored the plight of the Jews.

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