



Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John

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Mirosław Stanisław Wróbel

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A New Look at the Fourth Gospel's
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V&R

Professor Mirosław Wróbel has long been involved in research on Jewish topics which are inextricably linked with the beginnings of Christianity, including the stage of the formation of New Testament books. This is evidenced by his numerous publications both in Polish and English. A book entitled *Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John. A New Look at the Fourth Gospel's Relationship with Judaism* also focuses on this issue. It is an important voice in the discussion on the “*parting of the ways*” of the Church and the Synagogue, which has been going on for several decades in the theological academic world. Before delving into Wróbel’s monograph, it is crucial to recognize the fact that the separation of the Church and the Synagogue (Christianity and Judaism) was not a one-time act, but a long-lasting, multilayered, and diversified process. Even if many scholars try to isolate that moment in time (pointing to ca. A.D. 90 and the environment of Jabne or the fall of the Bar Kochba uprising), the rabbis’ decision to exclude Christians from the Synagogue or the decision of followers of Christ’s to break ties with the Synagogue evolved over the years.

Mirosław Wróbel’s book is dedicated, as the title suggests, to the anti-Judaism of the Fourth Gospel. The author’s very recognition of the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Judaism is crucial. This issue, although partly developed, especially in his articles, was examined by Wróbel differently and innovatively due to the methodology employed, and therefore, it deserves to be the subject of a monograph. The Gospel of John is considered by many scholars to be the most anti-Judaic piece of the New Testament. It contains a reflection of Christian-Jewish relations from the period of their inception, even though the Gospel primarily describes the activities of Jesus (John 1–12) leading up to his passion and death (John 13–21).

Apart from the table of contents, the list of abbreviations, the introduction, the conclusion, and the bibliography, the book contains six chapters titled “Status Quaestionis,” “An Analysis of Terminology,” “The *Ioudaioi* in John’s Gospel,” “Anti-Judaic texts in John” (here, the term “Texts” should be capitalized), “The Specificity of Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John,” and “Anti-Judaism and Johannine Theology.” In the first chapter, the reader learns that it is extremely important to understand the term *Ioudaioi* to properly delineate the relationship of the Gospel of John to Judaism and that the author uses synchronic and diachronic methods to interpret anti-Judaic texts. The second chapter is particularly noteworthy. In it, the author analyzes the nomenclature related to the chosen people based on the Old Testament, rabbinic literature, Qumran writings, the works of Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, apocryphal writings, books of the New Testament, and even early Christian literature. The three words in question are “the Hebrews,” “the Israelites,” and “the Jews.” For Mirosław Wróbel’s research, the third one proves to be the most relevant. He devotes the fourth chapter of the book to that very expression, quite reasonably limiting the scope of analysis to its Greek form.

The term *Ioudaioi* appears seventy-two times in the Fourth Gospel and is by no means unambiguous. Sometimes it takes on a regional meaning with reference to Judea (John 3:22; 4:3, 47, 54; 7:1, 3; 11:7–8, 54); at other times it is used to refer to its inhabitants (John 10:19; 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45; 12:9, 11; 19:20). Occasionally, it takes on a neutral meaning with reference to Jewish persons, festivals, and customs (John 2:6, 13; 3:1, 25; 4:9, 22; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 18:20, 33, 35, 39; 19:3, 19, 21, 40, 42) while at other times it has a negative connotation (John 1:19; 2:18, 20; 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 6:41, 52; 7:1, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 31, 48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22; 10:24, 31, 33; 11:8; 13:33; 18:12, 14, 31, 36, 38; 19:7, 12, 14, 31, 38; 20:19). The negative connotations of the term *Ioudaioi* are associated with the hostility of the “Jews” towards Jesus and his followers. This does not, of course, refer to all Jews, but to a certain group whose animosity towards Jesus and his disciples is so intense that John repeatedly speaks of “fear of the Jews” (John 7:13; 19:38; 20:19). The so-called “anti-Judaic” texts in John’s Gospel are usually divided into three groups. The first one includes Jesus’ polemical dialogues with the Jews, the second one covers the hostility and strong controversy between them while the third one comprises texts that speak of the role played by the Jews in the account of

Christ's passion. The fourth chapter of Mirosław Wróbel's work is devoted to the exegesis of these three groups of pericopes, which can undoubtedly be considered essential in the conducted research. John reveals the murderous intentions of the Jews towards Jesus. There were various reasons why Jesus' opponents intended to execute him: violating the Sabbath rest (John 5:18; cf. 7:1), his accusations of their not keeping the Law (John 7:19) and of rejecting his teaching (John 8:37), as well as their question-ing of his connection to Abraham (John 8:40). These intentions turned into action: first into an attempt to stone Jesus (John 8:59; 10:31; 11:8), and then his trial (John 18–19). Those responsible for this state of affairs were, yet again, not all the *Ioudaioi*, but the leaders (Gr. *archontes*; John 7:25–26). John 8:44 is often regarded as the *locus classicus* of John's anti-Judaism; Jesus accuses the Jews of being the children of the devil. Extensive study of this text and its closer and further context, however, indicates that Jesus directs this statement not to the Jews alone, but to all people who reject his teaching and oppose his messianic message.

Another aspect of the anti-Judaism of John's Gospel is the phenomenon of *apodynamis*, which indicates exclusion from the Synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:4). The author has already explored this theme in an earlier monograph entitled *Synagoga a rodzacy się Kościół. Studium egzegetyczno-teologiczne Czwartej Ewangelii* (J 9,22; 12,42; 16,2) [Synagogue and Church. Exegetical and Theological Study of the Fourth Gospel (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)] (Studia Biblica 3; Kielce: Instytut Teologii Biblijnej VERBUM 2002), and in this case, he largely cites the results of the analyses contained in it. Chapter five is dedicated to the exclusion of Christians from the Synagogue, as well as to the issue of the Samaritans. The last chapter is devoted to theological issues, among which the importance of Christological polemics related to the titles of the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and the Teacher comes to the fore. The attitude of the *Ioudaioi* towards Jesus found its continuation in their stance towards the emerging community of the Church.

Ultimately—from the “*parting of the ways*” perspective—it must be concluded that John's Gospel did not so much influence the schism between the Church and the Synagogue, or was one of the factors that contributed to this schism, but rather is a testimony to it. The paths of the two religious communities in the region inhabited by the Johannine community were already running almost separately, yet the links between them were still vivid enough that the Christian polemic with Judaism in the Fourth Gospel was unusually fierce. The difficulty in properly assessing the mutual relations of the Church and the Synagogue in John results from such things as his use of the term *Ioudaioi* with various shades of meaning. Moreover, when carefully read, some fragments of the Gospel of John that had previously been considered anti-Judaic in character turn out to be references ex-pressing intra-Church criticism directed at the Jews who had accepted Jesus, i.e., against the Judeo-Christians.

From a formal point of view, the proposed structure of the work seems logical and does not raise any objections. The structure of the individual chapters is also very clear. The author uses correct and rich vocabulary; the book's language is academic and the conclusions are formulated in a comprehensible and competent manner while also being well-argued, justified and characterized by logical argumentation. They follow directly from the conducted research and are not, as sometimes happens, too far-reaching or not rooted in the source research data. The collected literature references are extensive and the author has consulted many books and articles that are difficult to access.

The question of the parting of the ways of the Church and the Synagogue calls for further in-depth study. It should be explored from the perspective of both Judaism and Christianity. The progress made in these studies in recent decades cannot be overestimated. It touches on the mutual relationships between the adherents of the two religions. There is no doubt that Mirosław Wróbel's monograph can make a significant contribution to the development of mutual dialogue between the two religious communities.

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