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Is there a connection between the Nicene Creed, Eusebius of Caesarea and anti-Judaism?

by Margriet Gosker

1. Introduction

While preparing for the celebration of 1700 years of Nicaea and its Creed, I looked for information about the date for Easter. Then, by chance, I came across a text in the *Vita Constantini* by Eusebius of Caesarea (±263-339),¹ which gave me an impression of painful anti-Judaism. I was shocked by reading the following text, concerning the Easter celebration:

And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages, by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.²

These discriminatory harsh words prompted me to initiate this research. I wanted to find out if there was a connection between Nicaea, its Creed, Eusebius Caesariensis and anti-Judaism. I think it is important not to ignore this question, as it is also necessary not to ignore the dialogue with the Jews during this celebration of 1700 years Nicaea. I noticed that anti-Judaism is not really an issue in most dogmatic studies about Nicaea. In order to achieve a comprehensive approach I have consulted with ecumenical scholars, church historians, New Testament scholars, systematic theologians, Jewish scholars and Auschwitz theologians, all of whom work from different perspectives.³ Eusebius was able to present to the Great Council a 'Formula of Faith', which according to his 'Letter to his Diocese' did serve as a basis for the

¹ Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine should not be confused with Eusebius of Nicomedia (†341), who also played an important role during the Council of Nicaea. The latter was sent into exile a few months after the Council, due to his contacts with Arius. He was rehabilitated in 328. He was the one who baptised Constantine. Nor should both of them be confused with Eusebius of Cappadocia (†370).

² Eusebius Caesariensis, *Vita Constantini*, III, XVIII.

[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339_Eusebius_Caesariensis_Vita_Constantini_\[Schaff\]_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339_Eusebius_Caesariensis_Vita_Constantini_[Schaff]_EN.pdf), 1004–1005 (accessed January 15, 2025).

³ I thank rev. Harvey Richardson for improving my English. I thank prof. dr. Zoltán Adorjáni, prof. dr. Henk Bakker, Monique Belinfante-van Gelder, prof. dr. Andreas Benk, dr. Karel Blei, prof. dr. Diederik Burgersdijk, drs. Willemien van Dijk, dr. Theodor Dunkelgrün, prof. dr. Rebecca Denova, rev. Marlis Gerwig, rev. drs. Reinier Gosker, prof. dr. Wolfram Kinzig, sr. Ingeborg-Marie Kvam, dr. Vladimir Latinovic, dr. Johannes Oeldemann, prof. dr. György Papp, prof. dr. Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, prof. dr. Eginhard Meijering, dr. Róbert Oláh, prof. dr. Marcel Poorthuis, prof. dr. Ferenc Postma, prof. dr. Konrad Raiser, prof. dr. Riemer Roukema, prof. dr. Marcel Sarot, and rev. dr. Jan Dirk Wassenaar for their kind support and advises.

Nicene Creed.⁴ Although I began my research by asking whether the problems with the date for Easter were related to the anti-Jewish words in the *Vita Constantini*, I will leave this issue aside, because I do not have enough space for that here.⁵ Briefly, my research yielded the result that this text seems to be not from the hand of Eusebius himself. I had a closer look and saw that Eusebius claims to have taken it from a document apparently coming from the Emperor Constantine the Great and addressed to all the churches. I concluded that the decision to separate the date of the Christian Easter from the Jewish Passover was not directly motivated by anti-Judaism. The Council Fathers chose to establish a common date for Easter primarily out of concern for the unity of the Church. In this contribution, I will try to find answers to the following questions. 1. Did Nicaea widen the gap between Jews and Christians? 2. Was Christian anti-Judaism anchored in Nicaea? 3. Is there any anti-Judaism in the Nicene Creed? 4. Was the establishment of the Sunday by Constantine inspired by anti-Judaism? 5. Can we label Eusebius' relationship to the Jews as anti-Jewish?

2. Eusebius and the Nicene Creed

Long before the birth of the Nicene Creed, already a number of local confessions existed, although their textual witnesses are not older than Nicaea itself. Eusebius presented such a 'Formula of Faith' to the Council. It may date from the middle of the third century, and he claimed that it was used at his own baptism.⁶ In June 325, he sent a letter to Caesarea, in order to inform his own Diocese about what happened during the Great Council. He wrote: "You have probably learned from other sources what happened concerning the Church's faith at the Great Council assembled at Nicaea. As we do not want the facts to be misrepresented by such reports, we have been obliged to transmit to you, first, the 'Formula of Faith' which we ourselves presented, and next, the second, which the assembled fathers put forth with some additions to our words."⁷ It is called a 'letter of justification'.⁸ Why? The thing is that Eusebius had not really rejected Arian thoughts. Moreover, there was a bit of criticism from his home church for agreeing with the Creed, and he was also elsewhere under suspicion of heresy for being reluctant to assent to the Creed.⁹ Therefore, he found himself forced during the Council to adjust his theological position. In the letter to his church, he tried to explain why he still signed the Creed. I think we should characterize Eusebius as a moderate orthodox theologian. The 'Formula of Faith' begins with 'we believe' (πιστεύομεν). A baptismal text

⁴ Some scholars doubt on grounds that are not really convincing to me, whether the 'Formula of Faith' forms the basis of the Nicene Creed. Eusebius, Letter to his Diocese, §2, §6. <https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-22/> (accessed January 3, 2025). Samuel Fernández, 'First Council of Nicaea', in: Hunter/Van Geest/Lietaert Peerbolte (ed.), Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, Vol. 4, Leiden 2024, 764–773,768. <https://referenceworks.brill.com/display/db/eeco> (accessed January 3, 2025).

J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, London 1972, 227–230.

⁵ This research will be published in: 'Református Szemle', which will appear in the first volume of 2025 in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár, Romania).

⁶ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Prolegomena, Chapter I, §2.

https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/02650339_Eusebius_Caesariensis_Historia_ecclesiastica_%5Bschaff%5D_EN.pdf (accessed January 3, 2025). Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Euseb von Kaisareia. Der Vater der Kirchengeschichte*, Berlin 1991, 18. Heinrich Denzinger, *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen, verbessert, erweitert, ins Deutsche übertragen und unter Mitarbeit von Helmut Hoping herausgegeben von Peter Hünermann*, Freiburg in Breisgau/Basel/Wien 2009, §40.

⁷ <https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-22/> (accessed January 4, 2025). The Greek text from Opitz (Πιστεύομεν δὲ καὶ εἰς ἓν πνεῦμα ἅγιον) differs a bit from the Greek text from Denzinger : Πιστεύομεν καὶ εἰς ἓν πνεῦμα ἅγιον.

⁸ A. M. Ritter, *Arius und das Konzil von Nizäa (325)*, in: Andresen "et al." (ed.), *Handbuch Band I*, 167.

⁹ Christian History Institute, 109, Council of Nicaea, "God of God and Light of Light." Nicene Council Affirms Christ's Divinity. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/nicaea> (accessed January 3, 2025).

will usually be in the singular, just as the Apostles' Creed. Eusebius included in his letter to his church also the text of the Nicene Creed, as adopted by the Council (325). It has been argued that Arianism had a 'Judaizing' approach in a pejorative sense. Michael Ipgrave reports some hostile accusations of so-called 'Jewish sympathy' among Arians. He notes that Alexander of Alexandria complained of Arius (and his colleague Achilles) as if 'they revile every godly apostolical doctrine, and in Jewish fashion have organised a gang to fight against Christ, denying His divinity, and declaring Him to be on a level with other men.' In other words: it would be mainly Jews who would want to deny the divinity of Christ.¹⁰ We realize that Nicaea was not the end of the conversation. The whole question was discussed with even more intensity after Nicaea. Many things still remained unclear, especially the exact meaning of the keyword 'ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ'. In the years after the Council, Eusebius avoided the term.¹¹ Only during the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381) did the Creed take on its final form.

3. Anti-Judaism in the Historia Ecclesiastica?

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* is not free from what we might call anti-Judaism. I will give some examples. Eusebius states in his introduction: "It is my intention, moreover, to recount the misfortunes which immediately came upon the whole Jewish nation in consequence of their plots against our Saviour."¹² It is clear that he fully agrees with his teacher Origen, who considered the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by the Roman troops in the year 70 CE and the expulsion of the Jewish people from Jerusalem as a divine punishment and revenge for Jesus' crucifixion.¹³ Also Eusebius sees the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment from God. "Thus, the divine vengeance overtook the Jews for the crimes they dared to commit against Christ."¹⁴ In this way, he saw the fall of the Jewish nation as a legitimization of discrimination of Jews. I also found the story of a Jewish woman Mary eating her own child, which Eusebius (quoting Josephus) commented as follows: "Such was the reward which the Jews received for their wickedness and impiety, against the Christ of God."¹⁵ The Japanese professor Gohei Hata thinks there is a possibility that Eusebius changed the Greek name of Mariamme (Hebrew name Miriam) into Mary (Greek name Maria) "in an attempt to demonstrate to his readers that the Christian Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a benevolent woman, while the Jewish Mary was an evil woman."¹⁶ To me that seems rather far-fetched. Afterwards the bloody fairytale emerged and was spread repeatedly, that Jews were eating children. Sometimes it was also linked to the Lamentations of Jeremiah 4:10. This is still circulating among anti-Semites even today. In addition, I must say, that Christian commentators, in order to emphasize that eating children is a typically Jewish practice, have

¹⁰ Michael Ipgrave, *Nicaea and Christian – Jewish Relations*, in: *Ecumenical Review* 75 (2023) 2, 235–248, 242.

¹¹ Aaron Johnson, *Eusebius of Caesarea (Palestine)*, in: *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Vol. 3, 240–249, 247.

¹² Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I,I 3 (see note 6).

¹³ Riemer Roukema, *Origen, the Jews, and the New Testament*, in: Amirav/Roukema, *The 'New Testament' as a Polemical Tool: Studies in Ancient Christian Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Beliefs [Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus. Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, Band 118]*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2018, 241–253, 253.

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, II,V,6; II,VI,8 (see note 6).

¹⁵ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III,I,24–32 (see note 6).

¹⁶ Gohei Hata, *The abuse and misuse of Josephus in Eusebius' Historia Ecclesiastica, Books 2 and 3*, in: Shaye J.D. Cohen/Joshua J. Schwartz (ed.), *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism [Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume]*, Leiden/Boston 2007, 91–103, 99. https://netzarimemunah.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2007_feldman_studies-in-josephus.pdf (accessed January 4, 2025).

abused also other Bible texts on the child-eating curse (Lev. 26:29; Deut. 28:53-57).¹⁷ Eusebius also claims (apparently quoting Josephus), that Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of the Roman army, because of the Jewish crimes against James, saying: “These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, that is called the Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man.”¹⁸ Hata notes that Eusebius is mistaken here. This quote did not come from Josephus.¹⁹ Hata states that Eusebius used and misused Josephus to deliberately express his anti-Jewish message, which paved the way for Christian anti-Judaism through the centuries, and he gives some evidence for it.²⁰ Hata is accusing Eusebius of constantly using and abusing Josephus. He states that Eusebius speaks of Jewish ‘crime against Christ’ and of Jewish ‘crime against the Saviour’. However, in fact Eusebius speaks (Historia Ecclesiastica II,V,7) of the crime of Pilate, not of the Jews in general. Hata claims, that Eusebius speaks of ‘plots against the apostles’ (Historia Ecclesiastica II,X,1) but in fact Eusebius speaks here of the crime of Herod Agrippa, not of the Jews in general. Eusebius speaks indeed of the Jews as ‘Lord-killers’ (κυριοκτόνοι),²¹ suggesting that the whole Jewish nation is responsible for the death of Christ and therefore doomed to destruction, but I cannot find this in the Historia Ecclesiastica. In fact, the motive of Deicide does not occur very often in the work of Eusebius. Yet it was a well-known reproach, first launched by Melito of Sardis (†180 CE), who was the first Christian writer to blame only the Jews for the Deicide.²² Eusebius at least knew Melito’s books on the Pascha (Περὶ Πάσχα), but he does not consider the content.²³ The accusation of Deicide would be brought forward again by the influential Chrysostom (347-407), with all the consequences it entailed. Hata states that the essence of Eusebius’s anti-Jewish thoughts in his Historia Ecclesiastica is as follows:

Jews put the Saviour on the cross. This is the crime against Christ. The Jewish people, to whom the above-mentioned Jews belong, must be accused as a ‘race’. The penalty of God pursued the Jewish people for their crimes against Christ. At the same time, God postponed his decisive punishment upon the Jewish people until the year 70 in an attempt to give them an opportunity for repentance. However, the Jewish people did not repent. Therefore, God punished them by destroying both Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70.

Hata even calls the whole of Eusebius’s theology a ‘theology of punishment’ and he speaks twice of his ‘theological vandalism’.²⁴ Hata does not mention however that Eusebius applies God’s punishment not only to Jews, but also to Christians. Eusebius did indeed see the fall of Jerusalem as a divine punishment for the Jews, but he also saw the persecution under Diocletian as a punishment for the Christians because of their lethargy: “On account of the

¹⁷ [Rabbi] Wendy Love Anderson, Parents Eating their Children. The Torah’s Curse and Its Undertones in Medieval Interpretation, in: The Thora. <https://www.thetorah.com/article/parents-eating-their-children-the-torahs-curse-and-its-undertones-in-medieval-interpretation> (accessed January 4, 2025).

¹⁸ Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica, II,XXIII (see note 6).

¹⁹ Hata claims that this passage is wrongly quoted by Origen (*Contra Celsus* 1,47) as coming from Josephus. According to his *Antiquities* 20, 197 ff., James died around the year 62 CE, that is eight years before the fall of Jerusalem. Hata, Abuse (see note 16), 95.

²⁰ Eusebius speaks of plots against Paul (HE II,XXIII,1), crime against James, the brother of Jesus (HE II,XXIII,1, HE II,XXIII,19), crime against the Lord (HE III,V,2), plots against the apostles of the Lord (HE III,V,2), most lawless acts against Christ and his apostles (HE III,V,3), lawless acts against the Christ of God (HE III,V,7). Hata also quotes HE III,VII,1, but that does not seem right. Hata, Abuse (see note 16).

²¹ Eusebius, On the celebration of the Pascha, VIII.

https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_on_easter.htm (accessed January 6, 2025).

²² Stephen G. Wilson, Melito and Israel. in: S. Wilson (ed.), *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, Vol. II: Separation and Polemic, Waterloo, 1986, 81–102.

²³ Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica, IV,XXVI,2 (see note 6).

²⁴ Hata, Abuse (see note 16), 98 and 102.

abundant freedom, we [i.e. Christians] fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other”.²⁵ Hata also nowhere mentions that the motive for the hatred of the Jews (the people who had slain the prophets and the Lord himself) occurs already in the New Testament (I Thess. 2:15-16) and is unfortunately often interpreted in an anti-Jewish way, as if all Jews are guilty and remain eternally guilty of the death of Christ. In that framework, many Christian theologians did the same throughout the centuries. In my opinion, Hata’s arguments to make such a sharp judgment about Eusebius and his *Historia Ecclesiastica* are too weak and not very convincing.

4. Anti-Judaism in the Demonstratio Evangelica?

From the Jewish perspective, Joseph Jacobs and Isaac Broydé²⁶ tell us, that Eusebius strongly attacked Judaism in his *Demonstratio Evangelica*,²⁷ charging the Jews with serious accusations and errors in the explanation of Scripture. “Scripture foretells an extreme curse, adding a lamentation for the Jewish race, which actually overtook them immediately after their impiety against our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”²⁸ On the other hand, they admit that Eusebius’ *Præparatio Evangelica* is nevertheless of great interest for Jews. It contains fifteen books, of which the last eight outline Judaism, its religion, history, and institutions. Especially valuable are books VIII and IX, in which Eusebius reproduces fragments of Jewish-Hellenic writers, such as Eupolemus, Demetrius, Artapanus, Philo, Ezekielus, and Josephus.²⁹ Jörg Ulrich is convinced that Eusebius did not consciously want to adopt a polemical position towards the Jews.³⁰ He emphasizes that the *Demonstratio Evangelica* is not intended as an attack on the Jews or the Jewish religion. He states that we cannot read the *Demonstratio Evangelica* without the *Præparatio Evangelica*. These two belong together; they are ‘Apologetic Twins’ (das apologetische Doppelwerk). He states clearly that no anti-Jewish ‘primary interest’ can be identified in these works.³¹ Unfortunately, the last ten books of the *Demonstratio* are lost, including book 10, which deals with the suffering and death of Jesus. Nonetheless, Eusebius himself also strongly denies any anti-Jewish sentiment in his *Demonstratio Evangelica*. However, he is well aware of the possibility of misunderstanding. He writes: “... the importance of my writing does not lie in the fact that it is, as might be suggested, a polemic against the Jews. Perish the thought, far from that! For if they would fairly consider it, it is really on their side.”³²

5. Eusebius and the Jews

I already draw some attention to Jörg Ulrich, who made a thorough study of the theology of Eusebius and the Jews. He characterizes Eusebius’ theology as ‘salvation-historical’.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VIII,I,7–9 (see note 6).

²⁶ Joseph Jacobs/Isaac Broydé, Eusebius, in: *Jewish Encyclopedia*. <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5911-eusebius> (accessed January 6, 2025).

²⁷ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*. Translation W.J. Ferrar. http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/fathers/eusebius_de_06_book4.html (accessed January 6, 2025).

²⁸ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, IV,16. (see note 27).

²⁹ Joseph Jacobs/Isaac Broydé, Eusebius (see note 26).

³⁰ Jörg Ulrich, *Eusebius von Caesarea und die Juden. Studien zur Rolle der Juden in der Theologie des Eusebius von Caesarea*, Berlin/New York 1999, 246–254.

³¹ Ulrich, Eusebius (see note 30), 40–44.

³² Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, I,1 (see note 27). https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_de_03_book1.htm (accessed January 6, 2025).

Eusebius sees the biblical history of Judaism as a preliminary stage that was overtaken by the coming of Christianity. This seems to me crystal clearly as a form of replacement theology. To properly understand Eusebius we should know that he distinguishes between Hebrews, Jews, Greeks (οἱ Ἕλληνες c.q. τὰ ἔθνη) and Christians.³³ The Hebrews were former to the Jews in time, and they were higher in spirituality and morality. They descended from Heber, Abraham's grandfather (Gen. 10:21). This ancient Hebrew religion had no Sinai legislation, no Sabbath and no circumcision; it was all focused on universality. Why no circumcision? Because Abraham as a 'Hebrew' was already justified without his circumcision. I think Eusebius refers here to Romans 4:10, but he does not mention it, neither does Arthur Cushman McGiffert.³⁴ Eusebius argues here: "Indeed unto Abraham, who was thus before his circumcision a justified man, there was given by God, who revealed himself unto him (but this was Christ himself, the word of God), a prophecy in regard to those who in coming ages should be justified in the same way as he. In thee shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed." In his *Praeparatio Evangelica* he argues:

For all these (sc. Hebrews) there was not one word about bodily circumcision, nor yet about the Jewish commandments of Moses: and therefore it is not right either to call them Jews, nor yet Greeks, because they did not believe in more gods than one like Greeks or the other nations. But they would be more properly called Hebrews, either because of Eber, or rather because of the interpretation of the name.³⁵

Eusebius actually uses the word 'Hebrews' as an honorary title (φίλοι Θεοῦ, friends of God). However, he can also apply this honorary title to some Jews after Moses and even to Plato, who distanced himself from polytheism and – so to speak – found himself in the vestibule of truth.³⁶ Eusebius wanted to show that to a large extent the Christian faith corresponds with Greek philosophy and had been prepared by it.³⁷ In his *Praeparatio Evangelica* Eusebius argued that the Greeks had taken their (partial) truths from the Hebrew tradition.³⁸ The members of the Church and in particular the authors of the New Testament, also deserve this honorary title.³⁹ If Eusebius speaks of 'Jews' he means the descendants of Judah and then all twelve tribes and the entire Jewish people, keeping the Mosaic law, but there is no watershed between 'Hebrews' and 'Jews'. Certainly, there is continuity. With all his efforts to defend Eusebius, Ulrich cannot avoid admitting that we find in Eusebius some very negative passages about the Jews in a way that could and should be interpreted as anti-Judaism.⁴⁰ "The Jews have been struck blind and have a darkened mind."⁴¹ On the basis of Rom. 9: 27-29 and Isaiah 1:9, Eusebius can even say that Paul would have called the entire Jewish people the 'people of Gomorrah', and their rulers the 'Princes of Sodom', implying a rejection of the Mosaic worship.⁴² The whole study of Ulrich seems to be an attempt to defend Eusebius

³³ Ulrich, Eusebius (see note 30), 57–132.

³⁴ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I,IV,12 (see note 6). McGiffert, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VII, VIII. https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_07_book7.htm (accessed January 24, 2025)

³⁵ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VII, VIII. https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_07_book7.htm (accessed January 10, 2025).

³⁶ Ulrich, Eusebius (see note 30), 74.

³⁷ Riemer Roukema, *Reception and Interpretation of Jesus' Teaching of Love for Enemies in Ancient Christianity*. in: Geljon/Roukema, *Violence in Ancient Christianity. Victims and Perpetrators*, Leiden/Boston 2014, 198–214, 205.

³⁸ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VII,I (see note 35).

³⁹ Ulrich, Eusebius (see note 30), 66.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, II,3,57; VII,2,128 (see note 27).

⁴¹ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* VIII,II,128 (see note 27).

⁴² Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, II,III,27/36 (see note 27).

against unjustified charges of anti-Judaism. I agree with Wolfram Kinzig that Ulrich downplayed the fundamental anti-Judaism of Eusebius.⁴³ Also Hans Jansen sees theological anti-Judaism in Eusebius' work.⁴⁴ James Everett Seaver accuses Eusebius strongly of anti-Judaism.⁴⁵ He even dares to say: "The church fathers from Eusebius to Augustine tried to show that the Jews were wicked and depraved monsters."⁴⁶ I referred already earlier to G. Hata, who speaks firmly about Eusebius' anti-Jewish message. There are still more voices that also note explicit anti-Judaism in Eusebius texts. Jörg Ulrich gives us a summary. According to him, Rabbi N.M.R. de Lange, Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the University of Cambridge thinks that the work of Eusebius is full of anti-Judaism.⁴⁷ De Lange wrote indeed: "Time and again Origen warns his hearers against being misled into following Jewish practices, such as circumcision, fasting and the observance of Sabbats and festivals."⁴⁸ He also argued, that "the Jewish tradition had long identified Esau with Israel's enemies. Since Jacob stood for the Church, Esau represented the Jews."⁴⁹ In my opinion, Nicholas de Lange still judges Origen in a more balanced way than Ulrich thinks. De Lange sees in Origen mild reasonableness towards Jews in contrast to the 'hellfire and thunder' of Chrysostom. He notes: "If he [Eusebius] attacked the Jews vigorously in Church, he defended them no less vigorously against the abuse of pagans."⁵⁰ Monica Gödecke sees very clear anti-Judaism emerging in Eusebius.⁵¹ Heinz Schreckenbergs sees Eusebius as an enemy of the Jews.⁵² Friedhelm Winkelmann is a bit more cautious, but he also takes a very critical attitude towards Jews. Jörg Ulrich, however, sees it all in a much more nuanced way. He is trying to defend Eusebius strongly. He acknowledges that Eusebius has a triumphalist view of the Church, that he sees the crucifixion of Jesus as Jewish guilt and that he makes several statements that can be interpreted as anti-Judaism. On the other hand, Ulrich argues that Eusebius does have an open eye for the danger of Christian self-righteousness. Eusebius does not reject the Jews, he can even call them proto-Christians and he can even call the synagogue the 'Mother of the Church'.

7. *Eusebius and the first Sunday Law*

Some Jewish voices tell us that they do see the tendency in the young Church to substitute Sunday for the Sabbath as a kind of anti-Judaism.⁵³ It is also sometimes argued in Seventh-

⁴³ See the review of Wolfram Kinzig, in: *The Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (2004) 1, 348–351, 351.

⁴⁴ Hans Jansen, *Christelijke theologie na Auschwitz*. Deel I. Theologische en kerkelijke wortels van het antisemitisme, 's-Gravenhage 1982³, 516.

⁴⁵ James Everett Seaver, *Persecution of the Jews in the Roman Empire (300–438)*, Kansas 1951, 25.

⁴⁶ Seaver, *Persecution* (see note 45), 84.

S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi *Tractatus Adversus Judeos*.

[https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0354-](https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0354-0430_Augustinus_Tractatus_Adversus_Judaeos_MLT.pdf)

[0430_Augustinus_Tractatus_Adversus_Judaeos_MLT.pdf](https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0354-0430_Augustinus_Tractatus_Adversus_Judaeos_MLT.pdf) (accessed January 11, 2025).

⁴⁷ Ulrich quotes: N.M.R. de Lange *TRE* 3 (1978), 135. Ulrich, *Eusebius* (see note 30), 1.

⁴⁸ N.M.R. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews*. *Studies in Jewish-Christian relations in third-century Palestine*. University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 25, Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne 1976, reprinted 1978, 86–87.

⁴⁹ De Lange, *Origen* (see note 48) 80. Jansen, *Auschwitz* (see note 44) 73.

⁵⁰ De Lange, *Origen* (see note 48), 135.

⁵¹ Monika Gödecke, *Geschichte als Mythos*. *Eusebs Kirchengeschichte [Europäische Hochschulschriften. Theologie, 307]*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 135.

⁵² Heinz Schreckenbergs, *Die Christlichen Adversus-Judeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld, 1.–11. Jahrhundert-[Europäische Hochschulschriften Theologie, 172]*, Frankfurt am Main 1994, 264.

⁵³ *Joseph Jacobs/Emil G. Hirsch, 'Sabbath and Sunday'* in: *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906.

<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12966-sabbath-and-sunday> (accessed January 17, 2025).

day Adventist circles,⁵⁴ for example by the Adventist Samuele Bacchiocchi. He defended it his thesis at the Gregoriana in Rome with the title: ‘From Sabbath to Sunday’.⁵⁵ Bacchiocchi argues, there were three factors that influenced the adoption of Sunday observance in early Christianity. These factors were the Primacy of the Church of Rome, the worship of the Sun and anti-Judaism.⁵⁶ Rome was important indeed, but the Primacy of the Church of Rome was not that important for the whole Church in the year 321. We know that initially there were five major Centres of Christian belief: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Was it Pope Boniface III (†607), who saw the bishop of Rome as the head of all the churches and regulated it accordingly?⁵⁷ Bacchiocchi knows about the anti-Judaic motivation in the letter of Constantine I mentioned above. Therefore, he thinks that Nicaea represents the culmination of a controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings. He states that the same anti-Judaic motivation was primarily responsible for the substitution of Sabbath-keeping by Sunday worship.⁵⁸ However, he gives no evidence for this derived from written sources concerning the Council of Nicaea itself. Nevertheless, we should be aware of the fact, that the Council of Laodicea (364) expressly forbade Christians to keep the Sabbath, because this was a ‘Judaizing’ practise. Can we find evidence or an explanation in the New Testament? The word ‘Sunday’ as such does not appear in the Bible and it is not a Biblical day of rest but initially added to the Sabbath to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. It has taken the place of the Sabbath due to the replacement theology, which fortunately is now on its return.⁵⁹ This theology saw the Church as the new or ‘Verus’ Israel,⁶⁰ baptism as the replacement of circumcision and Sunday as the new Sabbath. Apostle Paul writes: “first the Jew and also the Greek”, always in this order.⁶¹ Nowhere in the Bible, have we found anything like “the Greek instead of the Jew”. There is no doubt that Jesus and his disciples kept the seventh day. After the emergence of the first Christian communities, the question arose in what respect non-Jewish Christians should or should not adhere to Jewish legislation, dietary laws, circumcision, keeping the Shabbat and so on. The Petrine, or Judæo-Christians (Gal. 2:9), wanted to adhere to Jewish laws and customs. Paul had a broader view and did not want to bind the new believers too much (Col. 2:16). We can find no indication in the New Testament for the abolition of the Sabbath, but from the very beginning Christians came together to break bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and to collect money for diaconal help (I Cor. 16:2). In the first centuries, the first day of the week was a normal working day for everybody. It was Constantine who established by a Decree in the year 321,⁶² that Sunday should be an official day of rest from labour in his

⁵⁴ We do not see it on their official website. <https://www.adventist.org/the-sabbath/> (accessed January 17, 2025).

⁵⁵ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday. A historical investigation of the rise of Sunday observance in early Christianity*, The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome 1977. <https://archive.org/details/from-sabbath-to-sunday/page/6/mode/2up> (accessed January 17, 2025).

⁵⁶ Edward Allen, ‘How did the Jewish Sabbath become the Christian Sunday? A Review of the Reviews of Bacchiocchi’s *From Sabbath to Sunday*’, in: *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 53 (2015)2, 337–353, 339. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3373&context=auss> (accessed January 17, 2025).

⁵⁷ “Der Ursprung und Anfang des Papsttums sei die Übertragung des Primates an Bonifaz III durch den oströmischen Usurpator Phokas gewesen”. See Wolfgang Klausnitzer, *Der Primat des Bischofs von Rom. Entwicklung. Dogma. Ökumenische Zukunft*, Herder, Freiburg/Basel/Wien 2004, 266.

⁵⁸ Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath*, (see note 55), 124.

⁵⁹ World Council of Churches, *Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, §§2,3–2, 4. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/ecumenical-considerations-on-jewish-christian-dialogue> (accessed January 7, 2025).

⁶⁰ Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel. Étude sur les relations entre les chrétiens et juifs dans l’empire romain*, Paris 1983, 135–425.

⁶¹ Rom. 1:16; Rom. 2:9–11; Rom. 3:29, I Cor. 1:24, I Cor. 10:32.

⁶² Sources contradict each other. Sometimes the date 3 March is mentioned, but 7 March is assumed by many other sources.

empire. Everyone should rest upon the venerable day of the sun, the Dies Solis. There was no reference to the Old Testament, or to the Jewish Sabbath. The Emperor just wanted to have one day distinguished and chose for the Sun's day. Christians however refused to be seen as 'sun worshippers'. The Christians wanted to distinguish themselves from the Jews, especially from the most characteristic Jewish ritual, the Sabbath. However, we can find not any reference to it in the Nicene documents.⁶³ Eusebius advocates abolishing the Sabbath and keeping the Sunday. He criticizes Christian Ebionites, who keep both holy days, namely the Saturday as a memorial of the Creation, and the Sunday as the Lord's Day, in memory of his Resurrection.⁶⁴ In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, he says clearly:

They (sc. the Hebrew nation) did not care about circumcision of the body, neither do we. They did not care about observing Sabbaths, nor do we. They did not avoid certain kinds of food; neither did they regard the other distinctions, which Moses first delivered to their posterity to be observed as symbols; nor do Christians of the present day such things.⁶⁵

In his *Demonstratio Evangelica* Eusebius states:

And this was the day of His Resurrection from the dead, which they say, as being the one and only truly Holy Day and the Lord's Day, is better than any number of days as we ordinarily understand them, and better than the days set apart by the Mosaic Law for Feasts, New Moons and Sabbaths.⁶⁶

In his *Vita Constantini* Eusebius reports that all Roman soldiers, whether Christian or not, were required to pray on Sunday as follows:

We acknowledge thee the only God: we own thee, as our King and implore thy succor. By thy favour have we gotten the victory: through thee are we mightier than our enemies. We render thanks for thy past benefits, and trust thee for future blessings. Together we pray to thee, and beseech thee long to preserve to us, safe and triumphant, our Emperor Constantine and his pious sons. Such was the duty to be performed on Sunday by his troops, and such the prayer they were instructed to offer up to God.⁶⁷

However, the Christian tradition of coming together on the day of the Lord's resurrection had already taken place much earlier, as we know from Justin Martyr (±100-165): "Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead."⁶⁸ We also know it from Ignatius.⁶⁹ And of course, replacement theology has played its role.

⁶³ Bernhard Blumenkranz, *The Roman Church and the Jews*. in: Jeremy Cohen (ed.), *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to Reformation*, New York University Press, 1991, 193–230, 196.

⁶⁴ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III,27,5 (see note 6).

⁶⁵ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, I,IV,8 (see note 6).

⁶⁶ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, IV,16 (see note 27).

⁶⁷ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, IV,XX (see note 2).

⁶⁸ Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I,67. https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/justin_eucharist.htm (accessed January 8, 2025).

⁶⁹ Ignatius, *Ad Magnesios*, IX. A.F.J. Klijn, *Apostolische Vaders 1, Ignatius en Polycarpus*, Baarn 1966, 90–91. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0105.htm> (accessed January 8, 2025).

8. Conclusion

1. Did Nicaea widen the gap between Jews and Christians? The replacement theology is undoubtedly present in the work of Eusebius. It sees the ancient 'Hebrew religion' as a kind of Proto-Christianity. The real 'Hebrews' are believers in Jesus Christ. The Church substitutes the synagogue, Jerusalem is rebuilt with a 'new temple', the Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis). Christ now exercises the royal, prophetic and priestly ministry of ancient Israel. To describe the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Eusebius however uses not only the substitution model (Christianity replaced Judaism), but also the universalization model (the sphere of salvation expanded from Judaism to all peoples). If we step away from this replacement theology, what will take its place? The only possibility is to enter into dialogue with each other with respect for each other's tradition and insights. Let us realize that 'the' Jews do not exist. They are not a homogeneous group, but a variety of different groups, ideas and ideals. The same goes for the Christians. Let us also realize that early Christian talks about 'the' Jews and 'the' Christians were of a different quality. After the Shoah we cannot do it anymore.

2. Was Christian anti-Judaism anchored in Nicaea? Yes, I would say that it marks a watershed in the relations between Christians and Jews. Many early Christian texts can be interpreted in an anti-Jewish way. Eusebius appreciated the good elements of Jewish history, but he also highlighted their failures by emphasizing their fate, which was a punishment of God in his eyes and in the eyes of his fellow theologians. I think that anti-Judaism was indeed anchored in Nicaea. Eusebius was influenced not only by an anti-Jewish interpretation of Scripture, but also by other theologians of his time who expressed themselves in an anti-Jewish manner and who were steeped in anti-Judaism.

3. Is there any anti-Judaism in the Nicene Creed? No. The text of the Creed and that of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum do not contain any anti-Jewish elements. In the formulation of the Trinitarian theological dogma, Judaism does not appear. The Nicene Creed speaks of the incarnation of Jesus Christ 'σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα' and in this way it rejected Docetism, which was at least as great a threat as Arianism. The birth of the Jewish child Jesus is described clearly. In the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum the virgin Mary, Jesus' Jewish mother is added (καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα). Another important fact is that the Creed does not say that (the) Jews crucified Jesus. On the contrary, the name of Pontius Pilate is mentioned in connection with the crucifixion of Christ: σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου. This is all the more remarkable because the apostle Paul never mentions Pilate. The fact that the speaking of the Old Testament prophets (τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν) is also included in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum means that the Council maintained the Jewish Bible – or as we say now: the 'First Testament' – as the Word of God. It is a message against the anti-Jewish attitude of Marcion (±85-160), who spoke of the 'vengeful' demiurge (creator god) of the Old Testament versus the heavenly father God of the New Testament. However, we should be aware of the fact, that the distinction 'Old Testament'/'New Testament' (when used in theological discourse) may always carry an anti-Jewish aftertaste. Unfortunately, the Creed does not mention Jesus and Maria being Jewish, and Israel is not mentioned either.

4. Was the establishment of the Sunday by Constantine inspired by anti-Judaism? Despite the fact that this is sometimes argued in Seventh-day Adventist circles, and has been suggested by some Jewish sources, the reason for it seems to me not specifically or directly anti-Jewish. There was no discussion in the Council on it. The tradition of coming together on the day of

the Lord's resurrection had already taken place much earlier. Nevertheless, the replacement theology has played its own role.

5. Can we label Eusebius' relationship to the Jews as anti-Jewish? Eusebius considers himself an expert on Judaism. He does not want to be accused of hatred of Jews. He obviously could not have been aware of the impact of the anti-Judaism in his work in future times; therefore, I cannot call him an enemy of the Jews. However, the reception history of his work and that of other Church Fathers of his time has revealed the bad consequences it has led to.

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