


Less successful, in my opinion, are the framing chapters on the social memory approach and the parting of the ways. Frankly, I have difficulty seeing the exegetical payoff of the 32 pages devoted to “social memory” in chapter 1. Very little of this theorizing is actually invoked when we get to the texts about the Baptist, and when it is, it is not clear that it clarifies things. I am especially leery of the vague term “invisible violence” developed on pp. 38–42, which does not receive anything approaching a definition until the end of the section, when we are told that “the memory of John’s beheading . . . is invisibly violent because it can legitimize, lend approval to, and crystallize into practices of harm and injury against Jews in perpetuity”—the word “can” epitomizing the slipperiness of the claim.

The concrete evidence Shedd presents for a connection between Christian interpretations of the Baptist story and violence against Jews is meager. (A stronger claim could be made about “his blood be on us and on our children” in Matt 27:25 or “you are of your father the devil” in John 8:44). He points, for example, to *Dial.* 49.3–5, where Justin refers to John as the prophet whom “your (plural) king Herod had shut up in prison,” thus “refract[ing] the degrading gaze of John’s death to implicate Herod and the Jews” (145). Earlier in the same passage, however, Justin has referred to John as “a prophet among your (plural) people,” who told the Jewish crowds that he had come baptizing “you” (plural) in water, in preparation for the Stronger One who “will baptize you (plural) in the Holy Spirit and fire.” Downplaying this positive association between John and the Jewish populace, Shedd instead suggests that Justin is trying to connect them with Herod’s crime—a link the passage itself does not forge. Indeed, Shedd’s *idée fixe* about this seems to have caused him to mistranslate the ending of the passage, which he quotes correctly in Greek on p. 142 (Ἡλίας ἤδη ἦλθε, καὶ οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν αὐτόν) but renders incorrectly on p. 143 in a way that advances his thesis (“Elijah already came and *you* did not recognize him”). It is true that elsewhere Justin links the Jewish people as a whole with the death of Christ, though not in a way that shuts down dialogue or incites to violence (see, for example, *Dial.* 16.4–17.3; 133.6). But I do not see a specific connection between the Baptist’s death and denigration of Jews in the *Dialogue*.

In sum, this is a provocative book that opens up new interpretative possibilities, but portions of it seem driven more by theory than exegesis.

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***The Source of Celsus’s Criticism of Jesus: Theological Developments in the Second Century AD.* By Egge Tjesseling. Leuven: Peeters, 2022. ix + 358 pp., € 79.00, hardback.**

The second-century Christian movement faced a number of poignant challenges, not the least of which was the rise of anti-Christian polemics from both the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds. Such polemics are exemplified in the second-century philosopher Celsus. Known through the excerpts available in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*,

Celsus's attacks are not only predicated on his understanding (and commitment to) middle Platonism, but also dependent upon earlier Jewish criticisms, drawn from the figure he calls "the Jew." Thus, in Celsus, we have both Greco-Roman and Jewish polemics mixed together in the same individual.

For generations, scholars have been particularly interested in the source of Celsus's critiques (and thereby the source of his knowledge of the Gospels). This new volume by Egge Tjsseling—apparently a version of his PhD thesis under Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte at de Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam—seeks to address precisely this question.

Tjsseling states his purpose: "The main subject of this study is to find an answer to the question of what were the sources Celsus used to collect his knowledge about Jesus, and to a lesser extent Christianity, and Judaism" (19). His answer, which he collectively argues for throughout the volume, is that Celsus's source is a written text composed by an unknown Jew "between 105 and 130 as a response to gospel stories he had heard or maybe seen" (246). Celsus himself likely did not know or read the Gospels, argues Tjsseling, but simply used this written Jewish source. This source, in turn, was utilized and expanded by later authors to form the Jewish polemical text known as the *Toledot Yeshu* ("Life of Jesus")—largely known to us through medieval manuscripts.

Before exploring Celsus's views of Jesus, and the possible Jewish source behind them, Tjsseling offers a number of preliminary chapters on subjects like methodology, the *status quaestionis* of Celsus's research, and the influence of Platonic thought on Celsus. This latter chapter is particularly insightful as it takes a deep dive into how Celsus's philosophical commitments are clearly derived from Plato and how those commitments are, in turn, the reasons he rejects many aspects of the teachings of (and about) Jesus. For instance, Tjsseling observes, Celsus rejects the incarnation not so much for historical reasons but for philosophical ones: "God cannot come down, and he would not want to either" (48).

In chapter 5, the volume's longest chapter, Tjsseling provides an extensive analysis of Celsus's testimony about Jesus, covering nine different topics: (1) Jesus's parentage and birth; (2) the baptism of Jesus; (3) Jesus as a magician; (4) the teachings of Jesus; (5) Jesus and his disciples; (6) Jesus and the Jewish law; (7) Jesus and the prophecies; (8) Jesus's appearance and character; and (9) Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection.

Here we see the severity of Celsus's critique (and therefore the severity of the Jewish source behind it) as he makes a number of provocative claims: for example, Jesus was a bastard child born of an adulterous relationship; Mary was a poor Jewish spinster with no significant lineage; Jesus was a magician/sorcerer (due to his time in Egypt) who tricked and deceived people; Jesus's disciples were a band of depraved, uneducated robbers; Jesus was a poor teacher who stole material from Plato.

After a brief chapter on Celsus's Christology, Tjsseling closes out the book with a comparison between Celsus's teachings on Jesus (covering a number of the aforementioned areas) and the later *Toledot Yeshu*. He concludes that the document Celsus used—created by the anonymous "Jew"—was effectively the "first edition of the *Toledot Yeshu*" (249). Elsewhere he refers to this document as a "precursor of *Toledot Yeshu*" (237).

However, while such a conclusion is certainly possible, it is not a necessary one. It seems there are other equally plausible solutions. Tjsseling's comparison shows the two documents shared common ideas, but does not demonstrate a *textual relationship*. The author of the later *Toledot Yeshu* may have received his content not from the text used by Celsus, but instead from the anti-Christian polemics that were well-known and widespread in the Jewish community.

As a whole, Tijsseling has offered a helpful and intriguing volume on Celsus's critiques of the Gospels and Jesus. Its fundamental contribution is not so much in solving the relationship between the text used by Celsus and the later *Toledot Yeshu* (I think that problem remains unresolved), but in highlighting the nature of early Jewish polemics against Christianity and how that illumines the relationship between Jews and Christians in the second century. Particularly useful in this regard is the appendix, which highlights 177 testimonials of Celsus, including the Greek text (with text-critical notes) and an English translation. Scholars of second-century Christianity will benefit from simply reading through these testimonials, conveniently gathered into one volume.

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Tolerance, Intolerance, and Recognition in Early Christianity and Early Judaism. Edited by Outi Lehtipuu and Michael Labahn. Early Christianity and the Roman World 2. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 314 pp. € 136,00 hardcover.

This collection of essays has its origin in the discussions of the Early Christianity research group held at the annual meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS), hosted in Córdoba in 2015. The editors further credit as an important influence the research conducted at the Centre of Excellence on Reason and Religious Recognition supported by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki from 2014 until 2019. The volume under consideration here brings together ten essays along with an introduction by the editors and a compelling epilogue by Amy Jill Levine.

Three sections structure the essays in this volume: (1) Conditions of Tolerance; (2) Jewish-Christian Relations between Tolerance and Intolerance; and (3) Tolerance and Questions of Persecution, Gender, and Ecology. The essays of section 1 examine the contexts of tolerance in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and early Christian communities using interpretive lenses such as ethnicity, theological constructions of the "other," and the management of intercommunal conflict, respectively. In section 2, the authors highlight the varying nature of Jewish-Christian relations under the Roman empire. Topics of interest here range widely, encompassing Paul's attitudes toward Jews and Gentiles; interpretations by patristic figures (Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine) of the Maccabean martyrs; Cyril of Alexandria's covert use of Philo to hide his intellectual debt to an influential Jewish thinker; and, finally, the interplay of Jewish and Christian discourses in Origen and the rabbinic text *Leviticus Rabbah* on the idea of miraculous birth. Section 3 features essays that bring the volume's overall themes of tolerance and recognition into dialogue with issues of religious persecution, gender, and ecology. The essays on gender and ecology in this last section, as well as Amy Jill Levine's epilogue, helpfully underscore the relevance of ancient debates on tolerance and recognition to the contemporary world.