

RESPONSE TO CHAPTER 8 'HOW COULD THEIR FOOD NOT BE IMPURE? JEWISH FOOD AND THE DEFINITION OF CHRISTIANITY' IN DAVID FREIDENREICH, *FOREIGNERS AND THEIR FOOD: CONSTRUCTING OTHERNESS IN JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC LAW*.

The chapter under discussion contains the illustration that adorns the paper cover of David Freidenreich's book: a roundel from a richly adorned rendition of the Bible, a so-called *Bible Moralisée* of the first part of the thirteenth century, analysed by Sara Lipton.¹ The picture shows a female representation of 'synagogue' whose response to the two apostles preaching to her on her right is written on the unfurled scroll she clutches in her arms: *spernit legem* ('she spurns the law'). To the front right side of the apostles a priest is raising the consecrated host; to *synagoga's* left there are two Jews sporting beards and coned hats. The front Jew is slaughtering a lamb; the Jew behind is lifting a lamb as an offering. The lifted lamb is lower than the raised host. Freidenreich follows Lipton in interpreting the roundel as proclaiming that Christians rather than Jews follow the true meaning of the law by hearing the word of Christ, the true paschal lamb. Jews despise the very law they imagine they are observing. The depiction of the slaughter of the lamb does not only stand for the sacrifices made in the Temple before its destruction in 70 CE. It stands for the practice of Jewish slaughter, *shechita*. The roundel's message seems to be that Jewish ritual constitutes the negation of Christian belief.

To this reading of the miniature I would add that the Jews of the roundel are also being used to emphasise the veracity of Christianity precisely because they are following their law. To me the paradoxical function imposed by this Christian miniature on Jews epitomises the ambiguous position ascribed to Jews from the time of Augustine. On the one hand, there is need for Jews in Christian society. Jews provide proof of Christian veracity by carrying the books of the 'Old Testament' and by following their interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. As the enemies of Christ, they are particularly credible as witnesses for Christianity. As a dispersed people, they demonstrate what happens to those who continue to deny Christ. But at the end of time they will fulfil Paul's prophecy by converting to Christ.² As I have emphasised in my recent book, Jews were deemed by Christians to serve them in a multiplicity of ways.³

The aspect of the confrontation between Christianity and Judaism that has captured Freidenreich's imagination is the question of food, with its related questions pertaining to the sharing of meals between the adherents of both traditions. In this chapter he is particularly interested in understanding the language of impurity that is used in Christian regulations forbidding Christians to eat Jewish food or share food with

¹ Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance. The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisée* (Berkeley etc., 1999), 68-9, 1, 5.

² On Augustine, see Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law. Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley etc. 1999), 23-71, and Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism, New York etc., 2008*.

³ Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations, 1000-1300. Jews in the service of medieval Christendom* (Harlow, 2011).

Jews. Some precepts stress that Jewish food itself is impure; others use Jews as rhetorical foils to conjure up images of impure deviance in order to put into relief the purity of right believing Christianity. Many precepts imply that Jews are worse than heretics. Freidenreich traces much of this to Augustine's attempt to counter Manichaean insistence on some biblical dietary rules. For Augustine's understanding of the 'Old Testament' it was paramount that all dietary laws should be interpreted by Christians figuratively. Manicheans were wrong and by implication, according to Freidenreich, so were the Jews. I would add that unlike unacceptable Manichaean error, Jewish error in this respect could be tolerated as one of their many alleged errors, which were deemed to prove the veracity of Christianity. For none of the regulations cited by Freidenreich suggested that Judaism be excised from Christian consciousness. On the contrary, as Freidenreich himself says, Christians used real or imaginary Jews as tools to forge their identity. Indeed, any concession made by Christians to Jews over food would invite the intolerable conclusion that Jews were superior to Christians and that Christianity had not, in fact, superseded Judaism.

The same can be said for the highly negative statements found in Eastern sources prohibiting Christians from sharing festival meals with Jews. Freidenreich cites a hymn by Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) in which Jewish hands are sullied with the blood of Christ; their Passover matzot are bloody signifiers of Christ's blood, which the Jews allegedly drew upon themselves at the crucifixion. Christians partaking of this food are damned by the blood that would save them if they partook of it through the Eucharist. Just as Christians are forbidden to eat what has been offered up to idols, they should not join Jews in festival meals. Freidenreich takes this and other hymns to imply that Jews were considered worse than idolaters, whom he calls the 'ultimate outsiders' (p. 112). But however violent the anti-Jewish rhetoric may be in Ephrem's work or that of others such as John Chrysostom (d. 407), Jews were still being used in these texts to consolidate Christian sense of self. For all its unsavouriness, the role assigned to the Jews in rejecting Christ and in participating in his crucifixion served as an essential part in the unfolding of Christian salvific history through the calling of the Gentiles to Christ.

Freidenreich's chapter demonstrates brilliantly how a religion's rules about eating with the other say more about internal attitudes than external ones. Augustinian thought had for good or for ill made sure that Judaism remained an integral part of medieval Catholicism. This meant that when it came to food, ecclesiastics were faced with daily reminders of the 'correct' or 'incorrect' interpretation of biblical dietary laws. Where Jews were physically present, rules had to delineate the kind of interaction between Christian and Jews that would substantiate Christian supersession over Judaism. It seems to me that it is not for nothing that Jewish food rules did not use Christians to formulate a sense of Jewish self. After all, Jews did not 'need' Christians in the way Christians 'needed' Jews. Whether medieval Jews and Christians actually followed the rules formulated by their leaders is another matter altogether.