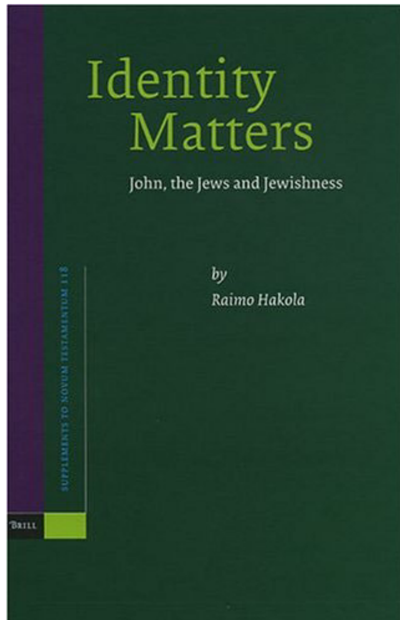
RBL 02/2007



Hakola, Raimo

Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness

Supplements to Novum Testamentum 118

Leiden: Brill, 2005. Pp. x + 294. Cloth. $145.00. ISBN 9004143246.

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Hakola's book is an essential read for anyone in the field of Johannine literature and first-century Jewish-Christian relationships. It is a revised form of his doctoral thesis for the University of Helsinki under the supervision of Ismo Dunderberg. The entire study deal with the issue of the way the Jews are presented in the Fourth Gospel.

Hakola introduces his theme by taking a very critical approach to the hypothesis presented by J. Louis Martyn, based on John 9, that the Gospel reflects a two-level drama addressing the problem of the Johannine Christians having been expelled from the synagogue. This expulsion was seen to be the result of an addition to the synagogue Morning Prayer service following the rabbinic council of Yavneh. While Martyn's study suggests this as a historical *hypothesis,* his historical reconstruction has been taken as an accepted fact until recent years, when it began to be called into question. Even so, the presentation of the Jews in John has continued to be interpreted as the result of some Jewish-Christian conflict experienced by the community, even if this conflict was localized. Hakola argues that this portrayal of the Jews as "other" was not initiated from within Judaism but had its origins within this Christian community as it came to recognize that its identity was no longer dependent on many of the major features that made one "Jewish," such as worship, Sabbath, temple, Torah, Abraham, and circumcision.

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The long introductory chapter introduces Hakola's methodology, where he draws on a three-world model based on the work of Kari Syreeni. This model is based upon the distinctions between the *text world,* the *symbolic world,* and the *real world* behind the text, where in argumentative texts the text and symbolic worlds lie close to one another. One advantage of this model is that it acknowledges the ideological aspect of writing. Hakola would place the term *Ioudaioi* within this ideological aspect of the Gospel.

Following his introductory arguments and explanation of his methodology, Hakola's second chapter carefully examines the Birkat Haminim, giving particular attention to its Jewish context and establishing that there is no evidence that this was ever directed toward Christians in the first century or that it could have been used as an instrument of expulsion of groups from the synagogue. This second chapter provides valuable insights into the early significance (or lack thereof) of the rabbis and Pharisees in post-70 Judaism, and he critically evaluates the Jewish and Christian evidence for the persecution of Christians by Jews. His conclusion is that "the separation of the Johannine group from the synagogue was not due to the violent policy of the early rabbinic movement" (85). This leads to his proposal that the alienation from Judaism emerged from within the Christian community as a result of its high ambivalence to some matters that were essential to Jewish identity, not for their profession of faith in Jesus as Messiah. The following chapters (ch. 3, "Jesus, the Jews and the Worship of God"; ch. 4, "Jesus, the Sabbath and Circumcision"; ch. 5, "Jesus, the Jews and Moses"; ch. 6, "The Believing Jews, Abraham and the Devil") take up each of these Jewish identity markers and how they are presented in the Gospel. The final chapter provides a synthesis and briefly proposes some arguments for looking at the Johannine *Ioudaioi* as part of a symbolic universe created by the writer as a strategy to strengthen a developing, new self-identity other than Jewish. In this chapter Hakola raises the paradox present in the Gospel where there are both Jewish and anti-Jewish tendencies as well as continuity and discontinuity with its Jewish heritage.

In his third chapter Hakola examines the temple scene in John 2 and the discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4 and describes Jesus' attitude to the Jerusalem temple as "ambivalent." This term is chosen to reflect the three-world model that Hakola explained in his methodology. "In their symbolic universe, the Johannine Christians pictured Jesus as a loyal cherisher of the best Jewish traditions." While this is probably how they saw themselves, in real life these two scenes suggest that the Johannine Christians have become alienated from their Jewish heritage: "they identify themselves neither with the Jews nor with the Samaritans but regard themselves as true worshippers who have been able to put behind earlier … untrue ways of worshipping God" (110).

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In chapter 4 Hakola examines Jesus, the Sabbath, and circumcision and discusses John 5 and 7:19–24. As in his treatment of the temple and worship, Hakola concludes that "neither of these principal matters of Judaism was of practical importance" for the Johannine community (145). He pays particular attention to the way the Sabbath theme in John 5 is quickly lost sight of, in the discussion of Jesus' relationship with his Father. In other words, Christology is more important than Sabbath for this community.

The following chapter on Moses highlights the tension between continuity and discontinuity. On the one hand, Moses is appealed to as a witness to Jesus (5:39); on the other hand, there is a sharp contrast established between the manna and the true bread from heaven, where both the manna and bread are symbols for divine revelation. The manna of Moses is unable to bring life, whereas Jesus, the true revealer, is able to offer life. Here again Hakola speaks of the symbolic world of the Johannine Christians that allowed Moses and the law to bear witness to Jesus and of the real life of these believers who have already abandoned aspects of the law essential for Jewish identity.

The discussion of John 8:31–59 clearly brings out the matter of identity. Who is your Father: Abraham? God? or the Devil? This passage contains the harshest condemnation of the Jews in the New Testament, where they are named as children of the devil. Hakola argues again that the purpose of this harsh language is to convince the Johannine community that it is not possible to be a believer in Jesus and at the same time to practice traditional Judaism. Here he challenges Raymond Brown's theory of conflict with secret believers inside the synagogue. Hakola claims that the problem lies within the community, where some are struggling to leave behind Jewish practices. In this discussion he situates the dualisms of the passage, and of the Gospel as a whole, within an eschatological framework where on one level the Johannine Gospel reflects a cosmic struggle between the powers of good and evil. The harsh rhetoric is part of the Johannine symbolic universe, not necessarily a reflection of the community's social reality. In making this distinction between the symbolic world of the narrative and the real world, Hakola notes that that this has given a "strong impetus to the growth of anti-Jewish Christian tradition. John cannot be kept completely apart from the sad and far-reaching development, even though the evangelist and his community could in no way anticipate the coming horrors of history" (214).

While generally finding Hakola's arguments convincing and his overall thesis sound, I have some points of disagreement, particularly his reading of Jesus' temple act, as that of a pious Jew reacting to the trade of animals within the temple. I have argued (*God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* [Liturgical Press, 2001]) that his action critiques and nullifies the entire temple sacrificial system, rather than being the action of a "keen reformer of the cult who is upset by the present corruption of the temple and wants

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to restore its sanctity" (92). My work would also strengthen Hakola's arguments in his treatment of John 4 and his discussion of Abraham in John 8. The discussion on worship may have also been enhanced through a discussion of John 1:1 and 20:28, where Jesus is given divine status. But these are minor points reflecting as much my bias as any weakness in Hakola's approach.

The strength of Hakola's work is his very careful and detailed arguments based on extensive use of primary Jewish sources. Scholars will find this particularly helpful for further research. In addition, Hakola does not back away from contentious contemporary issues in Jewish-Christian relations. He notes that in the discussion about Moses and the law there is already "a point of departure for a later Christian belief that saw the Hebrew bible exclusively in the light of Christology" (176). He also carefully nuances the naming of this group as "Christian," recognizing that, while the Gospel is well on its way to a distinctly non-Jewish identity, it may not yet be the historical marker for "the parting of the ways." He looks at the issue of the Gospel's anti-Jewishness and later anti-Semitism. On this point he makes a plea for Christians to search for new ways to define themselves that allow the legitimacy of other religious identities.

This is an excellent study adding significantly to our knowledge of the first-century religious world and the place of John's Gospel in this world. As is customary in Brill publications, the book concludes with an extensive bibliography, an index of authors cited, and an index of primary sources.

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