

## CODA

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In "Blindly Obvious Christian Anti-Semitism" Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann further defend their claim that Christianity is not responsible for antisemitism by drawing a sharp distinction between a doctrinal account of Christianity and (what they call) a sociological one. I argue in response that the distinction they make between these two kinds of account cannot, on pain of incoherence, be drawn as sharply as they wish; that in making it they have misread my argument about the kinds of connection that obtain between Christianity and antisemitism in two important ways; and that there are good Christian doctrinal reasons for expecting that any culturally significant body of belief—including Christian doctrine itself—will be implicated with moral (as well as other kinds of) failure, and that it therefore ought not to be surprising to find a case in point.

I am grateful to Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann for their lucid and forceful reply to my discussion of their critique of Gordon Kaufman.<sup>1</sup> It's now clear that Stump and Kretzmann agree with most of what I claimed in my earlier piece, but that they persist in thinking it unimportant. So on what, exactly, do we differ? Principally, I think, on two questions. First, what should the lexical item "Christianity" be taken to denote? And second, what kinds of data are relevant to decisions about this? For them "Christianity" denotes nothing other than a set of doctrines,<sup>2</sup> and they seem to have well-developed intuitions as to just which doctrines belong to this set. Unfortunately they share with their readers neither the procedures they deploy to decide which doctrines belong to the set, nor a list of the set's members. It remains unclear exactly how, for them, genuine members of the set are recognized and pretenders rejected.

On the second question, though, a negative point is clear: for Stump and Kretzmann no "sociological" data can be permitted to count, procedurally, in determining which doctrines belong to the set denoted by "Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Historical information as to which doctrines Christians have taken to belong to the set assent to which they have taken to be required by their identity as Christians, and what they have taken to follow, behaviorally, from such assent, has, apparently, no bearing whatever for Stump and Kretzmann on proper decisions as to what "Christianity" denotes. This is an exceedingly odd position. How, if information of this sort is irrelevant to arriving at a definition of "Christianity," can the text of the New Testament be used? The



texts of the credal statements of the ecumenical councils? The text (I speak here as an Episcopalian Christian) of the Book of Common Prayer? What are all these things if not “sociological” data? (They may of course be other things as well—such as the word of God, as I take the New Testament to be—but I don’t suppose that even Kretzmann and Stump will deny that they are at least “sociological” data.) Information about them can surely not be irrelevant to deciding what the term “Christianity” denotes, and yet Stump and Kretzmann seem committed to wanting it to be, since they claim, in the specific case of antisemitic beliefs, that the facts that Christians have held such beliefs, and that they have taken themselves to hold them as properly Christian beliefs, have no relevance whatever to decisions as to whether such beliefs really are Christian.

I note here, as relevant to this central point, a couple of exegetical problems in Stump and Kretzmann’s reading of my piece. I neither claimed nor suggested that “Christian ideas” should be taken exclusively in a sociological sense to mean ideas sometimes held by people who considered themselves Christians. In the case of the antisemitic ideas under discussion I suggested, and would still suggest, that these were (and are) not just ideas held by Christians, nor just ideas associated with Christianity by non-Christians, but rather ideas taken by Christians to be a proper part of their Christian identity, to be properly Christian ideas. That Stump and Kretzmann elide this part of my claim throughout is not accidental. If they were clear about it they would be forced to say things much closer to the absurdities mentioned in the immediately preceding paragraph. I also did not claim that religions should be defined *only* “sociologically,” though for reasons already suggested I take “sociological” data to be unavoidably relevant in arriving at any such definitions.

It’s also important to reject the idea that I think that Christianity is single-handedly responsible for the Holocaust. I’m not quite clear as to whether Stump and Kretzmann think I think this or not; earlier versions of their response (the version printed with this piece is the third revision that I’ve seen) strongly suggested that they did, but this final version isn’t so clear. Anyhow, I explicitly denied holding any such view in my earlier piece, asserting only that there are interesting causal connections between how Christians have historically understood themselves and their relations to Jews and the occurrence of the Holocaust, connections that are likely as strong as that the former is among the necessary conditions for the occurrence of the latter. Much the same might be said (I lack the historical expertise to know) about the relations between Marxist self-understandings and the Gulag or about Islamic ones and the attempted extermination of the Kurds. And I would certainly want to affirm in this connection, as a matter of principle (and for good Christian doctrinal reasons) something that my interlocutors apparently

find surprising: that no culturally significant body of belief will be above serious moral approach. The doctrine of original sin, properly understood (I would argue, though I haven't space to here), suggests that this ought to be true; and my own limited historical expertise reveals no counterexamples. But this claim doesn't at all mean that it's uninteresting or irrelevant to consider which bodies of belief seem to those who hold them to comport well with—or even require—which moral unpleasantnesses. My claim, once again, is that those who have considered themselves Christians have often thought (and often still think) that their Christianity comports well with—and even requires—the moral evil of antisemitism (though not, of course, usually under just that description).

But let's be charitable. Since Stump and Kretzmann can't, I hope, mean what they apparently intend about the irrelevance of "sociological" information to a proper definition of Christianity, let's assume they mean just this: that there are many bodies of belief which neither entail nor make plausible antisemitism; that one of these is what "Christianity" denotes; and that this same one is what they themselves assent to under that label. The first of these three claims is obviously true. The second can easily be made stipulatively true, though doing so without argument and without seriously engaging the question of how the proposed set relates to what Christians have historically taken to be Christian beliefs, sounds very like Humpty Dumpty. And I assume that the third is true, since Stump and Kretzmann themselves must be the most authoritative witnesses to its truth, and they assert it. My claim was (and remains) that there is a very great deal of historical evidence to support the claim that many Christians have taken themselves to have properly Christian beliefs that do issue in antisemitic behavior. I now add to it the view that historical evidence as to what Christians have thought were properly Christian beliefs is not irrelevant to decisions about what actually are such. If the second of these claims is right—and I don't think that Stump and Kretzmann can easily defend its contradictory—then it follows that account must be taken of what Christians have thought were properly Christian beliefs about Jews in deciding what actually are such. A refusal to do this on principle, I still say, is historically blind; it may also be incoherent if it is thematized as a procedural rule, as Stump and Kretzmann have now done.

Finally: it does not follow from anything I've said here (or in my previous piece) that being a Christian entails being an antisemite. I, like Stump and Kretzmann, am the former and try not to be the latter.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps also like them, I think there are ritual practices and beliefs that contribute to my Christian identity that can reasonably be taken to call antisemitism into question or to be incompatible with it. The same might be said about Martin Luther: perhaps some of his doctrinal commitments ought to have caused him to think more than twice about being the antisemite he appears to have been. But sorting

out whether and in what sense this is true would be hard historical and conceptual work, not a matter to be dismissed with the cavalier tone adopted by Stump and Kretzmann. And this, to return to the original context, is what I took to be the point of the disagreement between them and Kaufman: he thinks that the iron of antisemitism (and some other sins) has entered deeply into the mind and soul of Christians for reasons that have to do with their Christian identity, and that acknowledging this and taking seriously the importance of knowing something of its etiology is a necessary part of the remedy. They think, it seems, that the matter is simple and that a remedy can be arrived at without such knowledge. But the matter is not simple and any attempt to deal with it in a purely *a priori* manner will fail, both ethically and, in the end, conceptually.

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#### NOTES

Thanks to Del Kiernan-Lewis, Joseph Wawrykow, Phil Devenish, Peter Losin, and Judith Heyhoe.

1. All these pieces have appeared in this journal. Kaufman's original in vol. 6 (1989), 35-46; Stump & Kretzmann's response in vol. 7 (1990), 329-339; my first response in vol. 10 (1993), 79-85.

2. Unbelievable though it seems, I think that this is what Stump and Kretzmann really do think. They come close to equating religions with bodies of belief, and wish to define Christianity as a body of belief (or: doctrine). Thinking that Christianity just is a body of beliefs seems to me as crazy (and as profoundly unChristian) as thinking that Christianity just is a set of ritual acts or a set of sacred texts. Christianity, I would rather say, as a first stab at a corrective (and speaking as a Christian), is present wherever faithful Christians are present; and Christian faith consists not primarily in assent to a body of belief but rather in a properly-constituted relation to the triune God (though of course such a relation requires assent, explicit or implicit, to all kinds of doctrines). This, anyway, is what the New Testament says. But this is much too large a topic to pursue here.

3. By "sociological" they seem to mean any data arrived at by broadly empirical means, including the historical; this is an odd usage but for the sake of the discussion I shall adopt it in what follows, and shall signal my reservations about it by the use of scare-quotes.

4. Though I do not think it clear that the brief sketch given by Stump and Kretzmann of what they take to be a supersessionist theology of the relation between Judaism and Christianity that avoids antisemitism does in fact avoid it; neither do I think that what they say does more than scratch the surface of this very difficult question.