

## PROCESSING REJECTION IN CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the way in which New Testament writers responded to the experience of rejection, its grief and sometimes resultant anger, both by those who refused to respond positively to the message of the gospel and by those who ceased to continue to believe and left the faith communities. It does so initially by giving attention to the Parable of the Sower in the context of Jesus' ministry, then as interpreted in the context of the early Christian movement and finally in its Markan context. It then considers the processing of rejection in Mark as a whole, the responses to Jesus' rejection both in a sense of solidarity and going beyond it. The paper then discusses Paul's passionate response to rejection from within his own people and his theological response of hope before turning to consider the issues in Matthew and Luke, and briefly in the fourth gospel. Its conclusions are that responses were diverse, both in their scope and in their potential to cause harm and to heal.

**Keywords:** Rejection, Grief, Anger, Conflict, Predestination, Theism, Determinism, Paul and Israel, Parable of Sower, Antisemitism, Exclusivity, Continuity/Discontinuity, Torah.

Hatred has no place, but what if I am deeply hurt? Issues of conflict and hurt play a role in all human relationships. They also play a role in relations among communities, churches and nations. This paper will explore some instances within Christian beginnings of how people handled the pain of rejection. The issue of rejection was indeed a fairly constant feature in Christian beginnings as those proclaiming good news were sometimes met with rejection and even hostility. That claim matters and its rejection has the potential to call one's identity into question. People need to deal with it and find some way of explaining why such rejection is inappropriate.

The stimulus for this paper came from my study of this phenomenon in the fourth gospel where I argued that one of the author's concerns was to deal with the problem of rejection especially from Jews.<sup>1</sup> It was one thing to have one's message

<sup>1</sup> William LOADER, "Rationalising Rejection in John 8 and Elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel," a paper presented at the *Colloquium Ioanneum*, Vienna, August, 2023, to be published by Mohr Siebeck in the conference volume.