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Synagogue of Satan

In the letters to the early Christian churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, reference is made to a **synagogue of Satan** (Greek: συναγωγή τοῦ Σατανᾶ, *synagoge tou satana*), in each case referring to a group persecuting the church "who say they are Jews and are not".

The verse has often been used to justify hatred against all Jews or particular subsets of modern Jews,^{[1][2][3]} which academic scholars generally view as ignorant of the biblical context based on the fact that the suspected author of Revelation was likely Jewish.^{[4]:89}

Passages from Revelation

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

— Revelation 2:8-9

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write... "I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you."

— Revelation 3:7-9

Other uses

Similar language is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where a small persecuted Jewish sect considered the rest of Judaism apostate, and called its persecutors "the lot of Belial" (Satan).^[5]

The phrase is also used in a fragment of a lost work on Dioscorus I of Alexandria found at the Monastery of Saint Macarius the Great in 1923 and identified by American theologian William Hatch.^[6] Hatch believes the term refers to the Council of Chalcedon, which Dioscorus attended in 451 and from which he was deposed and exiled for his Monophysitism.

In 1653, Quakers Elizabeth Williams and Mary Fisher attacked members of Sidney Sussex College at Cambridge as "Antichrists" and called their college "a Cage of unclean Birds and a Synagogue of Satan."^[7] For this, they were publicly flogged.

Billy Graham used the phrase "synagogue of Satan" to refer to the Jews in a private 1973 White House conversation with President Richard Nixon.^{[8][9][10]} When tapes of the conversation were released many years later, Graham apologized for what were deemed by many to be antisemitic remarks.^[11]

The encyclical *Etsi multa*, written by Pope Pius IX in 1873, refers to Freemasonry as "the synagogue of Satan".^[12]

See also

- Antisemitism and the New Testament#Book of Revelation

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