

## ADL Letter to Garry Trudeau: Doonesbury Comic Strip 'Maligns Judaism'

[http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS\\_12/5539\\_12.htm](http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASUS_12/5539_12.htm)

New York, NY, June 1, 2009 ... The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) today released the text of a letter to cartoonist Garry Trudeau concerning his [Doonesbury](#) strip of May 31, 2009:

Dear Mr. Trudeau:

We agree with the numerous people who are contacting us that Sunday's Doonesbury misquotes the Bible, maligns Judaism, and promotes a Christian heresy, all within eight panels. It reinforces age-old stereotypes about Judaism that have been the cause of much suffering and pain over the centuries, and which have been rejected by a variety of Christian denominations over the last decades.

Jesus' concern in the Gospels is with money-changers, not money-lenders. The money-changers converted the coins of the Roman Empire into the currency accepted by the Jerusalem Temple, as money-changers today convert dollars into Euros. To speak of money-lenders harkens back the stereotype of Shylock, when Jews were forced by Christians to engage in usury.

Christian teaching is clear: the God of the Old Testament is the same God as the God of the New Testament. Doonesbury's Reverend Sloan is guilty of promoting anti-Jewish stereotypes and biblical illiteracy. He owes both Jews and Christians an apology.

*The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913, is the world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry.*

Commentary:

The ADL's condemnation of Mr. Trudeau's recent comic strip is misplaced. The fact is, there are Jewish and Gentile "money-lenders" today and they are both guilty of greed and corruption, as recent headlines assure us. So for the ADL to conclude that Mr. Trudeau is singling out Jewish bankers and thus bringing back the image of Shylock, is a bit of a stretch. As far as I can tell, Trudeau is remarking on the recent financial malfeasance of major US banks and insurance companies that engaged in the trade of unregulated credit default swaps and collateralized debt obligations at the risk of bringing the world's economy down in one fell swoop. Both Jews and Gentiles were involved in those schemes. For every Bernie Madoff there is also a Ken Lay. That level of greed and corruption, which receives little castigation and condemnation from today's Capitalistic-bathed press, is what Trudeau's comic preacher is ranting about, and rightly so. But to be sure, Trudeau does not single out the Jews as the only group guilty of these crimes.

Be that as it may, the ADL's take on what occurred in the cleansing of the Temple is quite off the mark. Granted, the people who receive Jesus' wrath are not "money-lenders" but "money-changers," but it really makes little difference in this case. Jesus' wrath is being directed against those who use the Temple as a place of business rather than a place of worship. In the time of Jesus, it was the Jews who were primarily guilty of this crime because the Temple was the only institution that conducted worship to the true God, the God of the Old Testament. Hence, if there was any group of people who should

have safeguarded worship in the Temple, it was the Jews, since they were the only group who had control over Temple proceedings.

More to the point, however, is that Jesus is reminding the Jews that Temple corruption was an ongoing problem in Jewish society, for in the incident in which Jesus chases out the money-changers, Matthew 21:13 has Jesus quoting from Jeremiah (7:11), a prophet to the Jews in the sixth century B.C. Jesus cites Jeremiah in order to show that money-changing in the Temple is a symptom of a much larger problem, for in Jeremiah 7:9-10 God is complaining that the Jews are stealing, murdering, committing adultery, bearing false witness and offering sacrifices to the false god Baal, but then they come to the Temple and give lip service to God and claim refuge from the world of evil! As such, God calls their hypocritical dalliance in the Temple as if it were a “den of robbers,” a term signifying that they were robbing God of his due worship and replacing it with their personal financial dealings.

So it is the case with the Jews six hundred years later in Jesus’ day. They break all the commandments of God, yet come to the Temple and give him lip service, and then they wonder in amazement why Jesus is so angry at them. This is the message that the ADL is missing. If the ADL would first learn what the true meaning of the Temple incident is, and then preach that message to the Jewish and Gentile bankers that Mr. Trudeau is so upset about, everyone would benefit. If not, the greed and corruption that is spiraling out of control in this Capitalistic society will eventually bring it down with a force that will be heard round the world.

One last issue. The ADL makes an outlandish allegation that cannot go without comment. It claims: “To speak of money-lenders harkens back the stereotype of Shylock, when Jews were forced by Christians to engage in usury.” First, I know a little bit about Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*, and it is clear that the Jewish Shylock was not forced by anyone to seek his pound of flesh from the Gentile merchant. The whole point of the play is that if you live by the strict letter of the law you will die by the strict letter of the law, which is good advice for any Jew or Gentile, then and now. The quality of mercy is not strained; it dropeth as the gentle rain from heaven.

Second, I don’t know of any reputable historian, Jew or Gentile, who blames Christians for “forcing” the Jews to engage in the practice of usury. As far as my reading shows, the Jews introduced usury all by themselves. The Catholic Church did not practice usury before the Jews engaged in the practice around the turn of the second millennium, and immediately after the Jews engaged in usury, the Catholic Church decreed strict rules against the practice. If the ADL contests this account, they should bring forth the historical evidence instead of making unsubstantiated allegations.

Third, if the ADL is hanging so much on the assertion that Jews were being “forced” into the practice of usury, then the ADL is inadvertently admitting that usury is wrong, otherwise, the ADL would be thanking Christians. As it stands, the ADL should now be telling all its Jewish and Gentile readers that usury is wrong and that all such business dealings that depend on usury should cease at once. This is how the ADL can really put its money where its mouth is, pun unintended.

Robert Sungenis, Ph.D., Catholic Apologetics International Publishing, Inc., June 5, 2009