

## Jews and Christians Facing Jesus

Amy-Jill Levine  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN USA 37240

I am honored to participate in this annual Meeting of the Diocesan Delegates for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the Italian Catholic Church, and I am heartened by your invitation to address the topic ‘Jews and Christians facing Jesus.’ For two millennia, Jesus of Nazareth has been a wedge dividing the Jewish and Christian communities. Perhaps the time has come when he can serve as a bridge between us. While Synagogue and the Church will not agree on certain questions of Christology, we can agree on the import of Jesus’ Torah-based messages of justice, compassion, and love.

By seeing Jesus as a Jew in terms of both belief and practice, Christians can develop a deeper appreciation for the teachings of the Church. Today Jesus’ words are too familiar, too domesticated, too stripped of their edginess and urgency. Only when heard through first-century Jewish ears can their original provocation and urgency be recovered. Consequently, to understand Jesus of Nazareth, it is necessary to understand Judaism. More, it is necessary to see Jesus as firmly within Judaism rather than as standing apart from it, and it is essential that the picture of Judaism not be distorted through the filter of centuries of Christian stereotypes. A distorted picture of first-century Judaism inevitably leads to a distorted picture of Jesus. For Christians, this concern for historical setting should have theological import. To take seriously the Incarnation requires taking seriously the time when, place where, and people among whom its occurred.

Jews too can learn much from understanding Jesus within his Jewish context, for the Gospels tell us a great deal about first-century Jewish life in Galilee and Judea. The more I study Jesus in his own historical context, the more I come to appreciate my own Judaism: the diversity of its teachings, the richness of its encounter with the divine, the struggles it faced in accommodating to the Roman world. I find inspirational the message of the Kingdom of Heaven, a message that speaks of the time when all debts are forgiven and when those who have willingly give, without thought of reciprocity, to those who need; a time when we prioritize serving rather than being served.

A critically aware, historically informed study of Jesus in his Jewish context does more than provide historical knowledge to Christians and Jews. It also helps in preventing the anti-Semitism that emerges when the history is not known. The concern to recover Jesus’ Jewishness is today particularly urgent. In numerous commentaries about Jesus—especially by historically uninformed theologians—Jesus’ Jewish background serves to epitomize what is wrong with the world. If Jesus preaches good news to the poor, so the common impression goes, ‘the Jews’ must be preaching good news to the rich. If Jesus welcomes sinners, so ‘the Jews’ must have pushed them away. If Jesus speaks to or heals women, so ‘the Jews’ promote a patriarchal society that makes the Taliban look progressive. If Jesus is the ‘pedagogue of the oppressed,’ then ‘Judaism’ must be the oppressor.

Such historically false but politically expedient views are then bolstered by equally false understandings of Jesus’ social context. The popular attempt to depict Jesus as a Galilean, and to see Galilee as completely religiously and ethnically distinct from Judea, conveys the impression that ‘Judaism’ with its Temple and its leadership is distinct from the Galilean Jesus. The popular image of Jesus as a ‘peasant’ —he was not; he was an artisan— often serves to distinguish him

from his fellow Jews, since 'the Jews' in the popular imagination are not peasants but Pharisees and Sadducees or members of the elite. Worse, the lingering view that Jesus dismissed Jewish practices such as Sabbath observance and ritual purity turns him away from his Jewish identity and makes him into a liberal Protestant.

This divorcing of Jesus from Judaism does a disservice to both Jesus and Judaism scripturally, historically, and ethically. First, the separation repeats Marcion's severing of the Church's connections to the Scriptures of Israel. Because Jesus and his earliest followers were all Jews, they held the Torah and the Prophets sacred, prayed the Psalms, celebrated the bravery of Esther and the fidelity of Ruth. To understand Jesus, one must have familiarity with the Scriptures that shaped him.

Historically, the insistence on Jesus' Jewish identity reinforces the fact that he is fully human, anchored in historical time and place. Moreover, he is then seen as proclaiming a message grounded in the teachings of Torah and Nevi'im. Like Amos and Jeremiah, he used arresting speech, risked political persecution, and turned traditional family values upside down in order to bring his people closer to divine will. This historical anchoring need not, and should not, in Catholic teaching, preclude or overshadow Jesus' role in the Divine plan. He must, in the Catholic tradition, be more than just a fine Jewish teacher. But he must be that Jewish teacher as well, which is in part how his first followers understood him.

In the 2001 'The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible,' the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) correctly states: 'Dialogue is possible, since Jews and Christians share a rich common patrimony that unites them. It is greatly to be desired that prejudice and misunderstanding be gradually eliminated on both sides, in favour of a better understanding of the patrimony they share and to strengthen the links that bind them.' But far too often this common patrimony is misunderstood. When Jesus' Second-Temple Jewish context is misunderstood, then Jesus himself will be misunderstood. And when Jesus' Jewish context is described by false and ugly stereotypes, then the Gospel of Love becomes deformed into a message of hate.

Therefore, I wish to speak with you about how early Judaism, and so Jesus, is misunderstood, and how such misunderstandings promote hatred of Judaism and so of Jews. I shall proceed as follows: first, I suggest several explanations for how Jesus of Nazareth is taken out of his Jewish context and how that Jewish context is constructed. Then, I give four examples of how this anti-Jewish teaching is manifested (there are more, but were I to detail all of them, we'd be here at least until Christmas). I conclude with recommendations on how to locate Jesus within his Jewish context and thus on how he can serve as a bridge between Church and Synagogue.

### *Causes of the problem*

The majority of the false depictions of early Judaism and thus the deformed understandings of Jesus do not come from hatred of Jews. They come from ignorance.

First, most Christian seminarians do not take courses on Judaism whether early or contemporary, and most seminaries do not provide explicit instruction on how to avoid anti-Jewish teaching and preaching. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church (as well as other Christian groups) has guidelines on the presentation of Jews and Judaism, many priests and religious educators do not know the guidelines, and thus do not follow them. Instead of doing the hard work of historical investigation, or of reading Jewish sources for themselves, the already overworked homilist finds it easier to repeat outdated claims.

Even religious educators who do receive some training about Jews and Judaism need refresher courses, just as doctors need to learn about new procedures and new medications. I am not sure of the details of the situation here in Italy, but in those countries with which I am familiar few dioceses sponsor programs on Jewish-Christian relations, and few clergy attend.

Second, as biblical studies moves away from historical-critical analysis and more toward social-location-based readings, new forms of anti-Jewish readings develop. Some readers who engage in these methods impose on Jesus' Jewish context whatever ills they find in their own society, and then impose on Jesus the role of political advisor. In these configurations, Judaism is presented as urban, elitist, ritually oriented, priestly, and legalistic. Jesus is then seen as a rural peasant who is unconcerned with *halakhah* or ritual. However, Jesus cares enough about *halakhah* to debate with fellow Jews on how it should be followed, and he cares enough about ritual to provide instruction on prayer and on table-fellowship.

Many of these stereotypes about Judaism are recapitulations of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-Catholic Protestant readings. The more proximate object of these vilifications are sometimes less first-century Judaism than the Tridentine Catholic Church or medieval European Christianity. But then, many of these new biblical critics do not know the history of their own discipline either.

Third anti-Jewish readings of the Gospel develop as the demographics of the Church shift from 'Western' nations (Europe, the U.S. and Canada, Australia) to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These areas lack the memory of the Shoah, and so are less sensitized to the dangers of detaching of Jesus from his Jewish tradition. In his introduction to the PBC's 'On the Jews and their Sacred Scripture in the Bible of the Christian Church,' Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger writes: 'The Biblical Commission could not ignore the contemporary context, where the shock of the Shoah has put the whole question under a new light.' This new light shines less brightly outside the West.

Further, for many outside the West, 'Judaism' and 'Jews' are vague images, or a combination of images of the Old Testament, the 'children of the devil' from John's Gospel, and current hard-line Israeli policy. The idea that Jesus was a Jew is in some locations not well known and certainly not seriously considered. When I served as the Catholic Biblical Association's visiting scholar to the Philippines in 2004, I had the privilege of addressing several congregations. At one church gathering, I asked the several hundred people in attendance if they had ever seen a Jew. Aside from one wag who had mentioned seeing 'Jerry Seinfeld' on U.S. television, the rest said 'no.' I then turned, pointed to the Crucifix behind me, and noted that they had been looking at a Jew every time they came to Church. The connection between Jesus and Judaism had not been made clear to them.

Failures in seminary programs and continuing education, utilitarian political exegesis, and demographic shifts all plant the seeds of anti-Jewish biblical interpretation and so of new forms of anti-Judaism. Such teachings then prohibit any positive conversations between Jews and Christians.

#### *The Misunderstandings*

I have documented numerous false teachings about Jesus Jewish context in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco, CA, HarperOne: 2006). The following are four of the most egregious:

1. The view that purity laws were oppressive and that Jesus replaced the Jewish system of purity with his system of compassion.
2. The claim that Judaism was misogynistic but Jesus was not.

3. The idea of the Jewish G-d as a distant, unapproachable, and wrathful vs. Jesus' Abba-G-d of Love.
4. The assertion that Jews were exclusive and xenophobic, but Jesus and the Church inclusive and multicultural.

### *Purity*

Common is the view that ritual purity was burdensome, made outcasts of the poor, and stigmatized women. Then, Jesus is seen as abrogating purity *halakhah*. These views are incorrect.

Following purity laws not only allowed Jews to sanctify daily life (being Jewish could not be a once a week thing), it also helped them resist assimilation, it functioned as a protest against expansive Hellenization, and it served as a sign of pride in Jewish identity. It also was a social leveler: the high priest could be ritually impure; the slave could be pure.

The following are a few of the numerous examples of unfortunate teachings regarding ritual purity. First, concerning on Mark 5:41 where Jesus touches Jairus's dead child, the Sacra Pagina commentary states: 'since corpse impurity was the most severe of all impurities this touch is another instance of Jesus violating cultural codes for the greater good of humanity...'<sup>1</sup> No cultural code is violated; nor did the disciples of John the Baptist violate a cultural code when they recovered his body from Herod Antipas, or when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Elijah and Elisha both touch corpses, and Tobit's defining characteristic is his insistence on providing bodies a proper burial. When Judaism is seen as a set of constricting taboos and Jesus is depicted as 'violating' them, both Jewish culture and Jesus are misunderstood.

In 'On the Jews and their Sacred Scripture,' the PBC states that 'dogs' is 'a metaphor for ritual impurity that Jews sometimes attributed to gentiles.' The citation, embedded in a discussion of Philippians 3, is to Matthew 15.26, a text that says nothing about ritual impurity. Paul's use of 'dogs' to describe those who 'mutilate the flesh' (Philippians 3:2), suggests the term is a generic insult. Regarding Matthew 15.26, 'dogs' need no more signal 'ritual impurity' than 'children' signal 'holiness.' Surely the little dog who accompanies Tobias and Raphael does not symbolize gentile impurity.

Similarly common is the view that the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage was 'marginalized and outcast' because she is unclean. Then, by touching her, Jesus abrogates purity laws. However, the passage has nothing to do with impurity. First, the woman touches Jesus' clothes, not his body; second, hands do not convey impurity; third, she is not marginal or outcast: to the contrary, she's embedded in a crowd.

The woman's problem is not ritual impurity, it is illness. Jesus does not abrogate purity laws, he restores a woman to health. Further, the story tells us is that Jewish women have their own funds, since we are told that the woman had spent her money on physicians and that they are proactive in seeking health-care.

Indeed, her story also suggests that Jesus is fully obedient to Torah; according to Matthew 9.20 and Luke 8.44, the woman touches the *kraspedon*, the 'fringe' of his garment, that is, his *tzitzit*. These fringes fulfill the commandments of Numbers 15:38-39 to 'make fringes on the corners of your garments ... so that, when you see them, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD.' That Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and scribes because 'they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long' (Matthew 23:5) implies that his phylacteries were narrow and his fringes short. By preserving the detail that Jesus wore fringes, the Gospels suggest that respect for Jewish custom be maintained, even by the Gentile Church that does not follow those customs.

Jesus followed the commandments (*mitzvot*) given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, as he understood them. He would not, for example, agree with the people at Qumran that the best way to live out the teachings of the Torah was to withdraw from society. The issue then, as now, was how to follow the Law. Jesus debates other Jews on how to follow the law –One does not passionately debate something in which one has no vested interest.

### *Misogynism*

The view that first-century Judaism was a misogynistic system and that Jesus was a first-century feminist developed from good intentions. In the late 60s and early 70s, as women's liberation developed, Christian women reasoned that Jesus came to liberate women from whatever kept them from equality with men. The idea was good; unfortunately, the evidence was not.

Jesus calls no woman from the fishing boats as he does Peter and Andrew. He tells no woman that she will sit on a throne and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. No woman appears at the Transfiguration, the Last Supper, or Gethsemane. Granted, absence of evidence is not the same thing as evidence of absence: The women present in the Gospels may be only the tip of the iceberg, and their leadership roles may have been suppressed by the men who gained control of the church. On the other hand, ice floats. There may be nothing suppressed; there may have been no women leaders comparable to Peter in that circle around Jesus.

Thus, feminist historians had a problem. If there is no compelling evidence that Jesus was proactive on women's roles, how can he deliver a liberationist message? Christian Biblical studies had for centuries presented a good Jesus over and against an ossified, morbid Judaism. And so women trained in biblical studies gave this bad Judaism/good Jesus model a feminist spin. They claimed that Judaism treated women like chattel, denied them basic rights, marginalized and stigmatized them. Then, Jesus liberated women from this misogynistic Judaism by allowing women to sit at his feet as disciples, permitting women to minister to him and with him, and forbidding men from divorcing their wives.

The following citation exposes most of these views:

Palestinian Hebrew women were among the poorest in the world in Jesus' day. This was probably because they had no inheritance rights and could be divorced for the flimsiest of reasons. Hebrew men could divorce their wives for anything from burning the dinner (Hillel) to adultery (*Shammai*). Yet Hebrew women were not allowed to divorce their husbands . . . A Hebrew woman had minimal to no property rights . . . Jewish women were held to be unclean while menstruating. If she inadvertently touched a man while having her menses, he was obliged to undergo a weeklong purification ritual before worshipping at the Temple . . . In early Judaism women did proclaim and prophesy, but in Jesus' day they weren't permitted to proclaim Torah at synagogue because of their periodic 'uncleanness.' As a rule, only the Rabbis' wives were so educated. Women were not accepted as witnesses in Jewish law, nor could they teach the law. Women had no official religious or leadership roles in first century Judaism. Jesus' behavior toward women, even viewed through the androcentric lens of the gospel texts, is remarkable.<sup>ii</sup>

Again, the understanding of Judaism and thus Jesus is wrong. Women did not need 'liberating' from Judaism because they were not oppressed by it. Women did not join Jesus because they were treated like chattel or because they could not study Torah elsewhere, they joined for the same reasons their fathers and sons and brothers joined: because they found his message of the

kingdom of Heaven compelling. We have already indicated how this quotation's treatment of purity laws is in error. Its other errors are equally evident.

Its major problem is that, without providing any primary source evidence, it presumes what 'the rabbis' say. Then, it presumes that all rabbinic statements concerned women are descriptive of life in the first century rather than both later than the first century and prescriptive rather than descriptive. It presumes, incorrectly, that no women are cited in rabbinic literature, that women could not serve as witnesses, that women are barred from synagogues, that menstruation prevents Torah study....

Such mistakes should not be surprising. As earlier noted, many Christian religious educators do not study Jewish sources, and it is easier to rely on negative stereotypes of Judaism than to do the hard work of historical investigation.

Rather than marginalized or stigmatized, early Jewish women and so the women who joined Jesus had numerous rights. For example:

1. Women owned their own homes (Martha welcomes Jesus into her home; the house church in Jerusalem is in the home of the mother of John Mark), and in their homes, they would have welcomed visiting teachers.

2. They had their own funds (the women patrons of the mission; the woman who anoints Jesus, our hemorrhaging woman; the widow who puts her coins in the poor box).

3. They had freedom of travel, and could leave their husbands (such as Joanna the wife of Herod's steward, and Mrs. Zebedee, who joins her sons while old man Zebedee says in Galilee with the boats)

4. They appear in synagogues and in the Temple of Jerusalem where they would have been instructed by – *and provided instruction to* – fellow Jews. We have inscriptions from the Diaspora identifying women as 'leader of the synagogue'; there is no reason to presume this identification is honorific.

5. Jesus' forbidding of divorce is not for the purposes of protecting women from being tossed out of their homes and forced to beg on the streets. Divorced women were protected from financial difficulty by their marriage contract (*ketubah*); Jewish social pressure against divorce (see, e.g., Malachi 2.16) helped to keep marriages together; some Jewish legal authorities permitted divorce only in cases of adultery. Most important: Jesus tells us why he forbids divorce: because 'from the beginning' (Mark 10.6 and pars.) divorce was not part of G-d's plan for humanity. The point is not social engineering; it is divine will.

Jesus does offer good news to women, and we need not construct a false and negative view of Judaism to find it. The Gospels suggest that single women were especially attracted to Jesus' movement. Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mrs. Zebedee... are all shown apart from husbands. With the exception of Mary and Joseph, there is only one definitively married couple —Jairus and his wife—that converses together with Jesus.

Jesus' new family—or 'fictive kinship group' -- was determined not by marriage or blood, but by faith and action: he defines his 'mother and brothers and sisters' as those who follow divine will (Mark 3.31-35). In a society where normative behavior meant marrying and raising children, Jesus commended those who made themselves eunuchs – metaphorically speaking – for the kingdom of heaven. At a time when women's self-worth was substantially based on marriage and children, he detached value from fertility. His 'family values' did not insist on heterosexual marriage and child-production; they insisted on recognizing that we are all, as Genesis and Judaism teach, children of G-d.

My point is not that this information should prevent women from serving in leadership positions in Churches today. Women clearly did serve as deacons (Phoebe), Apostles (Junia), Teachers (Pricilla), and Prophets (Anna, Philip's daughters, the women in Corinth). Rather, my point is that women's claims for roles in the Church today cannot and should not be made on the basis of a false stereotype of Judaism. The needs of one group cannot and should not be advocated by the demeaning of another.

*The Jewish G-d of wrath*

The depiction of a quasi-marcionite theology that distinguishes the G-d of first-century Judaism from the G-d proclaimed by Jesus is often found in liberation theology. For example, Virgilio Elizondo, 'considered the leading interpreter of U.S. Latino religion' according to his website, writes in his *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*, that with the coming of Jesus, 'religion will no longer be based on the law and constant ablutions (a sign of their uselessness) or on the observance of precepts followed under the fear of punishment and guilt. The presence of Jesus is the epiphany of this new and different God -- not a God of fear and punishment, distant from us and delighting in sacrifice.'<sup>iii</sup>

This is the tenor of theology associated with Leonardo Boff, who asserts: 'In the world as Jesus found it, human beings were...under the yoke of absolutization of religion, of tradition, and of the law. Religion was no longer the way in which human beings expressed their own openness to God. It had crystallized and stagnated in a world of its own, a world of rites and sacrifice. Pharisees had a morbid conception of their God.'<sup>iv</sup>

This portrayal of Jewish theology reaches its nadir in the following World Council of Churches publication by the Reverend Louise Kumandjek Tappa, from the Union des eglises baptistes du Cameroun:

Jesus died as the result of the clash between his G-d (capital G) and the god (lower-case g) of Pharisaic Judaism. Judaism had encaged G-d in its laws and tradition and its ministers could not accept a concept of G-d that went beyond their own limits... Jesus' crucifixion marked the temporal triumph of the patriarchal god of Judaism. His resurrection, however, proved that his G-d is the true G-d. But alas, Christianity has fallen back to the patriarchal god of Judaism with even greater zeal. The god of the institutional church now yields more power because the 'clan' has become more powerful. The god of the clan will sanctify anything including militarism, war, sexism, apartheid, as long as it serves the interests of the clan.<sup>v</sup>

The G-d of Jesus is the G-d of the synagogue; Jesus' commands concerning love of G-d and love of neighbor come from, respectively, Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, and these verses were put together in other Jewish sources of the period. Numerous Jewish texts portray G-d as loving, imminent, compassionate, and forgiving. Jews then and now prayed to '*avinu*, our father'. Both testaments portray the same G-d – merciful and compassionate, ever-ready to forgive, but also insisting upon human responsibility to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. My point is not to dismiss all of liberation theology. Again, it is to insist that the needs of one group cannot and should not be advocated by slandering another group.

*Exclusivism:*

The old canard of universalistic Christianity vs. exclusivistic Judaism, often accompanied by the view that Jews proclaim an ‘Old Testament G-d of Wrath’ whereas Jesus proclaimed ‘the New Testament G-d of love,’ has yet to be eradicated.

For example, the PBC document on Jews and Judaism states, ‘The Church is conscious of being given a universal horizon. The reign of G-d is no longer confined to Israel alone, but is open to all, including the pagans....’ Unnoticed is the fact that pagans were welcome to convert to Judaism and that many did. Israel did not ‘confine’ the ‘reign of G-d’ to Israel, since Israel’s tradition clearly recognized that the G-d of Israel is the G-d of the world. While some Jewish texts of antiquity do manifest an exclusive soteriology, so also do some Christian texts.

According to the PBC, Luke depicts universal Christianity vs. xenophobic Judaism: ‘Jesus appeals to his fellow townspeople to renounce a possessive attitude to his miracles and accept that these gifts are also for the benefit of foreigners (4:23-27). Their resentful reaction is violent; rejection and attempted murder (4:28-29).... The Jews violently oppose a preaching that sweeps away their privileges as the chosen people. Instead of opening out to the universalism of Second Isaiah, they follow Baruch’s counsel not to share their privileges with strangers (Bar 4:3).’ Aside from failing to note that Baruch is not part of the Synagogue’s canon, the statement also does not carefully read Luke’s text. The Nazareth sermon is not about ‘sharing their privileges’; to the contrary, Jesus states that the privileges provided by Elijah and Elisha are given *only* to Gentiles. ‘Elijah was sent to none of [the widows] *except* the widow in Sidon... Elisha cleansed no leper except Naaman.’ Jesus’ message, as Luke portrays it, is not about sharing but about excluding the people in the Nazareth synagogue from the messianic blessings.

The tropes of Jewish exclusivism and marginalizing purity laws conjoin in Fernando F. Segovia’s description of the mestizaje theology of Virgilio Elizondo: ‘this place of mestizaje is rejected by Gentiles and Jews alike as impure and inferior, with the Galileans as a clear example of a marginalized and oppressed people.’<sup>vi</sup> This reading distinguishes ‘Jews’ from ‘Galileans,’ and thereby creates the false comparison between a regional identification (Galilee) and a religious identification (Jews). It separates Jesus from Judaism, even as it depicts ‘Jews’ as creating marginalization and oppression. It is also historically incorrect, for it ignores the archaeological evidence that reveals Jewish Galilee not to be a ‘mixed’ area but one fully Jewish, from the presence of ritual baths and stone vessels to the absence of pig bones.<sup>vii</sup>

Finally, on this so-called Jewish exclusivism, missing are OT references to the so-called ‘righteous gentile.’ Throughout, the OT recognizes that true fidelity to divine designs is not limited to – and is sometimes absent within – the covenant community. Rahab the Canaanite displays fidelity; Uriah the Hittite follows the rules of both Holy War and personal conscience. We might therefore expect that for Matthew’s gospel a righteous gentile -- the Canaanite woman (connected to Rahab of the genealogy, Matthew’s other Canaanite woman) -- would prove faithful.

Jesus himself did not embark on a Gentile mission; he focuses instead on ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ Jesus expected the Gentiles to respond to the message of the Kingdom of Heaven; this expectation was already part of his Jewish tradition.

#### *Conclusions:*

Jesus of Nazareth dressed like a Jew, prayed like a Jew (and most likely in Aramaic), instructed other Jews on how to best to live according to the Commandments given by G-d to Moses, taught like a Jew, argued like a Jew with other Jews, and died like thousands of other Jews on a Roman cross. To see him in a first-century Jewish context, and to listen to his words with first-century Jewish ears, does not in any way undermine Christian theological claims. Jesus does not have to be utterly unique in order to say something or do something meaningful.



A Jewish presence on the Pontifical Biblical Commission would be beneficial to both Jews and Roman Catholics.<sup>viii</sup> Vatican documents, including the numerous texts that speak to the subject of Jewish-Catholic relations, are written by the Church and primarily for the Church. Problems arise, however, when Jewish eyes encounter those documents, for we are generally unfamiliar with the process of composition, the background that prompted its focus, and the nuances of its wording. As a consequence, what is helpful and uplifting to those on the inside may appear less so to those on the out. In order to avoid, or at least decrease, the inevitable misunderstandings that will result from internal documents that speak about Jews, Rome would do well I think to ask Jews for internal critique prior to the publication of pronouncements concerning Judaism.

After two-thousand years of ignorance, the time has come for Church and Synagogue, Jew and Christian, to understand our intertwined histories, to see Jesus as a Jew who made sense to other Jews in a Jewish context, to learn how our two traditions came to a parting of the ways, to recognize how misunderstandings of Jesus and Judaism continue even today to foster negative stereotypes and feed hate, and to explore how the gains in interfaith relations made over the past several decades can be nurtured and expanded.<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> John R. Donohue, S.J., *The Gospel of Mark*. Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 177.

<sup>ii</sup> Christine Schenk, CSJ, 'Celebrating the Inclusive Jesus,' in *Celebration: An Ecumenical Worship Resource* (February 2000), pp. 81-82, cited by Mary Boys, 'Patriarchal Judaism, Liberating Jesus: A Feminist Misrepresentation,' *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* 56/3-4 (2003), pp. 48-61.

<sup>iii</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1990), p. 57.

<sup>iv</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Passions of Christ, Passions of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), pp. 16, 13

<sup>v</sup> Louise Kumandjek Tappa, 'G-d in Man's Image,' in John S. Pobee and Bärbel von Wartenberg-Potter (eds.), *New eyes for reading. Biblical and theological reflections by women from the third world* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), pp. 101-106 (102).

<sup>vi</sup> Fernando F. Segovia, 'Reading the Bible as Hispanic Americans,' in Leander Keck et al. (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 167-173 (169).

<sup>vii</sup> See Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 118, Cambridge: University Press, 2002).

<sup>viii</sup> The presence of a woman would be welcome by many as well.

<sup>ix</sup> I express my gratitude to Professor James Patout Burns, Fr. Donald Senior, and Sr. Mary Boys for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.