Introduction

Zev Garber

Though many articles, reviews, and books are not of one opinion on the life and time of Jesus, there is a general understanding in the dogma of the church and in the quests of the academy that the incarnate Christ of Christian belief lived and died a faithful Jew,[1] and what this says to contemporary Jews and Christians is the focus of this volume depicting Jesus in the context of Judaism and its impact on Jewish and Christian traditional and contemporary views of the other.

In the context of our time, Pope John Paul II challenged members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to help Christians understand that the Hebrew Scriptures are essential to their faith (1997). That is to say, Catholic mysteries, including annunciation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and redemption are derived from the Hebrew biblical *Weltaschauung*. To speak of Jesus in the context of Judaism is affirmed by the church's acceptance of the Jewish Hebrew Bible as the Christian Old Testament, and this presents distinctive challenges to the visions of Judaism. When Jewish and Christian savants interweave the narrative and teaching of Jesus into the cultural and social life of first-century Judaism in the land of Israel under the rule of Caesar, they pinpoint the evolving Christology of Jesus believers, which conflicts with the viewpoints of the rabbis and jurisdiction of Rome. Second, Christians and Jews committed to reading scripture together are deeply motivated by an academic and reverential disposition toward rabbinic Judaism and the desire to correct the malign image of Jews and Judaism that emerges from erroneous readings of the Gospel sources. Arguably, *contra Iudaeos* biases happen when historicity (Pharasaic kinship of Jesus, Peter, and Paul) is conflated with apologetic ("give unto Caesar") and polemic depictions (Jews are a deicidal and misanthropic people), and theological innovation (Christ replaces Torah).

The desideratum is neither extreme skepticism nor full faith acceptance but rather a centralist position, somewhat contrary to an ecclesiastical tradition which teaches that truth is bounded and restricted to New Testament and early Christian *kerygma* (preaching) and *didache* (apologetics). Exploring the place of Jesus within Second Temple Judaism means to apply *drash* (insightful interpretation) to *peshat* (plain meaning of the text). Why so? Because Jesus the historical being, that is to say, Jesus before the oral and written traditions, is transformed and transfigured into a narrative character that appears in the canonized New Testament. The Jesus in narratology is a fluid figure of creative, idyllic, and dogmatic imagination, whose realness cannot be fixed in any given episode, teaching, or telling.

Thus, on reading the Gospel of John's account of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the trial before Pilate, and the sentence of death, one may project that the Evangelist's Jewish opponents are the reason for the virtual negativity of the *Ioudaioi* towards Jesus in his teaching and trial. Also, the cry of the mob, "His blood be upon us and on our children" (Matt. 27:25) is neither an acceptance of guilt nor perpetual pedigree damnation for the death of Jesus but can be seen as an expression of innocence that says if we are not innocent of this man's blood then may the curse be fulfilled (see Acts 18:6 and *b. Sanh.* 37a).

Jewish-Christian Encounter

The ground rule for Christian-Jewish scriptural reading and discussion is simple but complex. Let the Christian proclaim core Christian dogma (Easter faith) and dicta (e.g., Jesus "the living bread that came down from heaven" [John 6:51] is the savior of Israel) without a hint or utterance of anti-Judaism. Likewise, the Jewish observant needs to be aware and sensitive about claims of Christian identity. The objective in the quest for the rediscovery, and possibly reclamation, by Jews of the Jewish Jesus is to penetrate the wall of separation and suspicion of "law and grace" and enable the believer in the Second Testament to appreciate the saga and salvation of Israel experientially in terms of Judaism, that is to say, in accordance with the teaching of Moses and the exegesis of the sages of Israel. Reciprocally, the follower of the Torah way learns the how and why of the Christian relationship to the Sinai covenant as presented in the Christian spirit of scriptural inspiration and tradition, a strong sign that the centuries-old "teaching of contempt" is not doable for Christians and Jews in dialogue, where a shared biblical tradition is the surest sign that the stumbling blocks of religious intolerance can be overcome. Take *lex talionis*, for example.

Three times the Pentateuch mentions the legislation of *lex taliones* (the law of retaliation, of an "eye for an eye" [Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:18-21]). Though the law of "measure for measure" existed in the ancient Near East, there is little evidence that the Torah meant that this legislation should be fulfilled literally except in the case of willful murder. "Life for life" is taken liter-

ally in cases of homicidal intention, and fair compensation is appropriate when physical injuries are not fatal. Equitable monetary compensation is deemed appropriate by the Oral Torah in the case of a pregnant woman whose unborn child's life is lost and when animal life is forfeited. Indeed, the Written Torah casts aside all doubts regarding the intent of the biblical *lex talionis* injunction: "And he that kills a beast shall make it good; and he that kills a man shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:21).

Rejecting the literal application of *lex talionis* puts an end to the mean-spirited charge that Judaism is "strict justice." Similarly, the words of Jesus on the Torah ("For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" [Matt. 5:18]) beckon interpretation. Christian citing of Matthew 5:38-39a ("You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil") to teach that "Jesus cancels the law of revenge and replaces it with the law of love" is wrong on two accounts:1) syntactically, the Greek text of Matthew 5:39 reads "and," not "but," thereby removing the onus of change; and 2) scripturally, the text in context (see Matt. 5:21-30, Jesus on murder and adultery) instructs not cancellation but affirmation of the commandments. Thus, Jesus, like the sages, focuses on the significance of the teaching and its cautionary warning about wrong doing in "thoughts, words, and deeds."

Nonetheless, there are significant differences on retaliation between Jesus and the Rabbis. In Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus addresses *'ayin tachat 'ayin* (eye for eye) in terms of personal revenge and related implementations, but the Rabbis' understanding is *mamon tachat 'ayin* (value of an eye), and this is seen as remedial justice for the guilty and concern for the injured. Also, a Christian interpretation of the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) preceded by the prohibition, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge," (Lev. 19:18) is the foundation of the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12; see also Luke 6:31). However, the Jewish position is somewhat different. In Leviticus, "love your neighbor" is followed by, "You shall keep my statutes (*chuqqotai*, i.e., revelatory laws without applicable reason)" (19:19). In the rabbinic tradition, the covenantal partnership at Sinai represents the modus operandi to apply the love commandment, albeit taught in negative terms, "Whatever is hateful to you do it not to another."[2]

Participants in Jewish-Christian scriptural dialogue aim to show the interdependence of Jewish and Christian biblical traditions and do so by truncating the cultural, historical, psychological, religious, and theological differences between them. Some may see this and the absence of sustained critical discussion of texts and historical issues as major weaknesses, but I do not. There is something refreshing in connecting sentences to sentences, parts to whole, book to books. Spiritually informative, evocative in hermeneutics, less interested in critical scholarship that parses Jewish and Christian Scripture into strands and

schools and more concerned with Torah and Gospels that instructs in moral values and fellowship; a religiously correct lesson for two sibling religions whose God is the author of all.

Testimony of Jesus[3]

There is a line of basic continuity between the beliefs and attitudes of Jesus and the Pharisees, between the reasons which led Jesus into conflict with the religious establishment of his day, and those which led his followers into conflict with the synagogue.

Two of the basic issues were the role of the Torah and the authority of Jesus. Rabbinic Judaism could never accept the Second Testament Christology since the God-man of the "hypostatic union" is foreign to the Torah's teaching on absolute monotheism. As the promised Messiah,[4] Jesus did not meet the conditions which the prophetic-rabbinic tradition associated with the coming of the Messiah. For example, there was no harmony, freedom, peace, or amity in Jerusalem and enmity and struggle abounded elsewhere in the land. This denied the validity of the Christian claim that Jesus fulfilled the Torah and that in his second coming the tranquility of the messianic age will be realized. As Rabbi Jesus, he taught the divine authority of the Torah and the prophets[5] and respect for its presenters and preservers,[6] but the Gospels claimed that his authority was equally divine and that it stood above the authority of the Torah. The disparity of the Jewish self and the Gentile other in the ancestral faith of Jesus is abolished in the new faith in Jesus: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[7] I see this testimony as a major point of contention between the Jesus way and the way of rabbinic halakha that ultimately led to the severance of the Jesus party from the synagogue. And this acquired new intensity after the passing of the Jewish Jesus and the success of Pauline Christianity.

'Ani Hu'/ I Am He: Seeking Unity in Diversity

No matter how composite the figure of the historical Jesus and how rudimentary the concept of the Christ event in the Second Testament, there can be no doubt that the Jewish and Gentile believers bestowed divine attributes and power upon Jesus and venerated him above all creatures. Such an attitude towards the person of Jesus as God incarnate led to conflict with the sages, who revered only Torah-from-heaven. This is illustrated in the exegetical dissimilarity between church and synagogue on how one is to submit to God's righteousness. Reading the nature of God's commandment (Deut. 30:11-14), the Apostle Paul comments that Christ is the subject of "Who will ascend into heaven? . . . Who will descend into the deep?" and confesses, "Jesus is Lord . . . in your mouth and in your heart"[8] is the justified salvation for all. For the sages, however, salvation is in believing and

doing the commandments. "Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you . . . it is not in heaven,"[9] is the raison d'être of rabbinic Judaism. That is to say, the Torah is not in heaven, it is here and near so that Israel can hear "the blessing and the curse" and do the 613 Commandments[10] in order "to choose life"[11] and live.

The doctrine of the eternity of the Torah was axiomatic in Second Temple Judaism. It is implicit in verses that speak of individual teachings of Torah in phrases such as the following: "A perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your (lands of) dwellings" (Lev. 3:17) and "throughout the ages as a covenant for all time" (Exod. 3:16). Biblical (Proverbs, in which Torah equals wisdom), Apocryphal (the wisdom of Ben Sira), and Aggadic (Genesis Rabbah) traditions speak of the preexistence of Torah in heaven. Though the Talmud acknowledges the prerevelatory heavenly Torah, which the sages claimed was revealed to Moses at Sinai, it concentrates more on the Torah's eternal humanistic values. Indeed, the rabbinic mind speaks of two strains: revelation ("everything which a scholar will ask in the future is already known to Moses at Sinai"; see BT Menach. 29b) and the power of intellectual reasoning (as suggested in BT *Pes.* 21b, *Ketub*. 22a, *B.K*. 46b, *Chul*. 114b, *Nid.* 25a, *B.M.* 59b, and so forth). And by twinning the two dialectics, it appears, the sages taught more Torah than they received at Sinai.

Volatile are the arguments and disagreements between Petrine and Pauline Christians on issues of faith in Christ, with or without observance of the Torah on how to outreach to Gentiles.[12] On the other hand, the fallout is decisive and divisive in the disputations between the church and synagogue beginning with nascent Christianity, as John 8 seems to suggest. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Second Temple was sufficient proof for believers in Christ that God had pronounced dire judgment upon his stiff-necked people and that the God of promises dispensed his countenance to those who accepted Jesus as Messiah. Hence, "Christ is the end of the law,"[13] in "(whose) flesh the law with its commandments and regulations"[14] are abolished. But Torah and its commandments are the matrix in which rabbinic Judaism was born, and it proved to be the mighty fortress to withstand danger of extinction from without (Rome) and from within (non-Pharisaic philosophies, including Jewish Christianity). Thus, in the rabbinic way, to despise an individual precept of the Torah is tantamount to rejecting the whole Torah; and this explains the measures taken by the synagogue, for example, the second century *Birkat ha-Minim* (prayer against Jewish sectarians inserted in the Eighteen Benedictions), to preserve its national and religious character in the face of adversity and catastrophe.

John 8 (indeed, throughout the Fourth Gospel) exemplifies disparate views of the Jesus party on the yoke of the Torah (temporary or eternal) and the separation of a specific Jewish Christian community in the late first century from the Jewish society to which its members had belonged and are now excluded by synagogue fiat. On the former, consider Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman

at the well: "salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth"[15] and on the latter, the intensity of conflict between the Jewish Christian community for which John was composed and the reigning religious authority is reflected in the hostile and vindictive language placed on the mouth of Jesus accusing his Jewish detractors of not accepting the truth, plotting to kill him, and being the children of the devil.[16]

In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people by Christian believers based in part on the anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John. The cornerstone of supersessionist Christology is the belief that Israel was spurned by divine fiat for first rejecting and then killing Jesus. This permitted the apostolic and patristic writers to damn the Jews in the rhetoric of John 8, and more, to assign the worst dire punishment on judgment day. These are not words, just words, but they are links in an uninterrupted claim of antisemitic diatribes that contributed to the murder of Jews in the heartland of Christendom and still exist in a number of Christian circles today. How to mend the cycle of pain and the legacy of shame? The key is a midrashic (*peshat cum drash*) interpretation informed by an empathic and emphatic dialogue between siblings, Christian and Jew, individually and together.

Let me explain. It is a fact that church-synagogue relations turned for the better when the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) issued the document *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Times), the first ever Roman Catholic document repudiating collective Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. In the Roman Catholic world, this inspired many dioceses and archdioceses to implement *Nostra Aetate* and to rid the anti-Jewish bias of Christian teaching. To illustrate, consider the sentiment of the Italian bishops to the Jewish community of Italy (March 1998): "For its part, the Catholic Church, beginning with Second Vatican Council—and thanks to the meeting of two men of faith, Jules Isaac and John XXIII, whose memory is a blessing—decisively turned in another direction [from teaching divinely sanctioned punishment of the Jews], removing every pseudotheological justification for the accusation of deicide and perfidy and also the theory of substitution with its consequent 'teaching of contempt,'[17] the foundation for all antisemitism. The Church recognizes with St. Paul that the gifts of God are irrevocable and that even today Israel has a proper mission to fulfill: to witness to the absolute lordship of the Most High, before whom the heart of every person must open."

Few can rival Pope John Paul II's papacy in ridding the Roman Catholic Church of antisemitism. He more than any predecessor has condemned "the hatreds, acts of persecution, and displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place (Yad Va-Shem, 23 March 2000). He has labeled the hatred of Jews as a sin against God, referred to the Jews as Christianity's "elder brother,"[18] with whom God's covenant is irrevocable, and established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel (1994). The Vatican

documents, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998) and *Confessions of Sins Against the People of Israel* (St. Peter's Basilica, 12 March 2000) are major milestones in the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to reconcile with the Jewish people. And, we might add, mainline Protestant denominations in the World Council of Churches, in different degrees, have done likewise.

I welcome this gesture of professing and confessing spoken in the spirit of *teshuvah* (repentance) from the largest member-church in the "body of Christ" and it bodes well for Jews to offer *teshuvah* (response) in kind. Jews must be true to their Torah, distinct from other sacred scriptures and religions. It is not the role of the synagogue to judge whether Jesus the Jew metamorphosed into the Christ of faith or that Jesus and the Christ are one and the same individual. Rather, Jews must do their homework and cleanse the people Israel of any conceived or perceived anti-Christian bias. Jews must see the Roman Catholic Church's altering attitude and action toward them as good omens done in the spirit of humility and contrition. Jews need to be reminded that the Roman Catholic Church views the encounter with Judaism and the Jewish people as an organic part of Christian penance. Indeed, Christianity is a legitimate dialogue partner in *tikkun 'olam,* endowing the world in peace, understanding, and unity.

Admittedly, dialogue at times creates unexpected friction, of a kind found in chronicles and hoary debates, if aggressively done for the purpose of settling a score. Progress, not regress in Christian-Jewish dialogue is only possible if old canards are exposed and reciprocal teachings of respect are encouraged. So proper dialogue on John 8 neither overlooks the harsh statements against the Jews and explains them in a setting in life of that time, nor allows misguided judgments of mean-spirited hermeneutics to pass by unchallenged, nor allows a conjunctional albeit controversial thought to go by untested. The "I am " of John 8:24, is such an example. It reveals an aura of divinity by Jesus because his words, "I am the one I claim to be," can be equated with God's identity to Moses, "I am that I am."[19] For the Christian divine, this can be interpreted as "I am" (God) is revealed in "I am" (Jesus). But the text continues, "He (God) said, 'Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel: I am has sent me (Moses) to you."[20] This can mean that God as God not God as Jesus is the absolute and sufficient revelation of the divine pathos for the Jewish people.

The significance attached to the name of God in the above midrashic discussion dispels illusion by illustration. The holiness, sanctity, and power of God's call are heard equally and necessarily differently by church and synagogue. One by Christ and the other by Torah. However, the completeness of God's name, meaning his essence and plan, is hidden in this world forever,[21] but in the fullness of time it will be made known: "Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore, on that day, that '*Ani Hu*' (name of God, the *shem ha-mmephorash)* is speaking: here am I."[22]

It is incumbent upon Jew and Christian together in dialogue and in action to bring that day speedily in our lifetime.

Case for Jesus the Jew

In the final paragraph of "Reflections on Jesus," a review essay by Zev Garber and Joshua Kulp on several books dealing with Jesus in the context of his time, the New Testament and Talmud,[23] I affirmed unashamedly that the modern Jew can identify with the faith and fate of Jesus but not faith in Jesus. I have no clue what Jesus would say but I proposed to Professor Peter Haas, Abba Hillel Silver Professor of Jewish Studies, Chair, Department of Religious Studies and Director, and Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies at Case Western Reserve University, to convene a symposium on rediscovering the Jewish Jesus. So it was presented and so it was received. The three-day symposium on "Jesus in the Context of Judaism and the Challenge to the Church," hosted by the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies and managed brilliantly by Linda Gilmore,[24] took place at Case, 24-26 May 2009. The symposium presentations (Garber, Zevit, Moore, Basser, Fisher, Rubinstein, Bowman, Knight, Jacobs, and joined by Cook) were edited for publication in *Shofar* 28.3 (Spring 2010). Here they appear in a different format and increased word length. Additional chapters by Chilton, Schwartz, Ulmer, Kerem, Simms, Smerick, Mandell, and Magid complete this volume. .

The articles in this volume cover historical, literary, liturgical, philosophical, religious, theological, and contemporary issues evolving in and around the Jewish Jesus. The contributors reflect on a plethora of issues on the Jewishness of Jesus and what this means to the steadfast articles of faith in Christ Jesus. They demonstrate that concerned and informed Jews and Christians together can assess dis/misinformation, monitor dissent, alleviate religious fears, and reassure that the covenantal mission of Torah and Gospel, historically honed by apologetics and polemics, has now become blessedly altered by academic quests and congenial interfaith dialogue.[25] In sum, the tradition has been enhanced by the acceptance of differences. The passionate dialogue over the Jewish Jesus has proven to be a blessing, not a curse. Indeed, the mosaic of articles by a seminal group of Jewish and Christian scholars has seized the teaching moment and developed an academically responsible agenda to learn and teach the Jesus narrative with academic savvy and with religious tolerance. One wonderful opportunity *B'Yameinu* (In Our Time) to lift the Cross of Cavalry from the ashes of Auschwitz. So may it be done.

Zev Garber's opening plenary address on "Imagining the Jewish Jesus" postulated that the Easter faith without its Jewish historical context is unwieldy, or worse, a proven feeding ground for centuries-old Good Friday sermons that espoused anti-Judaism (replacement theology, conversion of the Jews) and anti-Semitism ("perfidious Jews and Christ killers"). A critical read of the Golden Rule, the Last Supper, and the Great Commandment in the context of Jewish exegesis showed how and why. Garber's methodology of reading Torah in the

response of *na'aseh ve-nishma* ("We shall do and we shall hear [reason]"; Exod. 24:7) explained his *darshani* (interpret me) imperative in his analysis of scriptural readings.

Notes

1. For a selection of books dealing with the Jewishness of Jesus, see Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1997); Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Image of Jesus*.2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus: The Nazarene Through Jewish Eyes*, trans. and ed. J. S. Klein and M. Reinhart (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006); Philip Sigal, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 2007); David Flusser, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Oskar Skarsaune and Hvalvik Reidar, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007); Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historial Jesus*, vol. 4 of *Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Herbert Basser, *The Mind Behind the Gospels: A Commentary to Matthew 1-14* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009).
2. The negative version of the Golden Rule suggests the frailty of subjective thinking, that is, "what is good for me, is good for you." The nonrational nature of *chuqqotai* supports this point of view.
3. My view on the historical Jesus is spelled out in Zev Garber, ed., *Mel Gibson's* Passion: *The Film, the Controversy, and Its Implications* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006), 63-69. Reprinted as chapter one in this book..
4. See also, among others, Matt. 26:62-64; Mark 14:60-62; Luke 22:60-70.
5. See also Matt. 5:17-20.
6. Matt 23:1-3a
7. Gal. 3:28. Also, 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11.
8. Rom. 10:6 commenting on Deut. 30:13-14
9. Deut. 30:11-12a
10. The Talmud states: "613 Commandments were revealed to Moses at Sinai, 365 being prohibitions equal in number to the solar days, and 248 being mandates corresponding in number to the limbs of the human body" (*Mak.* 23b). Another source sees the 365 prohibitions corresponding to the supposedly 365 veins in the body thereby drawing a connection between the performance of Commandments and the life of a person ("choose life"). The standard classification and enumeration of the *TaRYaG Mitzvot* (613 Commandments) follows the order of Maimonides (1135-1205) in his

Sefer ha-Mitzvot ("Book of Commandments," originally written in Arabic and translated several times into Hebrew).

11. Deut. 30:19
12. Galatians, for example, which I discussed in my paper, "How Believable Is the Allegory of Hagar and Sarah (Gal. 41)," given at the annual meeting of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH), meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of AAR-SBL, in Nashville, Tennessee, 18-21 November 2000.
13. Rom. 10:4a.
14. Eph. 2:15
15. John 4:22b-23.
16. John 8:31-59.
17. Term associated with Jules Isaac (1877-1963), French Jewish authority on antisemitism, who, in an audience with Pope John XXIII in 1960, persuaded the Holy Father to consider the errors of the Church's teachings on the Jews. Isaac's writings on *l'enseignement du mépris* played a key role in the declaration of *Nostra Aetate*.
18. Phrase introduced by Pope John XXIII.
19. Exod. 3:14
20. Ibid.
21. In the unvocalized Hebrew of the Torah, "this is my Name *l'lm*" can be read not as "forever" but "to be hidden." See Exod. 3:15b.
22. Isa. 52:6.
23. *Shofar* 27.2 (2009): 128-37.
24. Linda Gilmore's official title at Case is Manager of Interdisciplinary Programs and Centers but I call her "my Catholic angel." My admiration for Linda's managerial expertise was solidified in the spring 2005 semester when I taught at Case as the invited Rosenthal Fellow. Additionally, her Christian caring and concern that every "dot and tiddle" (see Matt. 5:17) of my Orthoprax Jewish ways be met is remembered with appreciation and respect.
25. On language violence in Jewish-Roman Catholic disputation, see Zev Garber, "Words, Words, Words," *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): 231-49.

Section 1

Reflections on the Jewish Jesus

The Jewish Jesus: A Partisan's Imagination

Zev Garber

My own approach to finding the historical Jesus in the text of the New Testament may appear to some as extreme. It seems to me that Mark, the earliest Gospel version on the life of Jesus compiled shortly after the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, contains authentic traces of the historical Jesus shrouded in repeated motifs of secrecy which are intended to obscure the role of Jesus as a political revolutionary sympathizer involved in the Jewish national struggle against Rome. When the Gospel of Mark is analyzed in its own light, without recourse to the special status which canonical tradition confers, it is less history and biography and more historiosophy and parable. It also features an astute polemic against the Jewish Christian believers in Jerusalem, whose influence diminished considerably following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and a clever apology to make early Christianity palatable for Rome by not identifying Jesus with the national aspirations of the Jews. The Markan account on the trial of Jesus and his execution, along with the portrait of a pacifistic Christ, are for the most part historically questioned by S. G. F. Brandon, who sees in these narratives attempts by the Gentile Church to win Roman favor by exculpating Pontius Pilate from his share in the crucifixion of Jesus.[1]

I agree. Regarding the Synoptic Gospels' (Mathew, Mark, Luke) account of Jesus before the Sanhedrin,[2] the trial before Pilate,[3] and the sentence of death,[4] the question of historical fairness intrudes into these accounts. Jesus is tried three times (the Sanhedrin night trial which found him guilty of blasphemy; the trial before Herod Antipas; the dawn trial before Pilate), and so which court condemned decisively Jesus?[5] Where in the biblical-talmudic tradition is blasphemy defined by claiming that one is the "Messiah the Son of the Blessed?"[6]

Leviticus 24:13-23 and Sanhedrin 7.5 proclaim that whoever curses God is guilty of blasphemy.[7] Rarely recorded are malediction and impious profanity by one who claims to be a messianic figure. True, Josephus recorded many messianic pretenders between 6-70 CE, but we have no record of any put to death. Bar-Kochba was called messiah by Akiba but tradition does not speak ill of either second-century hero. And no less a personality than Maimonides relegated the messianic doctrine to a secondary position among the articles of faith rendered in his name. Also, one guilty of blasphemy was stoned to death and not killed by crucifixion, as recorded by Mark.[8]

That Jesus was sympathetic to the Zealot cause may explain why the charges of sedition were not overtly denied by Jesus when asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?"[9] Other references support this view. One of the trusted disciples was Simon the Zealot.[10] The Zealot movement, rooted in the tradition of being "zealous for the Lord,"[11] arose in the Galilee in the first decade of the first century. It may be assumed that the child Jesus raised in Nazareth would have listened often to tales of Zealot exploits against the hated Romans and how many of the former died martyrs' deaths in a futile attempt to replace the bondage of Rome with the yoke of the "kingdom of heaven."[12]

These childhood experiences listened to in earnest and awe caused the adult Jesus to sympathize with the anti-Roman feelings of his people. Thus, the "cleansing of the temple" pericope is not to be read as anti-temple but rather as a critique of the temple functionaries who collaborated with Rome.[13] This episode appears to have coincided with an insurrection in Jerusalem during the period of Gaius Caligula (34-41), in which the Zealots appear to have been involved.[14] The famous question concerning tribute to Caesar has Jesus saying, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's,"[15] thereby implying Jewish support of Roman fiscal and political policy. This is an assimilable position and it is very doubtful that the historical Jesus identified with it. Better to say, the Rome-based school of Mark coined Jesus' answer for it and guaranteed that Jesus and his fellowship were loyal to Rome and opposed to Jewish nationalism. This was a necessary survivor mandate for Gentile Christians living in Rome during and after the Zealot-inspired Jewish war against Rome.

The *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 10:34, namely, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword," supports the militancy in the Jesus party mentioned in the Gethsemane tradition: Luke 22:35-38 portrays Jesus asking his disciples if they are armed and they reply that they are doubly armed. The size and arming of the arresting party "from the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders,"[16] can be cited as evidence of nationalist loyalty by Jesus. The unknown disciple who draws a word and cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave is identified in John's Gospel as Peter.[17]

Others say, the question of Jesus, "Have you come out against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me?,"[18] separates him from the Zealots. But can the parochial Jewish nationalism of Jesus be hidden in the image of the universal

image of the Christ of peace? I think not. Yet Mark's anti-Jewish bias and pro-Roman sentiments inspired him to lay the guilt of Jesus in the hands of Jewish authorities. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus was not an insurrectionist nor did he commit a crime deserving death by Roman law.[19] Later church narrative accepts this view without serious emendation and further presents Jesus as the "Prince of Peace." An early source of this tradition is the editorial note in Matthew 26:52. Here a post-70 CE Jewish Christian evaluating the ill-fated Jewish War declared in Jesus' name: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."[20]

A constant motif is the silence of the apostolic writings on matters pertaining to the political situation of the time. The Zealots of the period are essentially overlooked; episodes in which they are involved, as reported by Josephus and others, are not reported. Luke-Acts is silent about the identity and antecedents of James, Peter, and the other leaders of Jewish Christianity. Mark's theology prejudices the historical situation and declares that Jesus could not have involved himself in political nationalism and other contemporary issues. Later apostolic writers submissively follow the Markan line. How far theology distorts history is further shown by denigrating the Pharisees as the bitter opponents of Jesus.[21]

The received gospel tradition appears to suggest that the catastrophe of 70 CE and its aftermath was brought about by Jewish leaders who plotted Jesus' death, the Jewish mob who had demanded it, and the stiff-necked Jews who refused to follow the Jesus way. Also, the Jewish disciples do not know Jesus,[22] and it is the Roman centurion at the crucifixion who recognizes Jesus as the Son of God.[23]

Our thesis suggests that New Testament belief about "Who do the people say that I am?"[24] is more belief narrative than historicity. In my opinion, the genre of Christian Scriptures on the historical Jesus is expressed in the idiom of midrash. By midrash, I mean an existential understanding by man of his environment, history, and being. Its purpose is not to provide objective description of the world nor to relate objective facts, but to convey a particular cultural worldview rooted in a specific setting in the life of the people in a given historical moment (*Sitz im Leben*). Its content is doctrinal and ethical and its form is mythic. The very nature of midrash is an invitation to "demidrashize," that is, to decode the original form and make the content more meaningful for different time and clime. Indeed, the New Testament shows evidence of this. For example:

> Given: Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven
> Pauline: Shifts the emphasis of the failure of Jesus' return to the believer's present life.
> Johanine: Achieves the same Pauline goal with its conception of eternal life here and now present to the faith, and of judgment as already accomplished in the world which Jesus brings.

My *Jewish* reading of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels puts him in history and not in divinity. The Jesus of different Christologies could never find support in Judaism, since the God-man of the "hypostatic union" is foreign to Judaism's teaching on absolute monotheism. As the promised Messiah,[25] he did not meet the conditions which the prophetic-rabbinic tradition associated with the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, there was no harmony, freedom, peace and unity in the land of Israel—signs of the messianic age—and enmity and strife abounded everywhere. Not a false but failed Redeemer of the Jews, as witnessed by the words of the "King of the Jews" at the cross: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* ("My God, my God, why have You *forsaken* me")?[26] Notwithstanding, he was a loyal son of Israel, whose commitment to the Torah[27]—albeit radical and reformist—and his remarks about the great Commandment[28] were steadfast and comparable to Pharasaic Judaism of the day.

Arguably, the great flaw in pre-Vatican II Catholic traditionalism (as depicted in Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*) and Protestant fundamentalism in the teaching of the Easter faith is the heinous role played by the crowd, people, and Jews in the execution of Jesus. The cornerstone of supersessionist Christology is the belief that Israel was spurned by divine fiat for first rejecting and then killing Jesus. This permitted the apostolic and patristic writers and Protestant Reformers to attribute to Israel the mark of Cain and the evil of the Sodomites, and more, to assign the worst dire punishment on judgment day. These are not words, just words, but they are links in an uninterrupted chain of antisemitic diatribes that contributed to the murder of the Jews in the heartland of Christianity and still exists in a number of Christian circles today. How to mend the cycle of pain and the legacy of shame? The key is to separate the crucifixion of Jesus from the *contra Iudaeos* tradition by demystifying the composite Passion Narrative as taught and preached in ecclesiastical Christianity.

An illustration is in order. The nefarious words, "His blood be on us and on our children,"[29] seen by many as the scriptural flash point to the charge that Gibson's film is antisemitic, were composed in the 90s, a generation after the death of Jesus. And if the words are credible, then may they not be seen as composed by an anti-Zealot Jewish Christian writer who opposed the Jewish revolt against Rome and reflected on the wretched havoc on the Jewish people because of it? Similarly, to portray Pilate as meek, gentle, kind—a Jesus alter ego—that he cannot resist the aggressive demands of the Jewish mob to crucify Christ, is historically unfounded and not true.[30]

Finally, why the obsessive passion in Mel Gibson to portray endlessly the bloodied body of Jesus? May it not be this traditionalist Catholic's rejection of reforms advocated by Vatican Council II to present tolerantly the Passion of Jesus Christ? Whether conscientious or not, cowriter, director, and producer Gibson revises scriptural anti-Judaism in visual media. He does so by portraying overtly a corrupt Jewish priesthood, and especially the high priest, Caiaphas, a ferocious

blood-thirsty Jewish mob, an effeminate Satan who hovers only among Jews, satanic Jewish children, and a complacent Roman leadership that does the bidding of Jews. The subliminal message: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple (the film's climactic and penultimate scene) is sufficient proof for believers in Christ that God has pronounced dire punishment upon old Israel and that he now dispenses his countenance to the new Israel, who accepts unhesitatingly Jesus as Lord and Savior. Hence, "Christ is the end of the law,"[31] in (whose) *flesh* the law with its commandments and regulations"[32] are abolished. Thus, to flagellate unceasingly the body of Jesus is to rid unmercifully Judaism from the body of Christ and provide salvation through the blood of Christ.[33] On Gibson's cross, replacement theology is reborn. And Satan and mammon laugh aloud, a bitter laugh.[34]

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the role of biblical criticism in understanding the historical Jesus.
2. In what way and to what degree does the claim that Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary ("Think not that I come to bring peace, but a sword," (Matt. 10:34) advance or impede the ecclesiastical belief that he was the "Prince of Peace"?
3. How does the scriptural Jewish Jesus counter Mel Gibson's cinematic Christ?

Notes

1. The writings of S.G. F. Brandon, the late professor of comparative religion at the University of Manchester, have influenced my thinking on Jesus as a nationalist sympathizer and a political revolutionary. See, in particular, his *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967). Also influential is Hyam Maccoby, *Revolution in Judaea: Jesus and the Jewish Resistance* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1981).
2. Matt. 26:57-75; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-71.
3. Matt. 27:11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 2:3-5.
4. Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:17-25
5. See "The Trial of Jesus in Light of History: A Symposium," in *Judaism* 20.1 (1971): 6-74.
6. Matt 26: 63-65; Mark 14:61-65; Luke 22:67-70.
7. See Acts 6, where Christian tradition records that Stephen was guilty of death since he spoke "blasphemous words against Moses and against God" (Acts 6:7). See too Exod. 22:27; I Kgs. 21:10, 13 ("you have reviled God and king").
8. A brief description of the crucifixion is found in Matt. 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:33-43.
9. Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3. See also, Mark 15:9, 12 and the charge against Jesus inscribed on the cross (Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; John 19:19).
10. See Matt. 10:14; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:3. In Matthew and Mark it is written, "Simon the Cananaean" (Zealot). Matthew's Jewish audience can understand the Aramaism, but Mark, who normally translates Aramaisms (e.g., Mark 7:34) into

Greek, purposely does not here. The writer of Luke-Acts, writing a generation after Mark, no longer sees the taint of political sedition about Jesus or is simply unaware of Mark's dilemma and unashamedly identifies Simon as a Zealot.

11. See the roles of Phineas (Num. 25:7-10), Matthias (1 Macc. 2:15-41), and Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:9-10) as zealot types.
12. "Blessed be His Name, whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever," recited in the Temple during the Day of Atonement services, was added by the Rabbis to accompany the opening verse of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4). Since the period of Gaius Caligula (34-41), Roman emperors demanded from their subjects divine respect. The loyalist Jew (religious, nationalist) who rejected did so at the penalty of death. He submitted to the rule of God alone whom he proclaimed in "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone," and followed by the above doxology.
13. Mark 11:15-19; Matt. 21:21; Luke 19:45-48.
14. A reference to Pilate's ruthless suppression of the rebellion may be found in Luke 13:1.
15. Mark 12:17; Matt. 22:21; Luke 20:25.
16. The episode of Jesus taken captive is found in Mark 14:43-52; Matt 26:47-56; Luke 22:47-53.
17. Mark 14:46; Matt. 26:51; Luke 22:50; John 18:10.
18. Mark 14:48; Matt. 26:55; Luke 22:52.
19. Matt. 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22.
20. Also, Luke 22:50. A similar message is associated with national restoration and rebuilding the Second Temple (515 BCE) in Zech 4:6, which is later linked to the synagogue service of Chanukkah by the Rabbis in order to play down the militancy of the Maccabean victory and state imitated by the ill-fated revolt against Rome.
21. The word Pharisees occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament (29 times in Matthew; 12 times in Mark; 27 times in Luke; 19 times in John; 9 times in Acts; and one time in Phillipians). There is ample fodder in these references to portray Pharisaism as sanctimonious, self-righteous, hypocritical, petrified formalism, and a degraded religious system corroded by casuistry. The bitterest tirade against the Pharisees is found in Matt. 23.
22. See Mark 8:27-33; Matt 16:13-23; Luke 9:18-22. The Petrine blessing found in Matt. 16:17-19 was added by a Jewish Christian to offset Mark's rebuke of Peter (The Jerusalem Church) as Satan by Jesus (Mark 8:33).
23. Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47.
24. Matt. 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18
25. See, among others, Matt 26:62-64; Mark 14:60-62; Luke 22:66-70.
26. Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34. Emphasis added.
27. Matt. 5:17-20
28. Similar quotes can be found in Matt. 22:37 = Mark 12:30 = Luke 10:27 – Deut 6:5; Mark 12:29 – Deut 6:4; Matt 23:39 = Mark 12:31 = Luke 10:27b – Lev 19:18; Mark 12:33, see also I Sam 15:22.
29. Matt. 27:25. In *The Passion*, these words are heard in the original Aramaic but deleted in the English subtitles.
30. Philo Judaeus wrote about Pilate's "endless and intolerable cruelties"; this was no doubt why he was recalled to Rome in 37.
31. Rom 10:4a
32. Eph 2:15. Emphasis added.

33. Adversely, blood fixation by Jews is not associated with suffering, torture, and death but with birth, hope, and life. Consider the Ezekielian verse recited at the circumcision rite linking the birth of a Jewish male child (potential Messiah) with the birth of Jerusalem; "I (Lord God) said to you: 'In your blood, live.' Yeh, I said to you, 'in your blood, live.'" (Ezek. 16:6)
34. *Forbes* magazine (July 2004) announced that *The Passion* grossed more than $970 million, $370 million domestically and $600 million plus worldwide.