

## Pressezentrum

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Sperrfrist:	25. Mai 2017 15.00 Uhr
Projekt:	Zentrum Juden und Christen
Veranstaltung:	<b>Reformationsjubiläum als "Christusfest"?</b> <i>Auf der Suche nach einer nicht antijüdischen Christologie</i>
Zeit, Ort:	Do. 15.00 – 18.00, Universität der Künste, Konzertsaal, Hardenbergstr. 33, Charlottenburg (838   D4)
Referent/in:	<b>Prof. Dr. Michael J. Cook, Judaist, Cincinnati/USA</b>

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### **Jewish Jesus Scholarship: Is Christology Inherently Anti-Jewish?**

American Jews' study of the historical Jesus has so intensified that it's challenging to survey even its essentials in a brief amount of time.

Possibly differing from Europe, the American Jewish scene reflects a spilling over of Jesus-study from *academic* and *clergy* ranks into those of the Jewish *laity*. This is appropriate given that it's within the wider *lay* social contexts (neighborhood living, business interaction, education in school and houses of worship) that societal suspicion and stereotyping between Jew and Christian came to assume such deep rootage.

This dramatic proliferation of Jews' interest in Jesus has become localized especially within SYNAGOGUE lengthy adult education courses – *some even one or more years-long* – taught by *rabbis* graduated from Reform Judaism's Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati, Ohio – the only American Jewish *SEMINARY* ever to require *technical* training in the New Testament for *rabbinical* ordination.

Enthusiasm for such programs is primarily *historical*, *not* theological, a matter potentially impacting today's discussion. For Jews' primary incentive in Gospel study is to account for the scarring the Jewish people have experienced from their *history* of persecution at Christian hands.

Instead of within synagogue adult education, why don't American Jewish laypersons examine *academic* conferences on this subject? Because such conferences tend to be comprised far more of THEOLOGICAL *than* HISTORICAL analyses – and most American Jews opt for the HISTORICAL.

As for basic *historical contours* of Jesus' ministry, most Jews would subscribe to the following:

- That Jesus was, and behaved as, a Jew, and did not found Christianity;
- that Christianity's fundamental break with the Torah (or Pentateuch) should be traced more to Paul than to Jesus;
- that Jesus taught superbly-edifying parables;
- that possibly he felt a messianic mission to announce God's coming Kingdom, but did not imagine himself divine;
- that he was not widely accepted as Messiah since he didn't achieve independence for Israel from Roman oppression;
- that he was arrested *not* for "blasphemy" but political sedition:
- for his concept of God's coming Kingdom was construed as threatening overthrow of Rome's Emperor – including also the Emperor's appointee, Pontius Pilate, and *Pilate's* subordinate, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas; and
- that, as with other figures similarly perceived, Jesus was crucified – commonly a Roman practice for accused seditionists.

Jews today, however, are still obsessed to learn how to explain to themselves, and even more so their children, how dramatically worsened became their image over later centuries:

1. How did first-century Jews – likely 70% of whom were from the Diaspora, not to mention all those from the Holy Land – who for the most part had never even seen Jesus – how did even they become condemned as collectively, and in perpetuity, guilty of killing him?

2. Did Jesus originally come to preach only to Jews but then actually reject them – for Gentiles instead – as *the* "People of God"?

3. Did the Jewish Bible ("Old" Testament) genuinely predict Jesus' coming as Messiah, yet Jews are allegedly blind to the meaning of their own Bible?

4. By Jesus' ministry, had Judaism *really* ceased to be a living faith?

5. Is Judaism's essence *really* a burdensome legalism and a God of wrath? And

6. did Judaism's alleged oppressiveness *genuinely* reflect Jesus' hypocritical opponents, the "Pharisees" (forerunners of the "rabbis" who were great sages for all time since)?

Today's Jews do best to trace this heightened denigration of Jews – this redirection and intensification of animus toward them – especially to developments begun by the earliest Evangelist, Mark – who around 70 C.E. produced the oldest extant *historical* narrative of Jesus' ministry.

Here Jews have puzzled over whether Mark left what certainly appear to be glaring editorial finger-prints by devising and then inserting anti-Jewish paragraphs expanding his received earlier and briefer materials: While time does not now permit elaboration, four of such subjects commonly stimulating Jewish discussions are:

*First*, did Mark craft and insert – into what he had received – the paragraph of JESUS' SANHEDRIN TRIAL (chapter 14:55–65)?

*Second*, did Mark interrupt Pilate's decision to crucify Jesus by inserting the BARABBAS NARRATIVE (15:6–15a)?

*Third*, did Mark invent and insert the Scribes' DENUNCIATION OF JESUS FOR "BLASPHEMY" into Jesus' healing of the paralytic (verses 5b–10 in Chapter 2)?

*Fourth*, did Mark invent and insert a 5-verse segment effectively changing an ordinary Last Supper meal into a Passover observance?

If we accept, as do most scholars, that Matthew and Luke drew upon Mark, did they likewise intentionally intensify Mark's denigrations of Jews as Mark himself appears to have done to his own received traditions? And did later Christian tradition extend this trend even considerably further?

**Four other sources** – besides the Gospels – likewise capture modern Jews' attention:

*First*, did **Paul's** Epistles, intervening chronologically between Jesus' ministry and Gospel creation, effectively filter and hence redirect Jesus' image when applied to:

- Jesus' commonly-thought devaluation of the Law of Moses (in Mark)
- Jesus' turning from Jews to Gentiles; and
- Jesus' indications of Gentile-Christians' supersession of Jews as God's Chosen People?

A *second* source, **Josephus**, is valued, by Jews, for casting Pontius Pilate as brutal, not docile (the opposite of Gospel reportage); also, Josephus' schematization of first-century Judea into three decreasing authority tiers:

(I) Emperor, then

(II) Roman governor; and only last

(III) the Jewish high priest –

thereby reversing the common Gospel implication of a cowardly Pilate directed by a brutal Caiaphas.

Turning to a third source, **Rabbinic Literature's parables**, these certainly impress Jews, but not nearly as much as do *Jesus'* parables (the latter often among *the* singly most popular adult-education synagogue courses in themselves).

Fourth, Christianity's **typological** interpretation of **Jewish Scripture** – often held by Christians to *predict* Jesus' ministry – is routinely countered by Jewish insistence that Jesus' image was *conformed* to Jewish Biblical themes, hardly *predicted* by them – so much so that Evangelists' uses of story-lines of Adam, Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel (& countless others), are misleading – likely none more so than that of **Judas**.

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**THE MOST FREQUENTLY-POSED QUESTION** by American Jews I myself coin **the "Hybrid Riddle"** – since it combines two seemingly irreconcilable propositions: BENEFIT vs. BLAME. Adopting, for the moment, the commonly supposed notion of Jews as "Christ-killers," then

[1] *If* it was indispensable for humanity's redemption that Jesus die – a BENEFIT – and

[2] *if* Jews, by contrast, were deemed a central cog in effecting that "benefit,"

then why are Jews "blamed" for Jesus' death rather than "affirmed" for facilitating humanity's salvation?

The "hybrid riddle" arises if we misconstrue the themes of "benefit" vs. "blame" as arising *simultaneously* rather than *sequentially* –

"BENEFIT" reflects the 30's and 40's, soon after Jesus' death; but "BLAME" arose – in the 60s and later – due to Christians' persecutions-by Rome (especially by Nero and Domitian) and to the consequent security needed for Christians to revise

a-Jew-put-to-death-by-Rome into

a-Christian-put-to-death-by-Jews.

*I believe there is some parallel between the Hybrid Riddle and our resolving today whether Christology must be inherently anti-Jewish ...*

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In closing, many of us are familiar with Europe's multiple displays of statuary of two women, below flanking Jesus up on the Cross: a blind-folded Synagogue versus a clear-sighted Church. A customary interpretation holds that *Synagoga's* removal of her blindfold would finally signal her capitulation to *Ecclesia's* superior vision.

Yet I imagine a contrasting interpretation: Synagogue's removal of her blindfold could well reveal her wish to engage the Church eye-to-eye – in the hope that the Church will WELCOME modern Jews engaging the New Testament.

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