

By Dr. Howard Clark Kee

Throughout the last half of the 20th Century, the proliferation of Christian-Jewish dialogue has led to open and honest communication between two great religions. Bridges are being built over a twenty centuries-old chasm of abstract perceptions and limited information. Today, powerful relationships have been forged which reach out to historical truths, respect of the other and acceptance of the elements that link Christians and Jews.

As a result, distinguished theologians representing every facet of Christianity are calling for New Testament editions that reflect research and translations at the highest level of scholarship; that utilize this research to correct and modify the virulent suppositions and language about the Jewish people; that acknowledge the historical truth of First Century events within a framework of the political realities of the period; that remove the presentation of Jews as the enemies and killers of Christ.

Responsible translation – especially of ancient documents like the Bible – must avoid using terms that have changed meaning over the centuries, and must convey what the terms referred to in the original setting.

Children's Bibles are particularly susceptible to nefarious interpretations because they often paraphrase Scripture. The fact that the children cannot easily understand the New Testament in terms of its own historical context makes this matter all the more urgent. They do not make clear that Jesus himself was a Jew and that the controversies in the Gospels are between the Jew Jesus, his Jewish followers, and the other Jews, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. It is most important that children understand that references in the New Testament to "the Jews" are not to be equated with the Jews of today.

Had this initiative been implemented centuries ago, anti-Semitism would have been so diminished that Hitler and other purveyors of hate would not have succeeded in the murder of six million innocent men, women and children whose sole crime was having a Jewish mother or ancestor, just like Jesus. The Holocaust was a continuation of the atrocities that began with the First Crusade in the eleventh century. About two out of five Jews were murdered in the 20th century alone.

Today "the Jews" means the whole Jewish people. But as used in the gospel narratives, it refers to a group of Jewish leaders who were collaborating with the Roman invaders by serving on their ruling council. They were similar to the Quislings of Norway and the Vichy of France. What needs to be shown is that Jesus was put to death by the Romans, using their standard mode of execution: Crucifixion. A small number of Jewish leaders who served the Romans in their rule of the land collaborated with them in his execution.

Now is the time to take a bold new step and remove all anti-Judaism from Bibles and sermons. Now is the time to prevent ambitious bigots from exploiting the New Testament and Christianity. We urge, therefore, that anti-Judaism be removed from the King James Version, the New International Version, the New International Reader's Version and all other versions of the New Testament, especially Bibles published for children.

We pray that Bible publishers, editors and translators understand and accept that their blessed efforts will help bring the Kingdom of God to faith communities now and in all the tomorrows to come.

We seek your support. Together we can eliminate anti-Semitism in this century. Contact Bible publishers and advise them that anti-Judaism should be removed from Bibles. Anti-Judaism is not needed and confuses Jesus' message of love your neighbor.

Dr. Howard Clark Kee
Professor of Biblical Studies, Emeritus
Boston University