

Let us agree to three things out right: 1) Jesus was shaped by and deeply valued his Judaic religious heritage.2) Judaism did not lose its vitality after the birth of Christianity. 3) Although a primary teaching of Christianity is love of neighbor, what Christians have been taught has caused centuries of suffering for Jews.

1. It is not surprising that Protestant curricula are highly diverse.

2. Given the centrality of the Bible for Protestants, most Protestant curricula are fully rooted in the Bible, and focus on understanding Biblical times and people, covenants, revelation and text, for these shaped scripture and the writers of scripture. This is less true for Catholic and Orthodox education, wherein faith formation is also catechetical, liturgical and sacramental.

The following is a summary of Protestant curricula:

- No Protestant curriculum in the U.S. (as of 1992) can be said to offer exemplary treatment of Jews and Judaism, without qualification.
- Progress over the years is mixed. Less prominence is being given to offending texts like Matthew 27:25.
- On the other hand the Pharisees are still portrayed in a legalistic and hypocritical light, and Judaism is still treated as if it was made obsolete after Jesus.
- There is a significant drop-off in references to Jews and Judaism after Christianity, as if Judaism has lost all religious and historic significance during the last 2,000 years.

Contemporary Christian education in the United States builds upon inherited biases, and will continue promoting those biases until awareness (consciousness) and/or protest reach that critical mass which will lead to collective embarrassment, repentance and change...one by one, congregation by congregation, denomination by denomination. The following are “directional criteria” that were originally organized by Philip Cunningham for a 1992 study of Roman Catholic curricula. I find them to be insightful questions in their own right:

Regarding Hebrew Scriptures, is the Hebrew covenant portrayed as the root, foundation and promise of the new Covenant, as the source of inspiration for Jesus and his followers, or only as needing new covenant interpretation for validity?

Are both traditions portrayed as being founded on love and justice, or is the Hebrew tradition portrayed as a religion of justice, fear, retribution and legalism with the Christian tradition contrasted as being a religion of love?

Is the Judaism of Jesus' time, and after, shown to be dynamic, multi-faceted in theology, and practice, and revered by Jesus and the early disciples? Or is it dismissed as obsolete, or simply never referred to, after Jesus?

Regarding the treatment of the Pharisees, are they portrayed as representing revered and diverse traditions, or as legalistic hypocrites?

In lessons portraying Jesus and the disciples, does the material for student and teacher describe what it meant to be Jewish? Or is it implied that "Jewishness" was something that they rejected? And, ignoring the fact that all of the followers of Jesus were Jews, do lessons imply that all "the Jews" rejected Jesus?

In telling of the Crucifixion, is the role of the Romans made clear, and that "the chief priest" was an appointee of Pilate? Is it clear that passion cannot be blamed on all Jews then living, without distinction, (and certainly not upon Jews of today)?

Regarding interpretation of post-Jesus Judaism, is it implied that with the birth of Christianity, there has been no continuing, dynamic Judaism? Or is it implied that the suffering of Jews during the "common era" has been "divine retribution" for Jewish (alleged,) rejection of Jesus?

In the study of religious history, is there explicit reference to Judaism during the last 2000 years, its development, leaders and contributions, or is Judaism simply not mentioned (as if it lost its relevance with the birth of Christianity)?" I offer these questions, as having consciousness-raising value.

&nbsp;

**Suggestions for the Future:**

Higher priority needs to be given to curriculum analysis by Christian publishers. More needs to be done to all other age groups through teacher training materials, preacher guides, etc.

Policy statements and position papers can be developed by religious bodies, working together, specifically lifting up issues of interfaith sensitivity and offering suggestions for change.

Curriculum support materials can and should be explicit in identifying approaches to Jewish and Judaic content.

At the seminary level, courses in Bible, in church history and world religions need to be reviewed for implicit or explicit insensitivity.

Anti-Semitism, (like racism, sexism and classism), must be condemned and preached against as inherently anti-Christian; and checklists can be prepared

ecumenically of insensitive irreligious beliefs and attitudes. We call one another to faithfulness. Others see where I am blind. Social scientists call it offering "feedback". Religion calls it speaking the truth in love.

By: Dorothy Savage

National Council of Churches Ministries in Christian Education New York City

Condensed from Removing the Anti-Judaism from the New Testament, A.I.I., 1999