

By Irvin J. Borowsky

For many years, I wondered, like many of you, why Jews were so hated, thrown out of every nation in Europe, beaten and murdered in hideously large numbers. I read every book I could find on the subject and in time, the genesis of the atrocities became clear: the most potent factor fostering anti-Semitism has been the common understanding of the New Testament. There is a series of bitter references to Jews in Christian Bible translations that are either incorrectly translated or historically inaccurate. These references helped shape the warped portrait of the Jewish people that has been disseminated from the pulpit to influence generation after generation. The fear, distrust, and hatred that these teachings have generated have been powerful tools used by ambitious and bigoted demagogues for recruiting and focusing their mobs. Most Christians were never taught the truth: that they have more similarities with Jews than differences.

No idea has been more destructive for the scattered Jewish minorities living in Christian countries than the widespread view of them as “deicide people,” the others in the community who were Christ-killers. The fact remains that most of the people who assisted in the Nazi-led murder of a million and a half Jewish children just 60 years ago were not aware that Mary, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and John the Baptist — as well as all the founders of Christianity — were as Jewish as those innocent children. There were no Christians during their lifetime.

The fact is that sincere and meaningful dialogue between Christians and Jews will not solve anti-Semitism unless the references to Jews in the New Testament accurately reflect the historical past.

Every Jew can vividly recall the very moment when he or she first learned the violent scope of historical and contemporary anti-Semitism and the fear that accompanied it. The information woven throughout family histories of pogroms, concentration camps, and mass murder is shocking and irrefutable as a result of these atrocities.

But even in these enlighten times the portrait of Judaism held by most Christians still remains rooted in some of the seemingly hostile portions of the New Testament.

There are millions of new Christians from the former communist nations, Asia and Africa who, upon studying the Bible will be trained to distrust and hate Jews, because Jesus is presented as a Christian who was killed by Jews.

Perhaps the most telling argument that anti-Semitism has fundamentally nothing to do with the actions of Jews is the anti-Semitism in Japan. It becomes clear to the visitor that the placing of the New Testament in Japanese hotel rooms and the distribution of free Bibles by missionaries is teaching Japanese to distrust and hate Jews.

Can effective and meaningful interfaith dialogue be conducted when the powerful majority religion of the democratic western world states in its official Bibles, "They locked the door for fear of the Jews" implying Jews wanted to kill their Son of God.

The Contemporary English Version published by the American Bible Society is an outstanding example of conveying the meaning of the biblical text. This edition makes all other Bibles obsolete. Jesus' message and other first century events are presented in an accurate and easy-to-understand translation without creating distrust and hatred of the Jewish people.

Other Bible publishers are now reexamining their editions and encouraging their scholars and translators to remove these hateful references. This is a movement of truth, of historical wholeness that cannot be stopped, must not be stopped. We have eliminated in this century derogatory references about Native Americans that taught generations to believe they were savages. We have removed the barriers of prejudice that prevented African-Americans from eating in restaurants of their choice, from voting, from living where they could afford and from participating in our democracy. The murder of two out of five Jews in this century starting in 1900 is sufficient proof of the urgency and need for Christian leadership to remove hateful and inaccurate references to contemporary Jews from the New Testament.

There are many reasons to proceed with new translations but here are 4 of special importance:

1. It is dangerous to leave damaging impressions and historically inaccurate references to Jews in Bibles and Sunday school curricula for the Farrakhans and future Hitler's to exploit.
2. When books, technical research and media events are translated into other languages, they translate ideas not words.
3. Clearly, events in the world today tell us that there is an immediate need for Bible clarification. Since the Holocaust, there have been thousands of anti-Jewish incidents throughout the world, like the horrible bombing of Jewish headquarters in Argentina.
4. If you doubt the importance of and the need of new translations, visualize how safe would it be for Christian families living in a Moslem nation if the Koran contained dozens of passages that Christians sought to kill Mohammed.

The stakes are high. People have been murdered because of these words. It is time to clean up the garden and cut out the weeds of ignorance and error. The New Testament does not need to denigrate Jews to affirm its core message. In fact it drastically distorts Jesus' message and the aims of Christianity. Anti-Semitism is a Christian problem that only Christians can solve. It must be dealt with at its source

— the New Testament, misunderstood and wrongly translated. The Institute's enlightenment program has led to a series of historical breakthroughs.

We invite your support in this labor of love and truth. Join us.

Irvin J. Borowsky

Founder and Chairman

American Interfaith Institute/World Alliance and the Liberty Museum

Excerpts from Irvin J. Borowsky's presentation at the workshop.

Full text will be published this year in a book of the same title.