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**Licentiate in Theology Program**

**Fall Term 2023**

**Sacred Texts 160 Course Syllabus**

**The Jewishness of Jesus:**

**And Why It Matters to Christians**

**Huron University College Land Acknowledgment**

Huron is situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron, and Lenape peoples, whose sharing and stewardship of the land has been governed by the Dish with One Spoon treaty since time immemorial. We are guided by this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. Huron University College acknowledges its past role in perpetuating colonial and exclusionary relations. Because religious and ecclesial institutions were instrumental in such relations, we consider it our particular responsibility as a Faculty of Theology to work towards justice and reconciliation.

**Course Dates:** From Thursday, November 2nd – Thursday, December 21st, 2023

**Time:** Thursdays from 7 – 9 P.M. (CT), 8 – 10 P.M. (ET)

**Delivery:** Hosted via Zoom

**Instructor:** Dr. Murray Watson, SSL (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome), Ph.D. (Trinity College, Dublin)

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I am available to help or support you in any ways I can. Please feel free to e-mail me at any time, or we can arrange a mutually convenient time for a video conversation.

***Jesus Wasn’t a Christian:***

***Exploring Jesus’ Jewishness as a Source of Enrichment for Christian Faith***

In the closing decades of the twentieth century the most hopeful advance in life of Jesus research was the recognition that **the quest must primarily have in view Jesus the Jew, and a clearer and firmer grasp of the consequences.** What distinguishes this “third quest of the historical Jesus” is the conviction that **any attempt to build up a historical picture of Jesus of Nazareth should and must begin from the fact that he was a first-century Jew operating in a first-century milieu.** After all, when so much is historically uncertain, we can surely assume with confidence that Jesus was brought up as a religious Jew. (James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered.* Christianity in the Making, Vol. 1 [2003], pp. 85-86)

… an interest in the Jewishness of Jesus … is now primarily assumed among scholars. Discussing his book titled Jesus’ *Jewishness: Exploring the Place of Jesus in Early Judaism,* James Charlesworth noted: “As a scholar, I feel somewhat uneasy about the title *Jesus’ Jewishness.* Does it not sound redundant? Is it not obvious that Jesus was a Jew?” (Rabbi Juan Marcos Bejarano-Gutierrez, *Forgotten Origins: The Lost Jewish History of Jesus and Early Christianity.* Yaron Publishing, 2018)

Whoever meets Jesus Christ meets Judaism. (Pope John Paul II, *Insegnamenti*, Vol. III/2, 1980, p. 1272)

**Course Overview**

The last seventy-five years have witnessed a dramatic and unexpectedly positive transformation and reorientation in terms of Christian attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. Christian self-examination after the Holocaust, the discovery of the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls, and the re-establishment of the modern State of Israel are some of the factors that have combined to spark a renewed awareness of the Jewishness of Jesus as an essential foundation for accurately understanding his life and interpreting his teachings. Similarly, decades of positive Jewish-Christian dialogue have led many modern Jews to explore the place of Jesus within ancient Judaism—and have produced an impressive (and growing) body of *Jewish* scholarship about Jesus that has cast new and revealing light on his context and words.

In this course, we will begin by exploring the gradual alienation of Jews and Christians from each other, and how that antagonism has slowly been reversed over the last century. We will explore specific sections of the Gospels where sensitivity to Jesus’ Jewish identity (and Semitic words) enables us to appreciate him in his humanity, in a more three-dimensional and culturally sensitive way—and to discover how the Jewishness of Jesus can (and should!) enrich Christian faith through a better understanding of the One whom Christians consider their Messiah and Lord.

**Week 1 (November 2)**

Course Overview and Expectations

*“But of course Jesus was a Christian … wasn’t he?”:* Jesus’ Jewishness as a recent rediscovery for many Christians and Jews

An instructive example to begin with: The “morphing” of the name of Jesus itself:   
English *Jesus* ⮈Latin *Iesus* ⮈ Greek *Iēsous* [Ἰησοῦς]⮈ Hebrew *Yēšûaʿ* [יֵשׁוּעַ] ⮈ Shortened form of *Yəhôšuaʿ* [יְהוֹשֻׁעַ]  
The Hebrew three-letter root: y-*š*-*ʿ* : its meaning and relevance for understanding Jesus in the Gospels

A growing modern consensus: Some recent Christian statements about Jesus’ Jewishness and the relationship of Christianity to Judaism: Anglican, Catholic, United Church, and others.  
*Sed contra* [But on the other hand…]: Older Christian sources distancing Jesus (and Christianity) from Judaism

The “Partings of the Ways” between Judaism and Christianity

The *Birkat ha-Minim* (Curse Against the Heretics/Sectarians)

Evidence for ongoing Jewish-Christian fraternization into the 300s and beyond in some areas

Marcion and the (Undying) Marcionite Heresy

The First, Second and Third “Quests for the Historical Jesus”

**To read before next week: Amanda Witmer, “Jesus was not a Christian and why it matters”**[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tQksUjRggkK0xcuzym3maZg-usQRv0uc/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)

**Week 2 (November 9)**

The beginnings of a “re-Judaizing” of Jesus

The Protestant Reformation and the Reformers’ emphasis on *sola Scriptura* (and so on intense study of the Biblical text, and anything that could help to cast light on the Scriptures)

Martin Luther’s ambivalent (and shifting) views on Jews

John Lightfoot (1602-1675), *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ* (4 vols., 1823)

John Gill (1697-1772), and his regular reference to Jewish sources in his commentaries

20th century

Joseph Klausner (1874-1958), *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (published in Hebrew in 1922)

Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck’s *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash* (German original, 1922-28, just recently published in English translation)

The Second World War and the *Shoah* (Holocaust) – the catalyst for a dramatic re-thinking of Christianity’s teachings about Judaism

Jules Isaac (1877-1963): The “Godfather” of Modern Jewish-Christian Relations—and his 1947 classic book *Jesus and Israel*

Who was Isaac and why is he important? What was the genesis of this now-famous book?

What were the 21 key points he wanted to make?  
“The teaching of contempt” (*L’enseignement du mépris)*  
The 1947 Seelisberg Conference and its influence on modern Jewish-Christian relations

Isaac’s history-making 1961 meeting with Pope John XXIII; the evolution of *Nostra Ætate*

Subsequent church documents (WCC, other churches)

The influential work of Jewish scholars like Martin Buber, Pinchas Lapide, Geza Vermes, Shmuel Safrai, David Flusser, and their Christian and Jewish protégés

John Meier (+2022; author of the 5-volume magnum opus *A Marginal Jew),* and his judgement about the central importance of Jesus’ Judaism for the Third Quest

**To read before next week: Capsule biography of Jules Isaac**[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1djDa2LAwnvbp\_ryGkUpG2hYAdSADkDP9/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)

**Week 3 (November 16)**

What did Judaism look like in the time of Jesus? Delineating the Second Temple period

“Common Judaism” (E.P. Sanders) and Plural “Judaisms” (Jacob Neusner) – mapping the diversity of first-century Jewish faith, life and practice

* + a Judaism largely *of the Diaspora* (where the Diaspora population was much larger than that of the Land of Israel) – but centred on Jerusalem and its Temple
  + a *diverse* Judaism – made up of a range of religious and political “schools”/sects
  + a Judaism that was *profoundly* *shaped by location, culture, language and politics*

Beginning at the Start: The Jewish Backdrop of Jesus’ Birth and Childhood

Important Jewish Messages Embedded in Matthew’s Genealogy of Jesus

The Gospel Canticles: The *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat*

The Circumcision and the Finding in the Temple

What can we surmise about Jesus’ religious experience growing up?

Lucien Deiss, *Joseph, Mary, Jesus.* Liturgical Press, 1996.

Lucien Deiss, *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries.* Liturgical Press, 1979 (especially Chapter 1, “The Sources of Jewish Prayer”)

Jesus, Nazareth and Sepphoris: The Complex Intersections of Jewish Faith, Politics, and Greco-Roman Culture in the Second Temple period?

**To read before next week: Excerpts on Sepphoris from Jerome Murphy-O’Connor OP, *Jesus and Paul: Parallel Lives.* Liturgical Press, 2007:**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LlRAR\_n\_d-3KNbd--uQVQY2wYP9Xmul-/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)

**Week 4 (November 23)**

A Semitic Jesus, a Greek New Testament, and the Jewish Background of the Gospels  
The challenge of working with texts that are *already* translations/interpretations

Some attempts at more “formal equivalent” translations in recent decades  
The value of speculative retroversions by competent scholars

“Semitisms” (Characteristic Hebrew/Aramaic expressions that seem to have been translated literally into Greek, in a way that is not natural to Greek); possible word-plays

Retrieving first-century meanings of “theologically-sanctified” terms  
The importance of proper names  
Examples of how Jewish background informs, enriches (and sometimes corrects) our understanding of some key parables (drawing upon Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi.* Abingdon Press, 2018*)*

**Week 5 (November 30)**

Some Concerted Efforts (Ancient and Modern) to “De-Judaize” Jesus within Christianity

Patristic sources

Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany (2010)*

The Unintended but Gradual “De-Judaization” of Jesus in the Christian Artistic Tradition

Exploring the prevalent de-contextualization of Jesus in many Christian art forms

The Strong (and Repeated) Message of Pope John Paul II:

“Those who consider the reality that Jesus was a Jew and that his milieu was the Jewish world as merely incidental cultural facts (for which it would be possible to substitute another religious tradition, from which the person of the Lord could be detached without losing his identity) not only misconstrue the meaning of salvation history but, more radically, call into question the very truth of the Incarnation” (October 1997)

**To read before next week: Patrick Gallagher, “Devil in the Details: It’s time to confront anti-Semitism in Church art” (*U.S. Catholic,* March 2019):**[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bUlBquRZ2DYBcm6C0yAxwariR63U1Pr4/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)

**Week 6 (December 7)**

Ancient Jewish Pluralism—and Grappling with the Traditional Christian Portrayal of the Pharisees  
***“Pharisee:***

1. Judaism: a member of an ancient Jewish sect that was opposed to the Sadducees, teaching strict observance of Jewish tradition as interpreted rabbinically and believing in life after death and in the coming of the Messiah

2. (often not capital) a self-righteous or hypocritical person” *(Collins English Dictionary)*

***“Pharisee:*** a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity; a self-righteous person; a hypocrite” *(Oxford English Dictionary)*

The historical evolution of the “sects/movements/schools of thought” in Second Temple Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, *Am ha-aretz* [People of the Land])

The impact of modern Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Understanding and Portraying the Pharisees

The May 2019 scholarly colloquium at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome: “Jesus and the Pharisees: An Interdisciplinary Reappraisal” (and the subsequent conference volume: Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, eds. *The Pharisees.* Eerdmans, 2021)

**To read before next week: Pope Francis’ address to a May 2019 scholarly conference on the Pharisees:**[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco\_20190509\_pont-istitutobiblico.html](about:blank)

**Week 7 (December 14)**

Situating the Events of Holy Week within Their First-Century/Second Temple Jewish Context

Passover week in Jerusalem circa AD 30

The issue of *hoi Ioudaioi* (“the Jews”) in the Gospel of John: Perspectives for preaching and prayer

Palm Sunday

Holy Thursday / Last Supper (and should Christians celebrate Seders?)

Good Friday

Easter Sunday

**To read before next week: U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Conference, “Criteria for the Evaluation of Dramatizations of the Passion,” 1988:**[https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/jewish/upload/Criteria-for-the-Evaluation-of-Dramatizations-of-the-Passion-1988.pdf](about:blank)

**Week 8 (December 21)**

Wrap-Up – Final Discussion, Consolidation and Questions

What have we learned from this journey together?  
What does it all mean?   
What questions still remain?  
Where do we go from here?

Suggestions for further learning and growing

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

**Students can pick any 4 from the following list (you are encouraged to select a variety from within these possibilities). Each assignment will be worth 25%.  
Due dates: #1: start of Week 3 class; #2: Start of Week 5 Class; #3: Start of Week 7 Class; #4: 10 days after the final class.**

1. David Brooks, “Jesus is a Jew: The ineffable becomes intelligible in Israel”. *Comment* magazine. [https://comment.org/jesus-is-a-jew/](about:blank)   
   (PDF version available at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KuAE9uDe3oBcO6iniLtoHo7FDHG0qbps/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) )  
   Carefully read David Brooks’ article about the Jewishness of Jesus. In a page and a half (single-spaced), share your reactions to this article and the ideas Brooks puts forward. In what ways do you agree with his suggestions? How might you disagree or think differently? Is his approach one you find appealing or intriguing? How might you want to respond?
2. A distinguished French Jewish historian, Dr. Jules Isaac (1877-1963) is generally recognized as one of the “founding fathers” of the modern Jewish-Christian relationship. While fleeing the Nazis during the Second World War, Isaac drafted a book that would be published in 1948 as *Jesus and Israel,* in which he (as a historian) outlined 21 points where he believed Christian theology had developed warped and inaccurate views of Judaism and Jews that urgently needed to be corrected, to uproot Christian anti-Jewish (and anti-Semitic) attitudes and actions. It is today considered a foundational classic of Jewish-Christian dialogue.  
   Read through the 21 short “propositions” that Isaac outlined in the table of contents to his 1948 book (link below), as well as his full commentary on Propositions 1 through 3. In a page and a half (single-spaced), share with me: (1) which of the 21 propositions do find the most challenging or shocking, and why? (2) what statements or insights by Isaac do you find helpful or enlightening, capable of enriching your understanding of the Jewishness of Jesus and the New Testament?  
   [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m0yoJ1Lu4-L2qKkbGQyXJk0EUWxmv8Bb/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)
3. Read Father Michel Remaud’s 1999 article, “Not One *Yod* Will Disappear” (included in his 2003 book *Évangile et tradition rabbinique.* Éditions Lessius, 2003; link: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FqrXqGKv7NsXIFIAk5B5zYU9ITeeUrg1/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) )  
   In one-and-a-half (single-spaced) pages, share with me: How might an awareness of this theme in ancient Jewish literature beyond the New Testament make you think differently about Jesus and the message of this Gospel passage? How can this help us to “insert” Jesus into the larger religious and cultural world of His time—and the ideas that probably helped to shape His own thinking and preaching? What value do you see in exploring this type of context as a background to studying and reflecting on the Gospels?
4. Read Dr. Amy-Jill Levine’s article, “Misusing Jesus: How the church divorces Jesus from Judaism” (*The Christian Century,* December 26, 2006): [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D-2\_28sORwQjWdJPL3UOsiQsS0ufwUF0/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)   
   Levine doesn’t hold back in her critique of what she sees as an insidious trend in some Christian denominations and circles: the de-Judaizing of Jesus for theological (and sometimes political) purposes. She points out how this often includes a “putting down” of “bad” Judaism in order to exalt “good” Christianity by comparison. What did you read in her article that was new or thought-provoking for you? In what ways does it challenge, or call into question, images of Jesus you received as you grew up? If you were a bishop or other church authority, what guidance (based on Levine’s comments) would you want to give to your ordained and lay leaders, about how they should (and should not) teach and preach about Judaism today?
5. Read through the provided excerpts from various (Jewish and Christian) commentaries on the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, from Luke’s Gospel ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HABz\_BykGdV-cuq1nDgeRsztzVgDSrGj/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) ). In one-and-a-half (single-spaced) pages, share with me two or three specific points from these commentaries that you personally find helpful or eye-opening in appreciating the Jewish backdrop of this important scene. Explain briefly why you found those points to be valuable for a sensitive reading and understanding of this text. What did you learn from these sources that you might not have been aware of before?
6. Read: (1) the excerpts from the 2006 book *The Christian and the Pharisee* ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mp\_ikDqMm7\_wnMFWUgZ0I-L-hB0yUB4W/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) )   
   and (2) my article on “Ferreting Out the Pharisees” ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SELZwLJuUYdoQsXOSlrmOFSXcsMZFx6i/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank) ).  
   In a page-and-a-half (single-spaced), describe your thoughts after reading through these two documents. In what ways do they sketch out a vision of the Pharisees that differs from what you might be used to? What do you find worthwhile in these two sources? How might your reading of these documents have an influence on your speaking/preaching?
7. For much of Christian history, Christian art was a medium that played a significant and influential role in de-Judaizing Jesus (subtly extracting Him from His Jewish and Middle Eastern context). Watch Dr. Bernard Starr’s documentary video “Identity Purge: The Search for the Jew in Jesus in Renaissance Art” (56 minutes; [https://youtu.be/kii5G9CgJVM](about:blank) .  
   In 1½ single-spaced pages, share your own thoughts about the points Dr. Starr has made in this video. Do a search online for two pieces of art (depicting Gospel themes or events) which visibly acknowledge and reflect the Jewishness and Middle Eastern setting of the Gospels (including skintones!); include these as part of your paper, together with whatever information you can find about the artist(s) behind them.
8. Philip Yancey’s 2008 book *The Jesus I Never Knew*, recounting his own attempt to grapple with the variety of available images of Jesus, quickly became (and has remained) a bestseller. Read through the first chapter of Yancey’s book (see link below), and share with me, in roughly 1.5 pages: (1) how does Yancey’s experience of searching for Jesus resonate with your own spiritual journey, and the images you have embraced (and perhaps needed to discard)? (2) How do the topics we’ve discussed in this course help you in refining, building (or re-building!), or renewing your own understanding of who Jesus is, and why He is important? It is a *radically* different Jesus who is emerging—or only a moderately “tweaked” version?  
   [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ck2jYRWDP0x3hL52DfRtBQymaBmnOvv5/view?usp=drive\_link](about:blank)

**Huron Grade Descriptors**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A+ | 90-100 | One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level |
| A | 80-89 | Superior work which is clearly above average |
| B | 70-79 | Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory |
| C | 60-69 | Competent work, meeting requirements |
| D | 50-59 | Fair work, minimally acceptable |
| F | below 50 | Fail |

**Student Code of Conduct**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work, and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: [https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf](about:blank).

**Statement on the Recording of Class Activities**

Students may not record or distribute any class activity, including conversations during office hours, without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student’s own private use.

Online courses within the Licentiate in Theology Program are recorded for student engagement purposes. These recording are only used by the registered students of the class and made available through a restricted video hosting site to respect both privacy and intellectual property. Should a student be uncomfortable with this practice, they can contact the course instructor or the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca

**Support Services**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should contact the LTh Program Director, Dr. Grayhame Bowcott at [grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca](mailto:grayhame.bowcott@huron.uwo.ca).

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THIS COURSE HAS BEEN [NOT YET BEEN] APPROVED BY HURON’S FACULTY OF THEOLOGY COMMITTEE

FOR THE SPRING TERM OF THE LTH PROGRAM, 2022.