

Rabbi: Jews handicapped without New Testament

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Of all the texts considered required reading in a thorough Jewish education, one major work with Jewish roots is usually missing from everyone's list: the New Testament.

Most Jews shun Christian Scripture. As a result, they can't answer Christians who ask why Jews don't accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Reform Rabbi Michael J. Cook says this "self-imposed ignorance" is dangerous.

At a time when many Christians are embracing the Jewish origins of their faith, holding Passover seders before Easter, Cook says he has taken on the

"Herculean task" of convincing Jews they must learn how the Gospels molded Christian attitudes toward Judaism.

"The New Testament is the greatest single external determinant of Jewish history, and deleteriously so in its causing Jews grievous problems," said Cook, who holds the unusual job of New Testament professor at a Jewish seminary, the Cincinnati-based Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. In a book he plans to publish next year, "Modern Jews Engage the New Testament," he will present an education plan for how Jews can learn enough to answer "why they process it

differently from Christians."

Many scholars agree that Jews would benefit from studying the Christian texts. They say it could improve interfaith relations, especially on the local level where rabbis are expected to work with fellow clergy from other denominations. It also would help when public debates arise—like the controversy about how Jews were depicted in the Mel Gibson movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Many outsiders viewed Jewish objections to the film as an affront to Christianity, damaging relations between the two faiths. Cook said most Jews had no idea how to explain their concerns about the script—even to their own children.

However, the scholars also say there are too many other pressing issues in Jewish education—including the increasing secularization of Jews—to make New Testament learning a priority.

Burt Visotsky, a longtime professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the flagship institution for Conservative Judaism, said many rabbinical students enroll at the seminary without strong backgrounds in their own religion—let alone Christianity and other faiths.

"In an ideal world, of course we'd train our students to know something about Christianity and also Islam," said Visotsky, who teaches Midrash and inter-religious studies. "But where is it on the triage list? I'm afraid not very high."

Jewish aversion to the New Testament is rooted in both religious law and historical experience.

Some passages in early rabbinic literature bar Jews from reading the Gospels, Cook said. The Talmud, the compilation of Jewish law,

reinforces this point by prohibiting Jews from saving the Gospels from a fire even

though the name of God is written in them, said Jacob

Neusner, a Bard College professor and expert on Judaism and Christianity.

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A well-meaning church member will say: "I just can't see God hardening anybody's heart." Well, one day I could not see it. But from Genesis to Revelation, God's Reprobation and Election go side by side: there's the reprobate on one hand, and the elect on the other hand. Your trouble is you will not believe God's Word. January of this year found me serving on the grand jury. It was also around that time that my little cousin, 16 years of age, was charged with assaulting the assistant principal of the school. When the case was first brought to me, I reserved my judgment until I could get all the facts on what happened. I accompanied her and her mother, along with others, to a meeting with school officials. To make a long story short, my little cousin did not assault the assistant principal. As her uncle in a far-away state rightly stated it: "This was an assault on a female student. I don't know what you all are going to do about it." And he works in the criminal justice system in his state. A local magistrate temporarily agreed with my out-of-state cousin. But the local officials gave in to "pressure" and charged my cousin with simple assault on a government official. At the Great White Throne Judgment, the assistant principal will be on trial for his wrongs. You local officials can't see that because it is hidden from you. (Rom. 11:7) The sad part of the story is that my cousin's mother gave in to the pressure and forced her daughter to lie to the court, making her admit she assaulted the assistant principal. The daughter told a family member just before the trial that she didn't want to plead guilty. I spent hours researching the laws and talking with legal experts and law enforcement officials about the case. Having spent five years licensed office by the attorney general as a private protective service officer, I knew from my own classroom training she was not guilty as charged. I could not find one lawyer or law enforcement official whom I talked to who would agree that she committed a physical assault. Another sad part of that story is that my cousin, who was representing her in court, went along with the lie.

Job's reflections

Continued from page 5B

where was he when He laid the foundation of the earth? In other words Job, were you there when the frame of the earth was created? Then God commanded Job to answer Him, if he can. Prove that you were in the same place as I when the earth was fashioned and explain in precise detail without error how it came to be. In vs. 16, God asked Job if he has been to the "springs of the sea" or to the "depth" (which refers to the same place)? Here God is asking Job if he knows about the creativity of the waters. Job, do you know what lies at the very pit of the sea? Or how many grains of sand are in the ocean? Or why the waters never overflow the earth? Job had never been so far beneath the surface of the planet that he could observe the source of the ocean. In vs. 17, God asked rhetorically whether Job had seen the entryway to Sheol - by making this connection, God was indicating that His control extends to issues of life and death. Job did not really understand these matters, either.

Note: God never told Job about the reason for his pain, about the conflict between Himself and Satan, which was the reason for Job's suffering. He never gave Job any explanation at all about the circumstances of his trouble.

3 How did Job respond to God's challenge? (42:1-6) After God's first interrogation of Job, there was a second interrogation (40:6-41:34). After all of this, Job still did not know why he suffered so profoundly, but he was done complaining, questioning, and challenging God's wisdom and justice.

He was reduced to such utter humility, crushed beneath the weight of God's greatness, that all he could do was repent for his insolence. Without answers to all of his questions, Job quietly bowed in humble submission before his Creator and admitted that God was sovereign and that it is pointless to challenge His ways.

By contrast, Job's power and understanding were so small that he could not rightly challenge God's fairness.

The only thing Job could do was confess and repent.

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