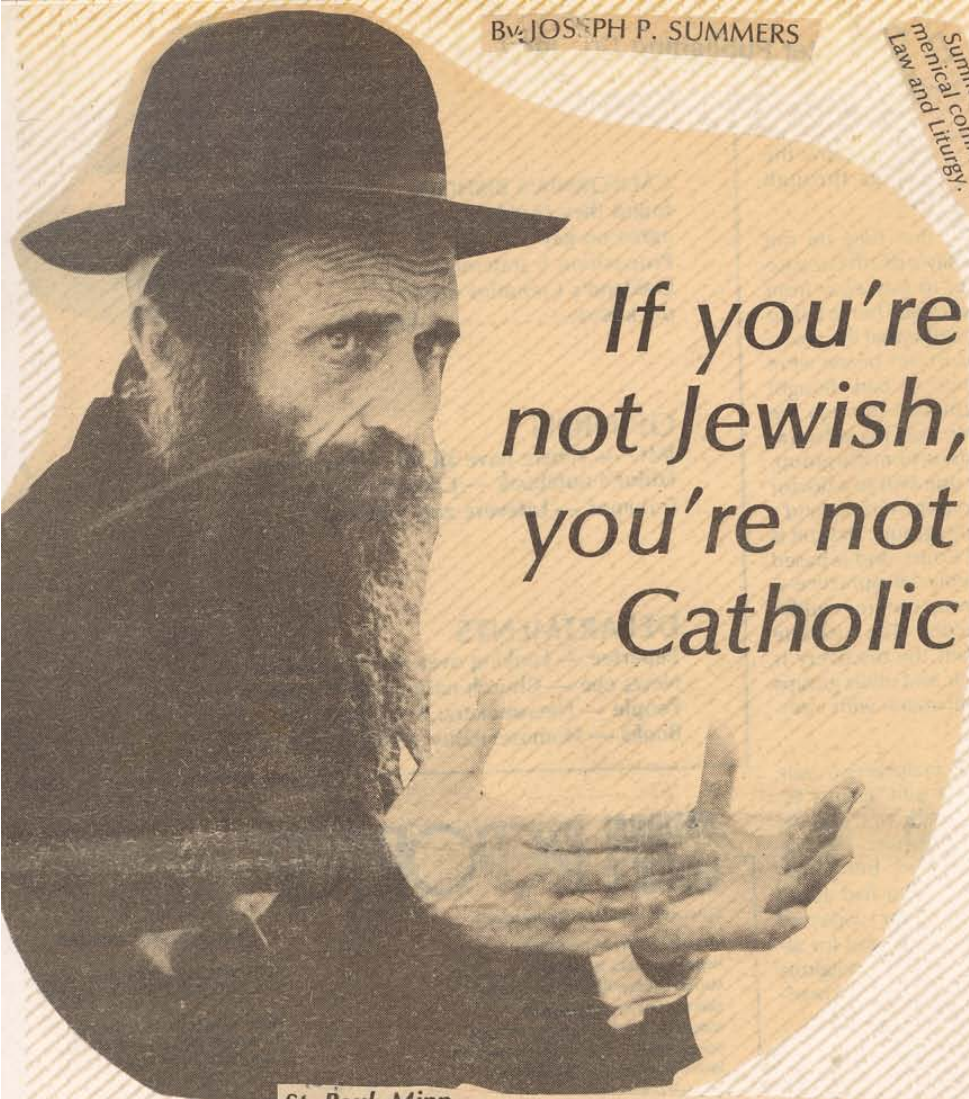


By JOSEPH P. SUMMERS

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If you're not Jewish, you're not Catholic

St. Paul, Minn.

AN NCR FEATURE

SURVEYS WILL DISCLOSE that American Catholics start way ahead of most denominations when it comes to thinking well of Jews.

True, I was 18 before I found out *sheenie* was not a term of endearment, and my sainted grandmother had me quite convinced that the man in the long coat who picked up rags and scrap was somehow selling it straight to the Japanese army. But Catholics, more than others, seem willing to throw off ancestral attitudes towards Jews.

These attitudes have roots in Christian beliefs and practices which go back hundreds — if not thousands — of years.

To start, we have to look at our New Testament in a different way than we're used to.

Our oldest gospel is that of Mark. The most recent gospel is John. These two gospels were written at least 40 years apart, and perhaps as much as 60 years apart. Matthew and Luke fall somewhere in between.

Mark, the oldest gospel, never uses the word *Jew* to describe the enemies of Jesus. In fact, the word only occurs once in the entire gospel of Mark — and then on the lips of Pontius Pilate.

In John, on the other hand, the word *Jew* is used upwards of 50 times and it almost always means something nasty. Taken as a whole, one could consider John downright anti-Semitic.

In the gospel of Mark, there's a story you are all familiar with because it's read frequently from the altar:

One of the scribes who had listened to them debating and had observed how well Jesus had answered them, now came up and put a question to him, "Which is the

first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "This is the first: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." The scribe said to Him, "Well spoken, Master; what You have said is true; that He is one and there is no other.

Now that prayer, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the One," is the central prayer of Judaism, the *Sh'ma*. The rest of what Jesus said is also pure Jewish doctrine as preached by the Pharisees of his time. The compliment from the scribe — "Well spoken, Master" — is an honest, forthright compliment. In Mark, Christ always talks just like the Jew he is.

By the time Matthew was written — at least the version of Matthew we have today — the tone is ugly, not friendly:

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert Him, one of them put a question, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus said, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.

These are reports of the same incident. But by the time of Matthew the *Sh'ma* had been edited out to make Jesus less Jewish, and the Pharisee, instead of asking an honest question, is painted as trying to "disconcert" Jesus. In some translations, the word is "trip him up."

This example sticks in my mind because I was at a wedding recently at which the priest — with no evil intent — chose the Matthew version. I remember thinking, "Why do we pick the version that makes the Jews look bad?"

The answer, of course, is that we don't even think of it — yet who can tell the lingering effects, especially upon the young, of hearing week after week from the pulpit Scripture readings which paint the Jews in a bad light? Shouldn't we at least consider picking our readings more carefully?

Another example:

In both Mark and John, Joseph of Arimathea claims the body of Jesus after his death. Mark has it thus:

There came Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, who himself lived in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God, and he *boldly* went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. (author's italics.)

By the time you get to John, Joseph almost has to sneak in:

After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus — *though a secret one for fear of the Jews* — asked Pilate to let him remove the body of Jesus. (author's italics.)

When you read your own Bible, you will see other differences between Mark and the later Gospels on this subject of Jews. In Mark, most Jews are the good guys. Only the chief priests and the elders, who were a minority political party, are the bad guys. By the time you get to John, all the Jews are bad guys. One wonders, in fact, if John's Christ is a Gentile.

These are good historical reasons why the Jews had become the villains by the time John was written; but they have to do with the domestic politics of the time, not with revelation. When the Jews rose against the Romans in A.D. 70, the Christianized Jews were conscientious objectors. The Christians in Jerusalem fled to what is now Syria. This didn't endear them to the survivors of the Jews who had died in the siege of Jerusalem. If our recent experience with those who fled to Canada or Sweden to avoid serving in Vietnam is any indication, there would have been a lot of strong emotions both ways.

By the time the gospel of John was written, the split between Jew and Christian which resulted from these wartime emotions had hardened into hatred.

The increasing hostility of the gospel writers to the Jews has not received enough scholarly attention. This is unfortunate, especially since John, the latest gospel, shows Christ more God-like than do the other gospels and thus is used a great deal for Sunday readings. It ought to be possible to tell our people about the Jewish Messiah who founded our religion without casting aspersions on his people.

By the middle of the second century A.D., St. Irenaeus could write that the Romans had been permitted by God to destroy Jerusalem because the Jews had killed Christ.

This image of the Jew as forever cursed has been part of the popular Christian cult until recently. In grade school, I got the impression that when the people of Jerusalem said to Pilate, "His blood be upon us and upon our children," it was all over for the Jews. No one explained that this seemingly violent imprecation was a Talmudic oath used in capital trials and should not be understood as an intentional curse of an entire people.

On the liturgical front, Jews took a heavy beating, especially in the Holy Week liturgy. In my youth, I puzzled over this prayer in the Good Friday mass:

Let us pray also for the faithless Jews; that our God and Lord would withdraw the veil from their hearts; that they may also acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ.

Almighty and eternal God, who drivest not away from Thy mercy even the faithless Jews: Hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people; that acknowledging the light of Thy truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness.

This prayer is found at that point in the Good Friday liturgy when after each prayer, we used to sing *Flectamus Genua . . . Levate* ("Let us kneel . . . arise"). The prayer for the Jews is the only one we didn't kneel after, because it was considered improper in 9th century France to kneel for the Jews.

One of the first things Pope John did was to get that word "faithless" out of there, and after Vatican II, the whole thing was rewritten. But that's the way it was for about 1,400 years.

Since on Good Friday we traditionally had heavy doses of the gospel of John, it is not for nothing that Jews in Europe learned to stay indoors towards the end of Holy Week. It was not uncommon as late as the 19th century for Christians to tear hell out of the Jewish sections of Russian villages after Good Friday services. The slogan for these pogroms was "Hep!", a Latin abbreviation for "Jerusalem is destroyed."

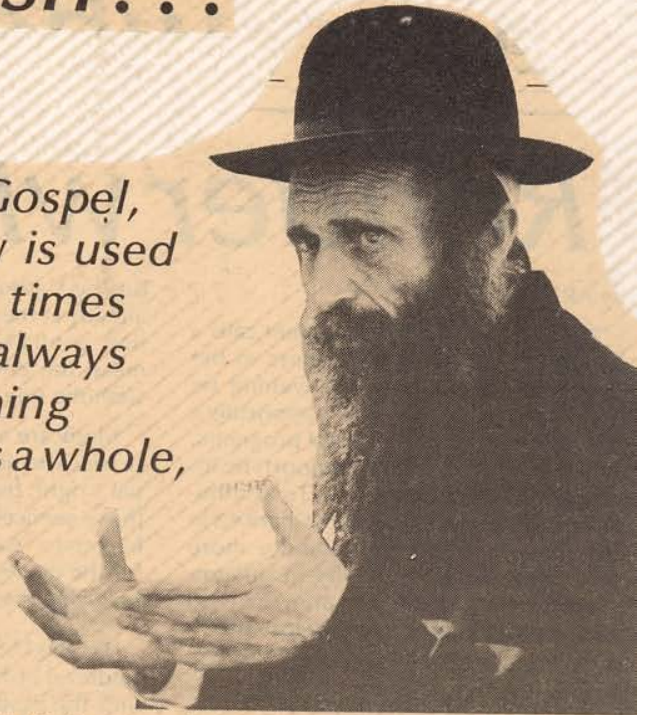
Of course, for a long time it was illegal for Jews to go outdoors during Holy Week. This was decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. That Council also required Jews to pay church taxes on their houses and a special tax at Easter, and prohibited Christians from hiring Jews.

Worst of all, the Lateran Council of 1215 required all Jews to wear badges on their coats. These badges, popularly known as the "marks of Cain," were a yellow wheel in France and Germany, two tablets embroidered with the Ten Commandments in Hebrew in England, and, in Vienna, a pointed cap with horns on it. This practice of requiring a "Jew badge" continued for centuries and cropped up again uncomfortably close to our own time. Hitler didn't invent it.

I don't walk around feeling guilty because of something my ancestors did. The Jews of today are not guilty of the death of Christ, and I am not guilty of Buchenwald.

If you're not Jewish . . .

In St. John's Gospel, "the word Jew is used upwards of 50 times and it almost always means something nasty. Taken as a whole, one could consider John downright anti-Semitic."



Yet we must recognize, as did Vatican II, that many present myths of anti-Semitism are rooted in age-old Christian practice and law, and in some of our Scripture. We can take steps to moderate or eliminate these obsolete hangovers of ancient hatreds.

Vatican II said, "Let's have an end to all this." The Council stated officially — for the first time by an official church body — that the Jews are not to be presented as cursed by God?

Many changes have eliminated anti-Semitism in the liturgy. The Good Friday prayer has been completely rewritten. The Reproaches of the Jews in the Good Friday liturgy have now been eliminated, since they could not be cleaned up. When the passion of John is read, the congregation now reads aloud the words put in the mouths of the people of Jerusalem, to try to make it clear that it is all people by their sin, not the Jew down the street, who are symbolically responsible for the death of Christ. There is a growing sentiment to drop parts of John entirely out of the mass readings.

The American bishops have gone beyond the bare words of the Council document. In November 1975, the U.S. bishops adopted guidelines for relations between Catholics and Jews. These guidelines, which are now official church policy, make clear Catholics' continuing duty to be respectful of our Jewish heritage and of

those Jews who represent that heritage in the modern world:

Christians have not fully appreciated their own Jewish roots. . . . The Jewishness of Jesus, of His mother, . . . that Jesus was called Rabbi, that He was born, lived, and died under the Law (of Moses), that He and Peter and Paul worshiped in the Temple — these facts are blurred by the controversy that alienated Christians from the synagogue. . . . Some catechists, homilists and teachers still convey little appreciation of the Jewishness of that heritage and rich spirituality which we derive from Abraham, Moses, prophets, psalmists and other spiritual giants of the Hebrew scriptures. . . . Most essential concepts in the Christian creed grew at first in Judaic soil.

The U.S. bishops propose three steps be taken immediately:

(1) That all dioceses create an agency to further deeper understanding by Catholics and Jews of their mutual heritage.

(2) That preachers pay special attention to the presentation of Scripture to promote among Catholics a genuine appreciation of the special place of the Jewish people as God's first-chosen.

(3) That Catholic scholars pay more attention to those documents which deal with the relationships of the church to Judaism.

We could well add a fourth: that Catholic lay people recognize in their minds and hearts that Catholicism is first, last and always Jewish — or it is not Christian.