

# "Mind the Gap": Bridging One Dozen Lacunae in Jewish-Catholic Dialogue



## **"Mind the Gap": Bridging One Dozen Lacunae in Jewish-Catholic Dialogue**



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We, at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in Cincinnati, were privileged for months to host the 2,200 square-foot exhibit entitled: "A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People." Created at Cincinnati's Xavier University,<sup>1</sup> after seven years of traveling to at least sixteen other venues it returned to Cincinnati to grace our campus' main entrance. (See handout, p. 1.)

The exhibit proceeds through four 1>> BDChs





## SEVEN GENERAL "GAPS"

### **"Mind the Gap" #1: *Theological* Compared to *Historical* Discourse**

Most Jewish participants assess our Jewish-Catholic dialogue as conducted primarily in *theological* terms. Yet not theology but ethnicity, culture, ethical *mitzvot* (or commandments), and especially history generally constitute the core elements of Jews' self-definition. Since it is the history of past centuries that has brought us into our modern relationship, Jews may feel that to close this gap — in the interest of dialogue and even "bonding" — requires us to proceed *historically* more so than theologically, and that this includes not only quoting but commencing

Cardinal Bernadin had instructed that minding this kind of gap required "restor[ing] to ... Catholic teaching materials ... the full story of the Church's treatment of Jews over the centuries" so that Christians today will no longer be mystified as to what *Nostra Aetate* was trying to mind and mend. Indeed, we may even be faced here with an unfortunate reversal, as illustrated now in Gap #3 (continuing the handout, p. 2).

### **"Mind the Gap" #3: Christian Religious Antisemitism in Relation to the Holocaust**

A Jewish historian

his? This is one of those considerations which my book terms "Gospel Dynamics."<sup>18</sup> Are the *Notes* themselves "minding a gap" between, on the one hand, how the historical Jesus actually comported himself and, on the other, how the Gospel writers enlisted and adjusted his image decades later to address problems of *their* day?

**"Mind the Gap" #5: Juxtaposing New Testament to Jewish Scripture or Rabbinic Literature?** (Handout, top of p. 3.)

It is Catholic directives — the *Guidelines*, thereafter the *Notes* — that began urging Christians to

risen Christ and ... on these grounds ... a Christian reading of the Old Testament ... does not necessarily coincide with the Jewish reading."<sup>23</sup>

The "gap" here is less that Catholics and Jews read Jewish Scripture differently than that some consequences of typology may have come to threaten the Jewish people's very survival ô and *this* dimension of the "gap" goes unrecognized. For example, how are we together to process the parallelism between Jesus' Passion and that of Jeremiah? (Turn now to "Mind the Gap #6," the bulk of p. 3 of the handout.)

#### **Is This *Jesus*?**

Long ago, there lived a righteous Jew who spoke for God. Defying the religious establishment, he aroused enmity from Jewish priests. Demanding they amend their ways, he threatened destruction of the Temple ("a den of robbers")! The priests threatened him with death. He warned that they could bring innocent blood upon themselves. The vacillating civil authority summoned and pronounced him innocent, expressing reluctance to heed his accusers' demands. As the just man warned, the Temple was later destroyed.

#### **This is *Jeremiah***

The



ōHe is in your hands ...ö (38:5)	it yourselvesö (Mt 27:24)
Wanting a private conversation, öZedekiah sent for Jeremiahö (38:14)	Wanting a private conversation, öPilate ... called Jesusö to him (Jn 18:33)
Zedekiah was öafraidö (38:19)	Pilate was öthe more afraidö (Jn 19:8)

### **The "Bull's-Eye" Analogy**

A farmer once arrayed his barn wall with bull's-eyes, with an arrow piercing the center of each. But appearances differed from reality: he had shot the arrows first and only thereafter painted a bull's-eye around each! The end result looked the same but not to someone who knew the underlying process. We should be dialoguing over this "gap" in perception: the degree to which passages perceived as Jewish Scriptural predictions are "arrows shot first," with Jesus' Gospel image a bull's-eye framed to surround them.

Some resultant choices include these three: (1) Was the Jewish Bible *fulfilled by* Jesus? (2) Was Jesus' image *conformed to match* the Jewish Bible? Or (3) did Jesus himself cite the Jewish Bible (as in quoting Jeremiah 7:11), and thereafter was, in turn, himself *further conformed* to it? Here constructive is the solution of Raymond Brown: that not only might Gospel narrators have created incidents "to give scriptural flavor," but from incidents that did actually occur narrators dramatized those capable of echoing the scriptures.<sup>24</sup>

The core problem here is that no section of the Gospels has proven more dangerous to Jews than the

that genuine siblings can only derive from an *identical* gene pool, no matter how much the siblings may come to diverge later on. Many Jews are discomfited, then, by the question: how did an allegedly identical gene pool come to generate fundamental elements of early Christianity not traceable to Judaism's own heritage? Examples: Incarnation, sacrifice for others' sins (eventually, for Original Sin), the Eucharist, vicarious identification with a dying and rising deity — all elements with which Rabbinic Judaism is not attuned and, indeed, opposed? Do these elements owe no derivation or indebtedness whatsoever to an antecedent *Greco-Roman* context?

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How widely representative of Jews are my first proposed seven "gaps"? I feel that each would elicit a fair measure of resonance — and that even Jews who have not heard some of these articulated before would now readily agree with them upon experiencing a first exposure.

### **FIVE (5) MORE "GAPS" FROM MAJOR NEW TESTAMENT SOURCES**

The remaining five "gaps" (of my nominal dozen) address the problem of what may be missing when we interpret, in isolation from their wider context, New Testament texts commonly cited as key to dialogue. I draw on five: one each, respectively, from Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, but there are dozens of others like them. Each of these five "gaps" is the space between how, on the one hand, the texts are cited in isolation and how, on the other, they could be differently interpreted if only their *panoramic* context were also explored (which I do not find sufficiently done). Too narrow a wrestling with New Testament texts is the single greatest obstacle for me to "bonding" — one not enumerated by Fr. Pawlikowki.

**"Minding the Gap" #8: PAUL — Do We Misapply Romans 9-11?** (See handout, p. 5.)

An example of a possibly missing "panorama," even if but speculative: The second-century Roman historian Suetonius mentions a disturbance in Rome's Jewish quarter, apparently during the late 40's, caused by a certain "Chrestus," sufficiently disruptive that the Emperor Claudius banished at least some Jews from the city.<sup>26</sup> By "Chrestus" did Suetonius mean "Christ"? Did the disturbances stem from Jews' reaction to Christian missionizing in Rome's Jewish quarter? Did Claudius' action also alter Rome's Christian demographics,

surrounding the notion that there was a formal Sanhedrin trial [of Jesus] argue for extreme caution and, perhaps, even abandoning the device."<sup>27</sup> Yet the content of the Sanhedrin episode continues as a regular feature in many dialogue sessions. The import of the gap between the Bishops' document and our customary dialogue is that, second only to the Barabbas episode, the Sanhedrin trial is *the* Gospel episode of most devastating impact on countless Jews throughout history (just think of Mel Gibson's dramatization of it!<sup>28</sup>). We cannot successfully talk about "bonding" today without a meticulous examination of whether the key Gospel passages so deleterious to Jews throughout history are now declared re-understood by Christians themselves.

The missing panorama? Keeping in mind that Mark is here the primary source for Matthew and Luke, let us focus on our handout's p. 5, at the bottom ô Diagram 12.3 ô leaving out the separate and in my view later tradition of Peter's denial.<sup>29</sup> Examine here the second line from the bottom: Mk 15:1's report of a brief Friday morning "consultation" by Jewish leaders, in Jesus' absence, over what to do with their captive?

At least as an observation, read the diagram without the gray arrow (that contains a concentrated report of the supposed Sanhedrin trial):

**14:53** "And they led Jesus to the high priest .... **15:1** And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, ... held a *consultation*; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate."

Here "the chief priests, with the elders and scribes held a consultation." How simply, yet sufficiently, the story-line proceeds without the shaded arrow ô the Sanhedrin trial.<sup>30</sup> Evidently, the "consultation" and the trial appear redundant. Could we not have had the second without the first?

I believe that Christian tradition belatedly came to deem the mere Friday morning "consultation" as so demeaning for the Son of God as to motivate aggrandizing Friday's morning's fleeting "consultation" into a full-fledged trial the previous night, before the Sanhedrin, greatest court of the land. ("Aggrandizing" is another example of what I term "Gospel Dynamics," with

This would explain why the previous night's "trial" oddly renders Friday morning's "consultation" superfluous ô what would remain to discuss by the same personnel, now mysteriously summoned anew, that was not already decided just hours before? Friday morning's mere "consultation," then, would be the earlier tradition and the previous night's trial crafted and belatedly inserted thereafter.<sup>33</sup>

This would likewise explain why Jesus' two radically different demeanors inside the Sanhedrin ô *silence*, then *stridence* ô are traceable to a harnessing of the figure of Jesus to two clashing proof-texts from later Christianity (handout bottom of p. 6):

His *silence* conformed to Isaiah 53:7's Suffering Servant: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

His *stridence* matched to Daniel 7:13's Son of man text, "... with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of man," together with Psalm 110:1: "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand ....'"

To be noticed also (handout Diagram 12:7) is the *structure* of the high priest's two questions to Jesus at night: it seems to parallel that of Pilate's two questions to Jesus following Friday morning's "consultation":

*Questioning Jesus' SILENCE*

HIGH PRIEST: 14:60 ... the high priest ... asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"

PILATE: 15:4 ... Pilate ... asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you."

*Specifying Jesus' CRIME*

HIGH PRIEST: 14:61 ... the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

PILATE: 15:2 ... Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Is this parallel structure coincidental? If not, then was the structure of Pilate's queries literarily modeled on that of the high priest's, or the reverse? I believe the reverse. Given

In the light of further ramifications

synagogue worship Jesus' proclamation of his Messiahship?<sup>38</sup> When Jesus begins developing an anti-Jewish pro-Gentile message,<sup>39</sup> his audience rejects, then ejects, him. Why then enlist this episode as proving Jesus' Jewishness rather than Luke's theology? Does it, instead, reflect Luke's need to account for Christianity's rejection by Jews of Luke's own time — which he presents as foreshadowed by Jesus' (alleged) rejection by people of his native town: again retrojection from the 90s?

The missing panoramic context here, then, is that Mark and Matthew relate Jesus' visit to Nazareth's synagogue, but they tell us nothing about his reading here the text from the prophets, and therefore nothing here of Jesus' alleged anti-Jewish interpretation thereof. While our predisposition may be to accept as historically true any text (here, one in Luke) unless proven otherwise, only by asking *panoramic* questions do we "mind this gap."

### **"Mind the Gap" #12: JOHN — Why Counter "Jews" (~~Judeans~~) with Jesus, Not with the Disciples?**

A fundamental contrast in John is alleged to be the diametric opposition between "the Jews" versus Jesus. This explains the profoundly dangerous impact that John exerted on Jews throughout history: for in so far as Jesus, in John, is deemed God as well as the Christ, John can be construed as presenting God Himself as antisemitic. To avoid this conclusion

Arrange the three protagonists as an isosceles triangle, with the "disciples" at one base at the lower left, "the Jews" at the other base at the lower right, with Jesus at the pinnacle  $\hat{\circ}$  with Jesus transcending both parties. So depicted, opposing "the Jews" are "the disciples." *Belief* comes into the two-columned diagram where "the disciples" (on the left) model those who believe despite all discouragement, and "the Jews" (on the right) symbolizing those who disbelieve in the face of all compelling evidence. So understood, John's paramount concern is not anti-Judaism but rather challenging unbelievers to become believers. This would account for the term'