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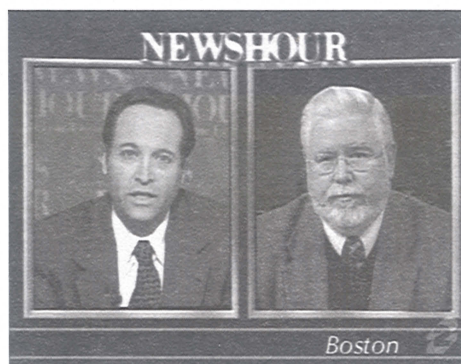
**CENTER FOR****CHRISTIAN-JEWISH LEARNING****AT BOSTON COLLEGE**

*This Annual Report is dedicated to the memory of John Corcoran '48 for his dedication to Jewish-Christian understanding. His vision led him in 2000 to donate to Boston College the establishing grant for the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning.*

**Center Plays Prominent Role in Gibson *Passion* Debate****LESSONS LEARNED****FROM THE CONTROVERSY**

by Philip A. Cunningham, Center Exec. Dir.

Whatever one thinks of the virtues or deficiencies of the Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of the Christ*, all would agree that the controversy surrounding its release generated widespread public discourse about a topic that for centuries poisoned interactions between Jews and Christians; namely, responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. The intense media attention to the issue provides an occasion to assess certain aspects of current Christian-Jewish relations in the United States.



*Philip Cunningham discusses the Gibson film with arts correspondent Jeffrey Brown on PBS' The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.*

**TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE**  
by Ruth Langer, Center Assoc. Dir.

"Do you really think that I would attack Jews?" was the insulted response of a Catholic Boston College undergraduate to my raising concerns about Mel Gibson's then forthcoming *The Passion of the Christ*. Only rather grudgingly did he attend a mandatory evening program where Philip Cunningham addressed the conflict between Catholic biblical teachings and what was known in advance about the film. When, on national television, Diane Sawyer asked Mel Gibson, "Are you an antisemite?" he too recoiled in horror. Contemporary Catholics have indeed learned

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**CENTER SPONSORS ORTHODOX JEWISH FORUM****Orthodox Jews and Theological Interfaith Dialogue**

For most of the modern history of Christian-Jewish dialogue, the Jewish participants, particularly in America, have been non-orthodox. In no small measure, this was due to an article published in 1964 by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (the Rav) called "Confrontation" and subsequent statements made by the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America that were understood by many to forbid dialogue between Jews and Christians. In actuality, though, the Rav's instructions were more nuanced. They explicitly encouraged dialogue

that brought Jews and Christians together to confront common issues of social justice; they discouraged theological dialogue that might result in Christian demands that Jews deviate from received tradition. Underlying the whole was a suspicion of Christian interest in dialogue that grew from a deep historical consciousness and the recent experience of the Holocaust.

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# In Grateful Memory of John Corcoran

The Boston College community mourns the death of John Corcoran on October 22, 2003. An alum (class of '48), benefactor, and trustee of Boston College, Mr. Corcoran also provided the foundational endowment for the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning.

A first-generation Irish American, Mr. Corcoran was born in Dorchester in 1923. Having earned a fortune in real estate development, he was very committed to philanthropy and to responsible citizenship. In addition to his generous support of his alma mater, Boston College, Mr. Corcoran sponsored numerous worthwhile projects throughout greater Boston, including the St. Mary's Women and Infant Center in Dorchester, inner city parochial schools, the Anti-Defamation League's Torch of Liberty Award dinner, and many speaker and lecture series.

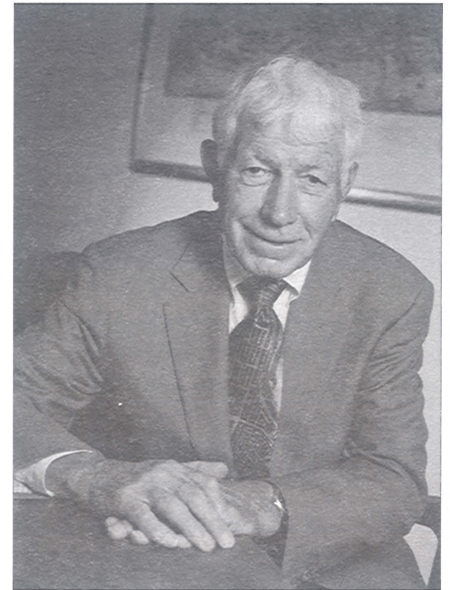
In 1998, during the public debates over the recently issued Vatican document, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, Mr. Corcoran expressed his desire to president William P. Leahy, S.J. that Boston College take a prominent role in the improvement of Catholic-Jewish relations. "As a boy growing up, he saw prejudice against members of the Jewish community," Fr. Leahy noted.

At a dinner held in his honor in 2001, Mr. Corcoran recounted his experiences as a boy in unwittingly hawking copies of Fr. Charles Coughlin's antisemitic writings on the Boston Common. Especially after serving in the military with Jewish Americans in the Second World War (he was one of the first Americans to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day), he vowed that if he ever had the means to do so he would promote understanding between Jews and Christians.

His dedication to this goal led him in 2000 to donate over five million dollars to establish the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning. In accordance with his wishes, the Center is committed to encouraging mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews at every level through academic research and dialogue, educational programs, and the development of resources locally, nationally, and internationally. A special concern of his was that the Center's work really have positive effects on relationships between Jews and Christians in local synagogue and church communities.

"He was very giving and generous," observed Fr. Leahy. "He didn't like the limelight, but he did so much good."

Inspired and grateful for his vision and generosity, the Center renews its commitment to the mission that was so important to John M. Corcoran. May his name be a blessing for years to come!



John Corcoran

## Center Begins Work on Major Jewish Resource

AN ANNOTATED SOURCEBOOK OF JEWISH TEXTS AND TEACHINGS ON NON-JEWS

Under the direction of Ruth Langer, the Center is beginning the process of designing an internet-based sourcebook of Jewish texts and teachings about non-Jews. This sourcebook, to be hosted on the Center's website, will collect and present these materials as a resource for Jews engaged in interreligious dialogue and for non-Jews who wish to understand Judaism better. Drs. Eugene Korn and Shira Lander will serve as co-editors.

This open-ended project will assemble texts from all periods of Jewish history and all genres of Jewish writing. Non-literary sources will be included as well. It will present each text in its original language and

in English translation, accompanied by a scholarly introduction and annotation. These last will provide historical context and explain how the source contributes to Jewish thought about other religions. Where the texts, or aspects of them, are "difficult" because their language or ideas fly in the face of contemporary sensibilities, the annotation will explore this honestly, suggesting strategies for reading and applying the texts today.

We plan to post the first texts soon. Please look out for them on the website!



# Reflections from the Center's First Visiting Researcher

by Audrey Doetzel, NDS

During his visit to Boston College on November 5-6, 2002 Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Biblical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, called centers for Christian-Jewish Relations a gift to the universal church. My time as a guest at the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College since January 2004 has been proving to me, in a very personal way, the truth of his words.

In July 2003 I finished ten years of full-time work in promoting interfaith understanding through *Christian-Jewish Relation and Encounter*, a ministry of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in North America. [The Sisters of Sion were founded in Paris in 1842 with a specific focus on the Christian-Jewish relationship. During the years of the *Shoah* and following, the Community gradually changed its mission from praying for the conversion of Jews to one of Christian-Jewish reconciliation and understanding. In 1965 Vatican II confirmed this new vision.] I was based in New York City, with its large and diverse Jewish community. Contact and collaboration with the interfaith departments at the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, interaction with Jewish Theological Seminary and Hebrew Union College, participation in the New York Diocese's Catholic-Jewish Dialogue all very quickly became part of my life. Living in and working from this international center facilitated involvement in a variety of local, national and international Christian-Jewish efforts, such as serving on the Advisory Committee on Catholic-Jewish Relations of the U.S. Bishops, being a Catholic delegate at the 2001 Catholic-Jewish International Liaison Committee Meeting in New York, and editing *SIDIC*, the international *Christian-Jewish Review* published in Rome. As an educator and a Sister of Sion I sought ways to bring the fruits of the Christian-Jewish encounter to educators and ministers in schools and parishes, with a major focus on the various dimensions of our new understanding of Christianity's rootedness in Judaism, and the history and lessons of the *Shoah*.

In the course of these ten years in New York, insights and issues compelled me almost daily to seek a deeper theological understanding, but the time and space for serious reflection and study were not available. Now I needed time to follow where my personal cutting edge questions were leading me, with the opportunity to express some of this in writing. The Center for Christian-Jewish Learning opened its doors

to me, welcoming me as a Visiting Researcher and inviting me to be a part of the life of the Center.

The past several months have been like an oasis of learning, with a private working space, access to the Boston Theological Institute libraries, and opportunities to attend a variety of courses and lectures. Very quickly I have also become connected with the Boston area Christian-Jewish and ecumenical community, including the Boston Archdiocese, Hebrew College, the local AJC and ADL, and the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

The building of new, positive relationships between Jews and Christians is still in its early stages, and for those involved it is often a matter of "learn as you go" since there are, as yet, no blueprints for this work. It can easily become a lonely space, since the "laborers in this vineyard" are still too few – and those few are highly motivated and intensely committed but frequently without sufficient, effective networking opportunities.

For me this opportunity for reflection, research and writing while also immersed in the life of an academic Center where the Christian-Jewish relationship is alive and thriving, is a time of replenishing the well. I sincerely thank the Center's Director and Associate Director for helping to make this possible. I know there are others out in the field who would welcome and benefit from a similar experience. It is my hope that the Center at Boston College and similar Centers throughout the country will increasingly make this possible.

## Join Our Listserve!

To be notified of news on Christian-Jewish relations, Center activities and additions to our expanding website, join our e-mail listserv today. Go to our home page at [www.bc.edu/cjlearning](http://www.bc.edu/cjlearning) and click on "Join our listserv."



## 1. Contrasting Perceptions

Public debate over the Gibson film has made it ever more apparent that because Christians and Jews construct their respective communal memories very differently, they can find it difficult to understand each other.

Christians often do not appreciate the feelings of anxiety and alarm that arise among Jews when the crucifixion of Jesus becomes a highly visible and public topic. Jews as a community remember that over the centuries Christian retellings of the story of the crucifixion of Jesus regularly led to persecutions. Since the *Shoah* occurred in the heart of “Christian” Europe, many Jews place that abominable genocide in the same category as those other outrages that were explicitly perpetrated under the sign of the cross. Many Jews have also personally experienced being called “Christ-killer.”

Having little familiarity with Christian ideas about salvation, Jewish moviegoers were mystified by the intense emotional response of some Christian viewers to questions about *The Passion of the Christ*. Jewish teachings about messianic times and divine redemption make it difficult to comprehend the utter centrality of this element of Christian faith. For Jews, Jesus is but one of thousands whom the Romans crucified during this period, and neither his death nor that of the others brought an end to human suffering.

Christians, on the other hand, are generally ignorant of the antisemitic manner in which their ancestors habitually told the story of the Passion of Jesus. Most Christians today are honestly unfamiliar with the centuries-old Christian charge that “the Jews” were guilty of “deicide” – killing God (or God’s divine Son) – and so accursed. Since the *Shoah*, virtually all churches have ceased to teach this notion of a divine curse on Jews. As a result, many Christians are actually bewildered when they hear it, not understanding how, if it was Jesus’ death that saves, Jews could be punished for it. Most Christians simply don’t know that the deicide charge was conveyed for centuries in Christian art and music, preaching and theatre, often in connection with Passion-related observances. Therefore, many Christians are baffled when others express alarm about the antisemitic possibilities of a current

retelling of the Passion. More concerned with confronting the prevailing secularization of western society today, those Christians who view the world as divided between belief and unbelief naturally ask, “Why can’t we just depict and proclaim our faith without being attacked or criticized? Is religion so odious in our culture?”

These contrasting perceptions of the Jewish and Christian communities can be bridged only by experiences of trust-building and open interreligious dialogue among people who have become friends. A process for local Christian and Jewish congregations, *Walking God’s Paths: Christians and Jews in Candid Conversation*, is one tool that can help Jews and Christians enter into each other’s traditions and frames of reference (see [www.bc.edu/wgp](http://www.bc.edu/wgp)).

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## 2. An Impoverishment of the Christian Tradition

Recent public conversation has also revealed a widespread lack of appreciation for the richness and diversity of Christian thinking about the Passion. Many commentators, Jewish and Christian, seem to feel that there is a single, universal understanding of the redemptive meaning of the cross: the highly

problematic idea of “substitutionary atonement,” whereby, in order to appease God, Jesus endures unimaginable pain by taking upon himself the just punishment deserved by all humanity.

However, over the centuries, Christians have produced a rich variety of understandings of why the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are universally saving. A new book based on a speakers’ series sponsored by the Center this year explores this theological wealth. *Pondering the Passion: What’s at Stake for Christians and Jews?* will be published by Sheed & Ward in November (see page 8).

## 3. Interpreting the Bible

The controversy over the Gibson movie has highlighted the differences between those Christians who feel that little interpretation or study is needed to discern the “plain sense” meaning of the Bible and those Christians who believe that the Bible must be read in some sort of literary or historical context. The Roman Catholic Church is in the second category.

Of particular significance in regard to the Passion is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the Gospel writers “selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or in written



form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches" (*Dei Verbum*, 19). This means that in Catholic understanding the Gospel Passion accounts are not simple historical transcripts, but are, more importantly, theologically-driven narratives written to convey inspired spiritual insights into the meaning of Jesus Christ. It also means that they sometimes incorporate into the narratives of his death religious arguments about Jesus' identity that did not arise until after the Resurrection.

Distressing to many Catholics dedicated to Christian-Jewish amity is the realization that many fellow Catholics seem untouched by the renaissance in Catholic biblical scholarship that has flowered since 1943. Little knowledge of this official Catholic biblical teaching was evident in public comments made by most Catholic proponents of Gibson's movie. Thus, they were unconcerned about the film's selective combining of the four distinct Gospel

narratives, its numerous historical errors, its use of unbiblical "visions," and its questionable theology of the cross.

### Conclusion

On the other hand, the controversy over the film has shown the strength of the conversation that has been occurring between Jews and Christians for the past few decades. Christians and Jews committed to mutual understanding collaborated extensively in raising questions about the film. The whirl of publicity before the film's release brought their concerns to public attention in an unprecedented way. The yet unmet challenge is to share the mutual understanding achieved by interreligious study and dialogue with ever larger segments of the population. It is clear that the work of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, and of similar endeavors, is much needed in the twenty-first century.

## Orthodox Dialogue Continued from page 1

Four decades later, four decades after *Nostra Aetate* began a revolution in Catholic (and Protestant) teachings about Jews and Judaism, has the world changed? How do orthodox Jews today understand the Rav's writings on this? On the one hand, many of the most important Jewish participants in dialogue today are orthodox. On the other hand, posthumous publication of the Rav's lectures and papers is generating enormous interest in him and veneration for his thought.

To open a discussion on this topic, we invited Dr. Eugene Korn, himself an orthodox rabbi and formerly the Anti-Defamation League's international point-person for Jewish-Christian dialogue, to deliver a paper at a Sunday afternoon symposium to which the community was invited. We also invited two other orthodox Jews, both rabbis, to respond to him. Dr. David Berger of Brooklyn College has also been a leading participant in dialogue internationally, but had publicly voiced concern over participation in theological dialogue. Aryeh Klapper, orthodox rabbi at Harvard Hillel and a leading local educator, represented a younger modern orthodox generation. Philip Cunningham also responded. All their talks are available in streaming video and as (revised) texts on the Center's website.

Discussions focused on how properly to interpret the Rav's article (also on the website), and whether and how the concerns that he voiced forty years ago



David Berger, Eugene Korn, and Aryeh Klapper

still apply today. The speakers agreed wholeheartedly that the orthodox community has been remiss in failing to heed the Rav's call to cooperation and dialogue over issues of common concern in our shared American environment. They disagreed, with varying nuances, about what the restrictions are on theological dialogue.

This discussion is ongoing. Other leading orthodox thinkers and rabbis have been asked to add their voices to the discussion. As of this writing, ten have been received, from Israel, from America, and from England, representing a diversity of perspectives. We hear that the conversation is being watched with interest in various corners of the Jewish world and sense in the various reports we receive about orthodox participants in ongoing dialogues that we have been successful in opening an even broader discussion. Will there be a resolution? Probably not. Judaism gives great value to the process of discernment, not just to its results.



# Christian and Jewish Experiences of Interreligious Learning

## A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

by Teresa Korphage

Experiencing Interreligious Learning as a part of my Theology curriculum has been a cherished aspect of my studies at Boston College, without which my education would be incomplete. Before taking an Interreligious Learning class through the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning my previous experience with Christian-Jewish relations had been while working at a Conservative synagogue. But there I was one Christian within a congregation of Jews variously informed and committed to their Judaism. In class I was one of many Christians, also variously informed and committed, among only a few Jews that had one thing in common – openness to dialogue.

Two very different situations produced two very different responses. The synagogue gave me an opportunity to learn about the religious “other;” but because I was not often asked to explain my own religion, I primarily absorbed commonalities between my faith and theirs. The classroom situation was more challenging to my Christian understanding. I was now expected to explain my faith to those outside my tradition, which demanded that I become conscious of how my explanation of Christianity might be seen through the eyes of another. I had to balance honesty and self-critique. I brought the willingness to be self-critical from the background of my consciousness to the very center of my learning.

I always understood that my purpose for entering into either situation was so I could learn and grow. Never was it my intention to convince another to accept my beliefs. Still, to be truthful, I admit to the unconscious desire to be spokesman for my religious tradition when the opportunity arose. Although my impulse, for good or bad, was satisfied more frequently as a lone Christian in a synagogue, this was not the case in a classroom of other Christians who had their own understanding of Christianity. In the Interreligious Learning environment I was surprised by where points of agreement and disagreement existed. I was humbled by the diversity of religious experience. Had we been blessed with the participation of more Jewish students, I cannot help but wonder if the same feeling might be present among them.

In general though, the Christian’s experience when exposed to Judaism must essentially be different from

## A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

by Eric Geller

When I was a young boy, many decades ago, my parents offered me common advice: as a Jew living in a non-Jewish world, avoid discussing religion with your Christian friends. That made sense to me, so as the years went by, and I attended school, played sports, became a lawyer, and created my social life, discussions with my Christian friends and co-workers included topics of every possible nature, except one: our religions.

While avoiding that topic certainly minimized

the possibility of conflict or tension in relationships, it also produced one necessary by-product, namely ignorance. I had enough trouble dealing with my own internal religious conflicts and the nature of my Jewish identity. The thought of trying to understand Christian thought and theology simply was not in my consciousness.

While the theology of Christianity was of little interest to me, the political, social, and economic relationships between Jews and Christians over the centuries were. While I grew up in

an open, tolerant, pluralistic society, what I call the post-Holocaust “era of good feeling,” I harbored deep suspicions and fears about the nature of Jewish-Christian relations both in the past and in the future.

I decided to deal with my feelings by seeking resources in which Jews and Christians could speak openly and honestly about their religions, and I was fortunate to find courses at the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning and at Harvard Divinity School that permitted such open exchanges. The subject matter for each of the three courses has been historical in nature.

My experience in each of those settings has been the same: the first thing I experience is how little knowledge the students possess, not only about the others’ religions, but most especially about their own religions! The Jewish students (like me) are remarkably unaware of the nature of Jewish life in the centuries preceding Jesus’ birth and the competing religious, political, and religious swirling within Israel. The Christian students seem to know little about the development of their own religious traditions, the processes by which the Gospels were created, the nature of their Jewish roots, and many of

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# in Center Courses

## A Christian Perspective Continued

the experience of the Jew when exposed to Christianity. There is already present in Christianity an acceptance of and dependence on Judaism, albeit tainted by centuries of anti-Jewish teachings. The same is not necessarily true for the Jew. Learning about Judaism and Christianity's relations with Judaism inevitably affected my Christian self-identity.

What I learned in the Center's classes both affirmed and challenged my previously held views of the two religions. This, together with the variety of religious experiences between and within traditions, as well as the presence of irreconcilable differences left me with more questions than answers. It would be easy to dismiss such an observation by admitting that this is the nature of the learning process. But if it is not the answering of questions that is fundamental to the Interreligious Learning experience, what is? I realized that perhaps more important than the knowledge gained in class were the friendships and trust being

formed between Jewish and Christian classmates.

This friendship was not without a prototype. The friendship between Professors Langer and Cunningham was inspiring. By the end of the semester, preconceptions and anticipations were confirmed or discarded; and what resulted was a classroom of equals, learning and engaging each other, welcoming surprising commonalities and embracing irreconcilable differences.

No longer was my goal merely to learn about the other and myself, but to experience the other's faith "from within" and to view myself with the eyes of those "outside." This is what I mean when I call the consequence of Interreligious Learning "friendship." Friendship in this way is necessarily connected with the virtue of empathy. The building of friendship requires a commitment to live side by side in solidarity with one another during situations that are life-changing, eye-opening, and at times even challenging and hurtful. This is a process that only moves forward with time. My hope is to bring this experience of friendship into the rest of my life and faith.

FOR A LIST OF CENTER INTERRELIGIOUS LEARNING COURSES 2003-2005 SEE PAGE 12.

## A Jewish Perspective Continued

the unpleasant details of Christian-Jewish relations throughout history.

The second thing I notice in classes is that, at first, most students step warily into the subject matter, perhaps afraid of saying the "wrong thing." After some period, however, as students begin to realize that we're in a safe environment, the level of energy and self-revelation is often remarkable.

Sometimes "breakthrough" moments occur: in one class, a Catholic woman who teaches in a parochial school began to cry as she realized that some of the texts used to teach her young students still contain unflattering ways of describing historic Judaism. I've seen Jewish students stunned to learn about the rise of strains of apocalyptic Judaism under the Roman Empire. I've seen Christian students struggle to understand the meaning of supersessionism and triumphalism. And I've seen Jewish students shocked to learn of fundamental changes in Christian theology about Judaism since the end of World War II.

As a Jew, I always emerge from these courses feeling the same way: enriched and relieved. I am enriched, for example, by being able to experience Christian theology for what is beautiful and satisfying in it; I am relieved by being in the presence of

Christians who are trying to make sense of their past and who are opening up their hearts and minds to difficult and sometimes troublesome issues.

Rogers and Hammerstein wrote the beautiful song about prejudice, "Carefully Taught," for *South Pacific*. In describing

the innocence of children and how we are taught to hate, they wrote,

"You've got to be taught, before it's too late  
Before you are six, or seven or eight  
To hate all the people your relatives hate  
You've got to be carefully taught  
You've got to be carefully taught."

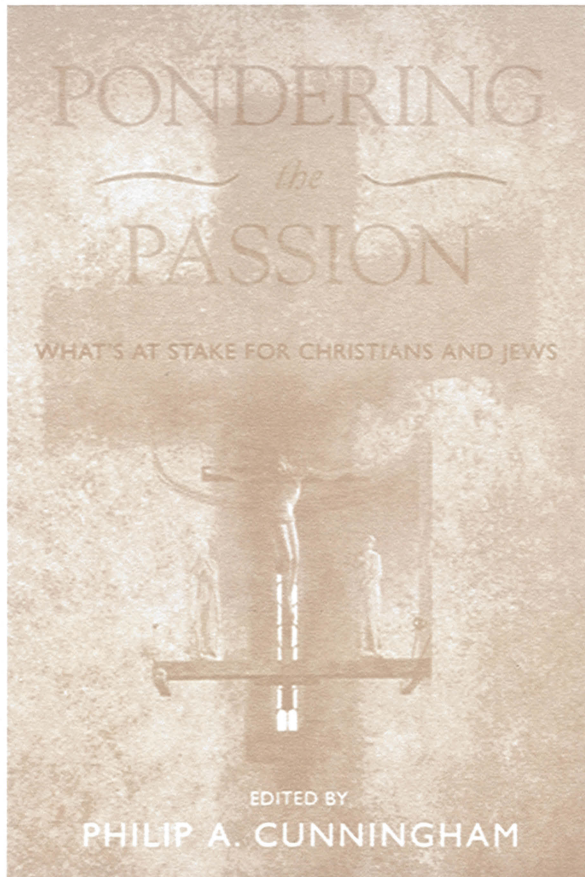
What I have learned from my interfaith courses is that prejudice and misunderstandings can be carefully *untaught*. Person by person, each one teaching another.

**"WHILE AVOIDING THAT TOPIC  
[OF RELIGION] CERTAINLY  
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# Two New Books Developed Under Center Sponsorship

## *Pondering the Passion: What's at Stake for Christians and Jews?*



The death of Jesus has been a major theme in the visual arts, music, writing, drama, worship and, more recently, in motion pictures. Sometimes these art works and writings have generated animosity toward Jews. A new book expanding on a speakers' series sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning addressing this topic is scheduled to be published by Sheed & Ward in November 2004.

*Pondering the Passion: What's at Stake for Christians and Jews?* explores some of the historical and interreligious complexities of the Gospel Passion narratives, portrayals in various media of the Passion over the centuries, and current Christian teachings. The consequence of these portrayals for relations between Jews and Christians is the special concern of the book.

With an introduction by Philip Cunningham, *Pondering the Passion* asks the question, "What's at stake for Christians and Jews?" The book begins by looking at the historical context of the passion.

From an historical and faith perspective essays ask the question, "Why was Jesus executed?" and examines the first-century context of Jews under Roman rule and Jewish jurisprudence at the time of Jesus' trial.

The book continues with essays on biblical accounts of the Passion and Protestant and Catholic understandings of these narratives. Moving into post-biblical interpretations of the Passion expressed in art and theology through the centuries, *Pondering the Passion* challenges depictions of Jews and examines the meaning of salvation and redemption.

More contemporary is the portrayal of the Passion in movies. Essays reflecting on Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* offers a variety of opinions that range from considering the lessons of the *Shoah* to psychological and educational responses to the film.

The Center's website offers many resources concerning *The Passion of the Christ* at [www.bc.edu/passionofchrist](http://www.bc.edu/passionofchrist)

- Catholic teaching documents
- Resources on the Gospel Passion narratives, Passion Plays, etc.
- Viewers guide for filmed or theatrical Passion dramas
- Analytic reviews of *The Passion of the Christ*
- Statements on the film
- Reflections on responses to the film



## Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation

Under the auspices of the Center, the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations is pleased to announce the upcoming publication by Sheed & Ward of its book *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*. The Christian Scholars Group is an ecumenical gathering of about twenty Christian scholars studying a wide range of topics pertinent to Jewish-Christian relations. Its members have written some of the most influential works on the subject and have lent their experience and talent to the forthcoming book.

At its June 2003 meeting at Boston College, members of the group agreed on the contents of the book, which is an expansion and educational presentation of the group's 2002 statement, *A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Teaching on Judaism and the Jewish People*. The book will be a useful accompaniment to the document, which has been translated into eight languages and is being widely used as an educational and interfaith resource.

The collection of essays on the ten points of *A Sacred Obligation* was edited by Mary C. Boys, with the assistance of an editorial committee of Rosann Catalano, Philip Cunningham, Joseph Tyson, and Clark Williamson.

Prefaced by Ruth Langer and Philip Cunningham, the book begins with an introduction by Mary C. Boys and a reflection on the *Shoah* and Jewish-Christian relations by Eva Fleischner. Each point from *A Sacred Obligation* is followed by one or more essays by Christian scholars representing many Christian denominations. The ten points considered are:

1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever.
2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.
3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.
4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.
5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.
6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.
7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.
8. Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God.
9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.
10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.

In addition to the essays, *Seeing Judaism Anew* includes chapters devoted to the ongoing renewal of Christian-Jewish relations over the past several decades, including the almost thirty-five years of study by CSG members.

The book is primarily intended for a Christian general readership, and hopefully will prove especially useful for clergy, educators, and ecumenical and interfaith offices.

In September 2002 twenty-one Christian scholars, Protestant and Catholic, released a statement that included these sentences: "We believe that revising Christian teaching about Judaism and the Jewish people is a central and indispensable obligation of theology in our time. It is essential that Christianity both understand and represent Judaism accurately, not only as a matter of justice for the Jewish people, but also for the integrity of Christian faith, which we cannot proclaim without reference to Judaism." This book expands upon our statement and explores its implications by bridging the realm of scholarship and the life of the church; it also seeks to bridge the longstanding divide between Jews and Christians. Our statement is far more than an intellectual exercise; we wrote it because each of us cares passionately about a vital and vibrant Christianity that does justice to its complex and profound relationship with Judaism. Our book arises from that same commitment as we seek to develop the assertions expressed in *A Sacred Obligation*.

- EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF *SEEING JUDAISM ANEW: CHRISTIANITY'S SACRED OBLIGATION*



# Theory into Practice

Continued from page 1

that antisemitism is a grave sin, to be avoided at all costs. The Vatican's official *teshuvah* (repentance) for the role of Christians in the Holocaust is their *teshuvah* too. Indeed, John Corcoran's personal *teshuvah* was no small element in his decision to endow this Center (see page 2).

Our center was a major player in the responses to Gibson's film. Philip Cunningham was one of the Catholic scholars who reviewed and critiqued a script of the film in April 2003. Our website became quickly and remains a primary national and international address for information, educational materials and study guides ([www.bc.edu/passionofchrist](http://www.bc.edu/passionofchrist)). We sponsored programs for the university and the greater Boston community before the film's release; and before and after spent untold hours with reporters, wrote, dialogued and spoke broadly, including appearances by Cunningham on national radio and television. Friends told us that every time they turned around, their heard, saw, or read him.

Dr. Peter Pettit of Muhlenberg College composed a viewers and reviewers guide on the film in the name of the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, whose work is funded by the Center.

At Boston College, we sponsored a series of three Sunday afternoon symposia before the film's release titled *Portraying the Passion*. Though obviously triggered by Gibson's film, the series asked Boston College faculty to address meta-issues in popular understandings of this central Christian narrative, issues that transcend the specifics of Gibson's decisions. These papers form the nucleus of a book scheduled for publication by Sheed & Ward this November (see page 8).

We made a deliberate decision, though, to treat Gibson's film as an inner-Christian issue. Catholics who addressed the issues raised by the film would be less likely dismissed as attacking Christianity itself. Dialogue with Jews has helped Christians to understand where the problems lie, but the work of actual change must come from within. We hoped that this film would trigger widespread inner-Christian discussions about issues that had become

second nature to those involved in dialogue, like employing historical-critical methods of Bible study and being sensitive to the presence of inherited anti-Jewish motifs in Christian tradition. Such an inner-Christian dialogue could spread the fruits of the Jewish-Christian dialogue more broadly and deeply. In retrospect, trying to cast the discussion this way was the right decision. As indeed happened, Jewish public criticisms have generated to date more antisemitic responses than the film itself.

Months later, what did we learn from this experience? First, religion is not theology. Academicians and religious leaders can and must provide a basis for the work of repair, but ultimately, their theology is powerless if it does not translate into something that can be integrated into the

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---

religious outlook of every Jew and Christian, something that effortlessly informs the shaping of sermons, grade-school textbooks, and art, including films. The Catholic Church can generate documents on the portrayal of the passion or on the proper interpretation of Scripture, but until these begin to shape the popular religious imagination of the faithful, they are just words. And word-oriented people need

to learn that our world often fails to integrate the content of plain print, that the visual and oral dimensions strongly influence religious imagination too. We can criticize Gibson's interpretation of the Passion, but can we generate an artistically and spiritually compelling, theologically sound alternative? Our task as an academic center begins in the university classroom and lecture hall, and with our publications, but it cannot end there.

The educational task is itself immense and complex. My student was deeply affronted when he thought that I was accusing him of being antisemitic. He and his classmates had never learned that all Jews of all time were, until the Second Vatican Council, understood to be guilty of deicide; they find the accusation illogical and incredible. This far we have indeed come. But they come into class thinking that antisemitism begins and ends with gas chambers and swastikas. A semester or two reading Scripture or asking theological questions through the lens of Jewish-Christian relations and in the presence of the “other” challenges them deeply, both to know their own tradition better and also to

*continued on next page*



begin to confront its problems (on experiences of interreligious learning, see page 6).

The majority of this student's classmates chose not to see Gibson's film, and most of those who did critiqued it. At the end of two semesters, this same student chose to explore further by writing his final

paper on comparative Jewish and Christian ideas of martyrdom, rather than something "safe" like the ethics of stem-cell research. He came to understand that, while he would not personally attack Jews, many Christians before him had, and the work of repair is ongoing.

## Third Annual Jewish-Catholic Seder Held

On March 11, 2004 (18 Adar 5764) the third annual New Hampshire Jewish-Catholic Seder was held in Manchester. Approximately two hundred people, roughly evenly divided between Catholics and Jews, joined together to celebrate God's liberating love through the Jewish Passover meal. Rabbi Louis Reiser led the observance and music was provided by Alan Kaplan, Arielle Kaplan and Peter Bridges. The Jewish-Catholic Seder is made possible through the generosity of Patrick and Kendra O'Donnell and was co-sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Manchester, the Diocese of Manchester, and the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning.

Interfaith Seders can be problematic if they blend or syncretize Jewish with Christian rituals or if they are not respectful of Jewish Passover traditions as they have developed from rabbinic times onward. This was of prime concern when preparing a customized *haggadah* (a book that tells the story of the Passover through the rituals of the Seder). To encourage dialogical respect of the other's traditions while maintaining their distinctive richness, each participant received an information sheet explaining briefly the history of the Passover festival and the reasons for hosting a Jewish-Catholic Seder. This handout can be found on the Center's website under "Educational Resources."

### Order Walking God's Paths on VHS or DVD for \$49 plus S/H!

The U.S. Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the National Council of Synagogues have recently published *Walking God's Paths: Christians and Jews in Candid Conversation*, a six-part video series produced by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning. More than two thousand synagogue and church congregations are using the discussion-starting videos for local interfaith dialogue. Over the six sessions, participants explore the two traditions' origins, approach to scripture, springtime observances, interrelationships, and missions in the world.

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## Upcoming Events

Visit the "Events" page on the Center's website for details on these events during the coming year:

- A panel discussion with Rabbi Irving Greenberg on his new book, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity*. Rabbi Greenberg, the president of Jewish Life Network (JLN), a Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation, is an Orthodox rabbi who for many years has been considering the covenantal relationship between Judaism and Christianity.
- A panel discussion with many of the contributors to the new book, *Pondering the Passion: What's at Stake for Christians and Jews?* (See p. 8.)
- A presentation by Prof. Edward Kessler, director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations at Cambridge University, on his new book, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Binding of Isaac*.
- Panel discussions of the dialogue document *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*, which set forth a theological rationale for why the Catholic Church no longer targets Jews in conversionary campaigns.
- Plus other events still being organized.



# Interreligious Learning at Boston College: 2003-2005

Many courses sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning engage their students in Interreligious Learning, a format developed by Dr. Mary C. Boys, SNJM of Union Theological Seminary in New York and Dr. Sara S. Lee of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. Interreligious Learning moves beyond simply learning about the other to an active engagement with Judaism or Christianity as lived by informed and committed Jews and Christians.

"COMMON EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS ON OUR HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS RELATIONS . . . WILL TRULY PROMOTE MUTUAL RESPECT."

- JOHN PAUL II, SEPT. 11, 1987

**Four Biblical Books in Jewish and Christian Perspectives** (*team-taught by Philip A. Cunningham and Ruth Langer, Fall 2003*) The most frequently attested Biblical texts among the "Dead Sea Scrolls" were Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Psalms. Through engaging selected passages from these four books in comparative Jewish and Christian perspectives - both traditional and contemporary - this course of study invites exploration of the role that context plays in the reading of text. What role does the reader's religious-cultural tradition play in the interaction that the reading experience involves? The phenomenon of interfaith dialogue - especially when Jews and Christians together study texts sacred to both traditions - is a defining course concern.

**The New Testament in its Jewish Context** (*team-taught by Philip A. Cunningham and Ruth Langer, Spring 2004*) Most of the New Testament books were composed when the Church was a Jewish eschatological movement, grappling with its relationship to other Jewish groups, with its understanding of the authority of the Torah, and with the conditions to admit Gentiles into its ranks. This course examines the consequences of these dynamics for the New Testament itself and for subsequent and contemporary Christian-Jewish relations.

**Jews and Christians: Understanding the Other** (*team-taught by Philip A. Cunningham and Ruth Langer, Fall 2004*) Interreligious dialogue requires interreligious understanding. This course builds a foundation for genuine dialogue between Jews and Christians by posing fundamental theological questions in a comparative context. Students gain an understanding of the other tradition while also deepening their understanding of their own, discussing such matters as the human experience of God, the purpose of human existence, the nature of religious community, and the ways that communities respond to challenges, both contemporary and ancient.

**Christ and the Jewish People** (*Philip A. Cunningham, Spring 2005*) In the wake of the groundbreaking conciliar declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, the Catholic Church now authoritatively teaches that the Jewish people remain in an eternal covenant with God. This course explores the unfolding implications of this recognition for the Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is universally significant for human salvation by considering relevant New Testament texts, the development of the church's christological tradition, the rise and demise of supersessionism, and various approaches being proposed today.

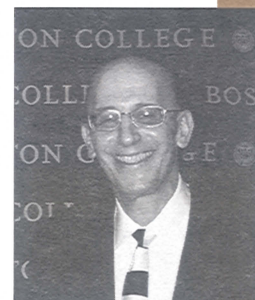
**From Diatribe to Dialogue: Studies in the Jewish-Christian Encounter** (*team-taught by Paul R. Kolbet and Ruth Langer, Spring 2005*) Christians and Jews, living together, have never ignored one another. Only in our times have these encounters begun to include positive affirmations of the other. To provide the student with a background for the contemporary situation, this course explores various theological facets of this encounter, from the diatribes of earliest Christianity through the medieval disputations, concluding with the contemporary dialogue. Readings are drawn from Jewish and Christian primary sources in translation.



# Center Lectures During the Past Academic Year

**Dr. Alan L. Berger** *The Moral Minority: Altruism, Rescue, and the Human Condition: Lessons from the Holocaust*  
What is altruism? How was it expressed during the Shoah? Can one educate for altruism or prosocial behavior? Professor Alan Berger looked at two examples, Andre Trocme and Oskar Schindler and discussed the role of autonomy in such behavior, political, religious, and societal factors supporting and impeding altruism.

**Dr. Deborah Weissman** *Interreligious Dialogue and Education in the Holy Land*  
Amidst all the violence in the Middle East, there are individuals and groups who believe that religion can actually be a force for peace. They are engaged in dialogue and study in a variety of formats, including all-women's groups. Dr. Debbie Weissman, a Jewish educator, religious feminist and peace activist presented on the basis of her experiences and asked what hope there is for peaceful co-existence in the Holy Land.



Alan Berger

## SUNDAY SYMPOSIA

### Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Interreligious Dialogue - 40 Years Later

**Speakers included:** Rabbi Dr. Eugene Korn, *Interreligious Affairs Director, Anti-Defamation League*; Dr. David Berger, *Brooklyn College*; Rabbi Aryeh Klapper, *Associate Director for Education and Orthodox Rabbinic Advisor, Harvard Hillel*; Dr. Philip Cunningham, *Director, Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College* (see page 1).

### Portraying the Passion Lecture Series

Throughout Christian history, the death of Jesus has been a major theme in the visual arts, music, writing, drama, worship and, more recently, in motion pictures. Sometimes these art works have generated animosity toward Jews. In this series, an interdisciplinary team of Boston College faculty members explored some of the historical and interreligious complexities of the Gospel Passion narratives, portrayals in various media of the Passion over the centuries, and current Roman Catholic teaching. The consequences of these portrayals for relations between Jews and Christians were a special concern of the series. A new book based on the speakers' series will be published by Sheed & Ward in November 2004 (see page 8).



Raymond Helmick, S.J., Philip Cunningham, Pamela Berger, and John Michalczyk

### THE GOSPELS, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES OF JUDAISM, AND ANTISEMITISM Philip A. Cunningham

This session considered the nature of the Gospel Passion accounts, described in a recent Vatican document as "the outcome of long and complicated editorial work." The ways in which these texts lent themselves to what Pope John Paul II has called "erroneous and unjust interpretations, ... engendering feelings of hostility towards this [Jewish] people" was also discussed. The program can be viewed online in streaming media at <http://frontrow.bc.edu/program/cunningham/>.

### PRESENTATIONS OF THE PASSION IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

This session surveyed how reflection on the death of Jesus shaped Christian artistic and religious expression in a variety of media. Special attention was given to the implications for Christian-Jewish relations.

*Visual arts:* Pamela Berger, *Professor of Fine Arts*

*Passion Plays:* John J. Michalczyk, *Professor of Fine Arts*

*Music:* Raymond Helmick, S.J., *Theology Department*

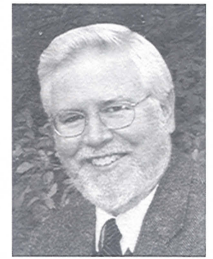
### THE CROSS AND THE CAMERA John J. Michalczyk, Professor of Fine Arts

This session explored how the death of Jesus has been variously portrayed in twentieth-century motion pictures. Particular attention was paid to how the producers addressed the issues discussed in the first two sessions.



# Center Personnel

## Philip A. Cunningham, Executive Director



Although much of Dr. Cunningham's year was concerned with the controversial Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, other endeavors concerning Christian-Jewish relations continued as well. These included publications and presentations on:

- "The Modern Church's Renunciation of Anti-Judaism and Supersessionism: A Transformation in Christian Teaching," for the New Hampshire Episcopalian clergy workshop.
- "Catholic Biblical Perspectives on Judaism and the Jewish People," *Fifth Annual Driscoll Lecture in Jewish-Catholic Studies*, Iona College, New Rochelle, NY.
- "Religious Education and Catholic-Jewish Relations," for the Diocese of Venice, FL.
- "Catholic Religion Textbooks on Jews and Judaism," at the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education, Seton Hill University, Greensburg, PA.
- "Dynamics of Interreligious Dialogue: Some Cues from the Christian-Jewish Experience," for Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston.
- "Actualizing Matthean Christology in a Post-Supersessionist Church," in *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini* (E.J. Brill).
- "One Catholic's Reflections on Jewish Discussions of the Religious Status of Gentiles and Christianity," at the Summer *Beit Midrash*.
- "Christians and Jews: Children of a Covenanting God," *The Living Light* (Spring 2004).
- Users' Guide for the video series *Walking God's Paths: Christians and Jews in Candid Conversation* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Catholic Communications Campaign and The National Council of Synagogues, 2004) at [www.bc.edu/wgp](http://www.bc.edu/wgp).

Concerning the Gibson movie, Dr. Cunningham's radio and television interviews included ABC TV's *Primetime*, New England Cable News, National Public Radio's *The Connection* and *Morning Edition*, PBS' *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*, and Radio Television Hong Kong; print media interviews with the *Associated Press* and *USA Today*, newspapers in twelve states, and overseas publications in Jerusalem, London, and Manila. Dr. Cunningham also spoke on the film's implications to seventeen church, synagogue, community agency, or university groups. In addition to many contributions to the Center's own heavily visited website, Dr. Cunningham's written work on the subject also appeared in both scholarly and popular publications. The most significant of these are:

- "Much Will Be Required of the Person Entrusted with Much: Assembling a Passion Drama from the Four Gospels" in *Perspectives on "The Passion of the Christ"* (Miramax Books).
- "A Dangerous Fiction," *America* (April 5, 2004).
- "The Arrest and Sentencing of Jesus: A Historical Reconstruction," Creighton University, Omaha, NE. Published in the online *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 6 (2004): <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2004/2004-8.html>.
- "Gibson's Limited Vision Often at Odds with Bible," *The Irish Echo*, 78/9 (Mar. 3-9, 2004): 15.
- "Pondering the Passion," *The Anglican Theological Review*, 86/2 (Spring 2004): 323-333.

## Teresa Korphage, Administrative Assistant

In January 2003 Teresa Korphage became the Center's Administrative Assistant. She is responsible for monitoring budgets, maintaining the Center's website, coordinating publicity, handling conference logistics, and other administrative duties. Before moving to Boston she worked for two years at a Conservative synagogue in Kansas City, Missouri. Teresa will be finishing her Master of Arts in Systematic Theology at Boston College this November, with a special concern for Christian-Jewish relations.







### Ruth Langer, Associate Director

Dr. Langer has devoted most of her scholarly work this year to her forthcoming history of the *birkat haminim*, the Jewish malediction of sectarians that through much of its pre-modern history included explicit or implicit curses of Christians. The early history of this prayer has been much discussed, but most often with incorrect conclusions. Its medieval and modern history have never been studied in any detail before. In addition, Dr. Langer lectured during the year on aspects of this project at the Association for Jewish Studies Conference, for Boston College's Medieval Forum, for a retreat of Temple Ohabei Shalom, for the Summer *Beit Midrash*, and as the Shapiro Lecture at The Joseph Cardinal Bernadin

Center at Catholic Theological Union.

Dr. Langer also continued to make contributions to the general study of Jewish liturgy, publishing an article titled "Early Rabbinic Liturgy in its Palestinian Milieu: Did Non-Rabbis Know the *Amidah*?" in *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini*. She also wrote a new article on "Worship and Devotional Life: Jewish Worship," for the forthcoming second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*; and the article on "Prayer and Worship" for the forthcoming *Modern Judaism: An Oxford Guide*. She also continues to lecture in this area, delivering a three-hour seminar on "What Should Students of Early Christian Liturgy Know About Early Jewish Liturgy?" at the conference of the North American Academy of Liturgy.

Contemporary issues in Jewish-Christian relations also received her attention. Dr. Langer contributed seven entries to the forthcoming *Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*. Although she deliberately played a back-seat role in the "Gibson Affair," Dr. Langer addressed this both directly and indirectly in various contexts, including facilitating an interfaith conversation after a private screening for Boston area religious leaders (together with Dr. Cunningham), and a panel at Congregation Shaarei Tefillah. However, more communities are interested in help in looking ahead, and in that context, she led a session at the convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and another for the Gralla Seminar for Religion Journalists (at Brandeis, together with Dr. Cunningham).

Dr. Langer has also served as Education Committee co-chair at Congregation Shaarei Tefillah, and has been asked to join the boards of the Hillel Council of New England and of the Jewish Studies program (in formation) at Boston College. She continues to serve as book review editor of the *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*.



### Audrey Doetzel, NDS, Visiting Researcher

A member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion, Dr. Doetzel most recently served as the director of Christian-Jewish Relation and Encounter, which coordinated the interfaith work of the community in North America ([www.cjre.org](http://www.cjre.org)).

Dr. Doetzel holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the Toronto School of Theology, University of Toronto. She serves on the Advisory Committee on Catholic-Jewish Relations for the U.S. Bishops' Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and the board of the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education at Seton Hill University. (For a personal reflection on her work here at Boston College, see page 3.)

While at Boston College, Dr. Doetzel is conducting research and writing on:

- the liturgical implications of post-*Nostra Aetate* theological developments
- Transformative Learning and Theological Reflection as agents of Christian moral discernment, decision, and action in the context of Holocaust Education
- a Church History curriculum unit focusing on the Catholic Church's *Shoah* and immediate post-*Shoah* history through the lives of key individuals
- the Jewishness of Jesus, focusing on the development of teaching guidelines for use with films or videos on the life of Jesus



## ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Christian-Jewish Learning is devoted to the multifaceted development and implementation of new relationships between Christians and Jews that are based, not merely on toleration, but on full respect and mutual enrichment. This defining purpose flows from the mission of Boston College and responds to the vision expressed in Roman Catholic documents ever since the Second Vatican Council.

The building of new, positive relationships between Jews and Christians requires sustained collaborative theological research. Therefore, under the Center's auspices, scholars and thinkers representing diverse Jewish and Christian perspectives engage in intense and ongoing study of all aspects of our related yet distinct traditions of faith.

Educationally, we are committed to the goal that "Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional and marginal place in [Christian religious education]: their presence there is essential and should be organically

integrated" (Notes, 2). We are convinced that Jews and Christians enrich and deepen their respective religious identities by joint educational endeavors. The Center is dedicated to conducting educational research and to offering programs, both in the university and the wider community, in which Christians and Jews explore their traditions together.

When the Center team is fully established, the executive director, the associate director, and professors holding one visiting and two permanent chairs in Christian-Jewish relations will pursue these tasks. In short, the Center applies the scholarly resources of a Catholic university to the task of encouraging mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews at every level (Notes, 27).

[Notes = Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church*, 1985.]



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