

Jesus the Jew / Jesus the Christ: Explorations of His Jewish Identity and Its Meanings

An international research project sponsored by:



Editors' Introduction

**Philip A. Cunningham, Adam Gregerman,
Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, and Ruth Langer**

This special volume of *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* presents a collection of scholarly articles produced by a multiyear international research project entitled “Jesus the Jew / Jesus the Christ: Explorations of His Jewish Identity and Its Meanings.” It investigates the question: **What is the religious meaning of the Jewish identity of Jesus for Christians and for Jews today and for their contemporary interrelationship?** This initiative was sponsored by the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College, the Center for Intercultural Theology and the Study of Religions at the Universität Salzburg, and the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations of Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia.

The four universities collaborated, beginning in 2019, to form and support a research team to explore “Christ Jesus the Jew: The Importance of his Jewish Identity for Christians and for Jews Today,” as the project was originally titled. Composed of about two dozen scholars from Europe, North America, and Israel, the team planned to gather annually in person at each of these universities to share and discuss its work.¹ However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the horrors of terrorism and wars in the Middle East made it difficult to maintain the planned

¹ This process was similar to the those that produced the books *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships*, eds. Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011) and *Enabling Dialogue about the Land: A Resource Book for*

schedule. Some members of the project team had to miss project consultations or withdraw entirely, resulting in the loss of important perspectives. Most members of the research group met for the first time in Philadelphia in September 2022, then in Frankfurt in February 2024, Boston in September 2024, and finally in Rome in October 2025. These in-person conversations created an invaluable atmosphere of mutual learning and reflection. Members found their initial drafts enriched, critiqued, and, in a few cases, entirely reworked because of these group exchanges.

The distinguishing and irreplaceable feature of this project is the active involvement of both Christians *and* Jews in exploring together over time a topic that at first glance might appear to be of primarily Christian interest. The belief that a first-century Jew is “the Christ” is a claim that Jews, with few exceptions, find unconvincing. This suggests that a conversation about Jesus between the two communities would lead only to endless contention and disputation. However, at least since the eighteenth century, some Jews and some Christians have sought to understand each other’s viewpoints in a non-polemical, appreciative manner. This effort intensified, especially after the abomination of the Shoah. The growth since of sustained Christian-Jewish dialogue and collaborative research, of learning together without proselytizing intent, is unprecedented. In this period, archeological, exegetical, and historical research into Jesus’s world, the late Second Temple era, has brought his Jewish context to life as never before. It is these developments that made this project possible.

From the very first it was clear that the project’s “meta-question” about the Jewishness of Jesus generated many possible questions and approaches. It could be approached from a number of Christian and Jewish theological viewpoints and from within a vast number of global, ethnic, cultural, and historical contexts. Inevitably, this discussion could not be comprehensive; much remains for future exploration.

It also became clear early that the project needed a better title. While everyone agreed that Jesus lived and died a Jew, only Christians also understood him to be “Christ.” It was felt that both this Christian claim and its Jewish denial had to be present in the project title, while also making clear that the Jewishness of Jesus was of interest to everyone. The project sponsors ultimately agreed on “Jesus the Jew / Jesus the Christ: Explorations of His Jewish Identity and Its Meanings.” This title expresses these major considerations, while also recognizing that some tensions and asymmetries are inevitable.

This volume of *SCJR* thus offers a first collection of studies on the Jewish identity of Jesus from a variety of starting points, utilizing multiple methodologies—all in conversation with one another and accessible to a wide readership. In four categories, it includes essays on the New Testament genealogies of Jesus and the titles it gives to him; on Jesus in his first-century world; and essays on relevant pastoral, educational, and liturgical matters. It also addresses Jewish traditions of reflection on Jesus; the implications of Jesus’s Jewishness for antisemitism; claims

about Jesus's uniqueness; proposals for various christological approaches; Jesus's Jewishness amid today's conflicts and wars; and more.

The four editors of this collection represent two of the four sponsoring institutions of this project: the Center for Christian-Jewish at Boston College and the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations of Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. We wish to express our profound thanks to Dr. Gregor Maria Hoff of the Center for Intercultural Theology and the Study of Religions at the Universität Salzburg and Dr. Massimo Gargiulo of the Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome for their wonderful collegiality as we worked together over the past several years. Special gratitude is extended to the editors of *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, Dr. Kevin Spicer, C.S.C., Dr. Devorah Schoenfeld, and especially its managing editor, Dr. Camille Markey, for helping us publish the entire collection in the journal.

Finally, the editors and sponsors wish to thank all the scholars who participated in the project during its various stages and particularly those who shared their expertise and insights in the essays they composed. Additional articles will enrich the collection as the year 2026 unfolds.