

Lux Center News



December 13, 2018

Best Wishes and Happy Holidays!

The Lux Center wishes all of our friends and colleagues a very happy holiday season. May the 2019 New Year bring you and your loved ones blessings of good health, joy and peace.

The 2018 fall semester at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology has come to a close. The students, faculty and staff have worked hard and have achieved much.

As the Lux Center sends you this last newsletter of 2019, we thank all of you for your support and look forward to seeing you at the exciting programs and events we have planned for next year. We have listed several of them for your reference at the end of this newsletter. Enjoy the following information that discusses particular commonalities and differences that are inherent to Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

The Diversity of the Jewish World in the Time of Jesus

In the polytheistic world of ancient humanity, battles were fought to determine whose gods were the strongest and most powerful ones. These battles of religious superiority carried over into monotheism, not to establish whose god was the best since the majority of the world's religions attest to worshipping the one God over all humanity, but the argument began concerning which way was the right way to worship God.

The major purpose for interreligious dialogue is to diffuse on-going conflicts and to avert misconceptions by striving to understand the beliefs and practices inherent to faiths that are not our own. In that way, we are able to appreciate and gain respect for paths to God that may be different from our own accepted path. Dialogue can also enhance understanding of our own faith by delving into and expressing what we ourselves believe and comparing and contrasting those beliefs with the beliefs of other religions.

It also happens that even within particular religions, there may be different interpretations of sacred scriptures and varying levels of observance of practices and rituals. This is very true within Judaism, and has been so for a very long time. It must be emphasized, though, that all Jewish groups, then and now, are centered on the Torah (also known as the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch).

Sects within Ancient Judaism

In the book "The Jews in the Time of Jesus," Stephen Wylen states that during the time of Jesus, diverse groups practiced Judaism with variations in the interpretations of Jewish law and practice as each group attempted to establish the "ideal sacred community." As Jesus

traveled through the Jewish homeland, he would have dealt with many members of different sects. This is important for understanding the Jewish world of Jesus in the first century.

Were there always different sects within Judaism?

The different sects appeared to originate in the rebellion of the Maccabees in 165 B.C.E. and faded away after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The rise of sects may have been due to the rejection of the high priests in the Temple as legitimate leaders. It also could have been attributed to the need for Judaism to adjust to Hellenistic rule and culture. Once the rabbis established their authority over Jewish affairs after the Temple was destroyed, there was little need for these different philosophies of Judaism.

What were the main Jewish sects during the first century?

In the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, three main Jewish sects were described: the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Essenes. Rabbinic literature emphasizes differences relating to their interpretations of Jewish law, while the New Testament focuses on ideological and ritual issues separating the Pharisees and Jesus. None of these different schools of thought represented a majority of the Jews who lived during that time. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees are mentioned in the New Testament (Gospels and Acts) and in Philippians 3.5.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were the priestly and aristocratic members of the Jewish community who came from the highest classes of society. The Sadducees had power because they controlled the Temple. Since they cooperated with and favored the Romans in ruling the country, the Sadducees were not popular with most of the common Jewish people.

The Sadducees believed that God is transcendent above all human concerns and therefore God takes no interest in human deeds. They refused to accept any precept as binding unless it was based directly on the Torah (also known as the "Written Law") and taught that the written Torah was the only source of revelation. They did not believe in bodily resurrection or in life after death.

The Essenes

The Essenes had very strict laws of Jewish observance, especially concerning ritual purity and Sabbath rest. Many of the Essenes lived a celibate life in the wilderness, thinking that they were the true Temple priesthood in exile. The Essenes considered the Temple priesthood in Jerusalem as corrupt and beyond redemption. In a hierarchical fashion, they engaged in sacred communal meals, with the chief priests at the head followed by the ordinary priests, then the laity. People entered the group with great and solemn oaths. They lived in voluntary poverty and all property was communally shared.

The Pharisees

Many Christians may be surprised to know that many of the Jewish people of today know little, if anything at all, about the Pharisees. This group may be mentioned when studying Jewish history or noted in rabbinic texts, but other than that, the Pharisees are not well known among Jews. However, it should be noted that it is believed that this strand of

Judaism was the one that later survived after the destruction of the Temple and the end of Temple worship.

The focus of the Pharisaic sages featured houses of study and synagogues that could be established whenever and wherever they decided to do so. The flexibility of their religious practice allowed Judaism to continue to survive and so their views were later incorporated into the rabbinic tradition that continued to develop into the 2nd century and beyond.

The Pharisees of the first century characterized the religious elite, those who excelled in the study of Torah and may have become sages or rabbis. They exhibited three major characteristics:

- They represented primarily artisans and small farmers. (middle class)
- They were only moderately Hellenized.
- They accepted what they termed “traditions of the fathers” which were nonbiblical laws and customs said to have been passed down through the generations (the Oral Torah).

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of the Pharisees was their unique doctrine of the Oral Law, which they considered as binding as the written Torah itself. Josephus describes the Pharisees as distinguished scholars of the laws and traditions of Judaism. To the Pharisees, worship consisted not in bloody sacrifices—the practice of the Temple priests—but in prayer and in the study of God’s law. They asserted that God could and should be worshipped even away from the Temple and outside Jerusalem. They did not believe in blindly following the letter of Law, but believed in the need to use their reason in interpreting the Torah and applying it to contemporary problems.

The Pharisees and the New Testament

The Jewish people have been very sensitive to commonly held interpretations *and* portrayals of the Pharisees in the New Testament that have been used to level criticism at Judaism as a whole. Many Christians take for granted New Testament anti-Jewish characterizations of the Pharisees as narrow-minded legalists, hypocrites, proud, superficial, lovers of money and of prestige, and ultimately as opponents of Jesus.

Each of the writers of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) had their own viewpoints affecting the way they told the story of Jesus. Since the Gospels were written between forty and seventy years after the death of Jesus, and Jesus left no written records himself, the events and experiences of the Gospel writers during their own times were reflected in their particular accounts of Jesus. This included the growing tensions between the Christians and Jews, as the Jewish sects continued to reject the emergence of early Christianity. By the time Luke composed his work, tension was breaking into open hostility. The New Testament tells a story of this broken relationship.

When the Second Vatican Council published *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, a document that addressed and diffused many of the misconceptions of Jews promoted throughout Catholic history, the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism finally began to

transform. In subsequent Vatican and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) documents, the negativity expressed in the New Testament toward the Pharisees was finally addressed as follows,

“If in the Gospels and elsewhere in the new Testament there are all sort of unfavourable references to the Pharisees, they should be seen against the, background of a complex and diversified movement. . . It may also be stressed that, if Jesus shows himself severe towards the Pharisees, it is because he is closer to them than to other contemporary Jewish groups.” (from” notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”, Holy See Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 1982)

“An explicit rejection should be made of the historically inaccurate notion that Judaism of that time, especially that of Pharisaism, was a decadent formalism and hypocrisy. Scholars are increasingly aware of the closeness on many central doctrines between Jesus’ teaching and that of the Pharisees. Many Jewish teachers adopted positions similar to those of Jesus on the critical religious and social issues of the time.” (Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations, Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations ,USCCB, 1985)

“Jesus shared with the Pharisees a number of distinctive doctrines: the resurrection of the body; forms of piety such as almsgiving, daily prayer, and fasting; the liturgical practice of addressing God as Father; and the priority of the love commandment. Many scholars are of the view that Jesus was not so much arguing against ‘the Pharisees’ as a group, as he was condemning excesses of some Pharisees, excesses of a sort that can be found among some Christians as well.” (God’s Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching, Committee on the Liturgy, USCCB, 1988)

The Legacy of the Pharisees

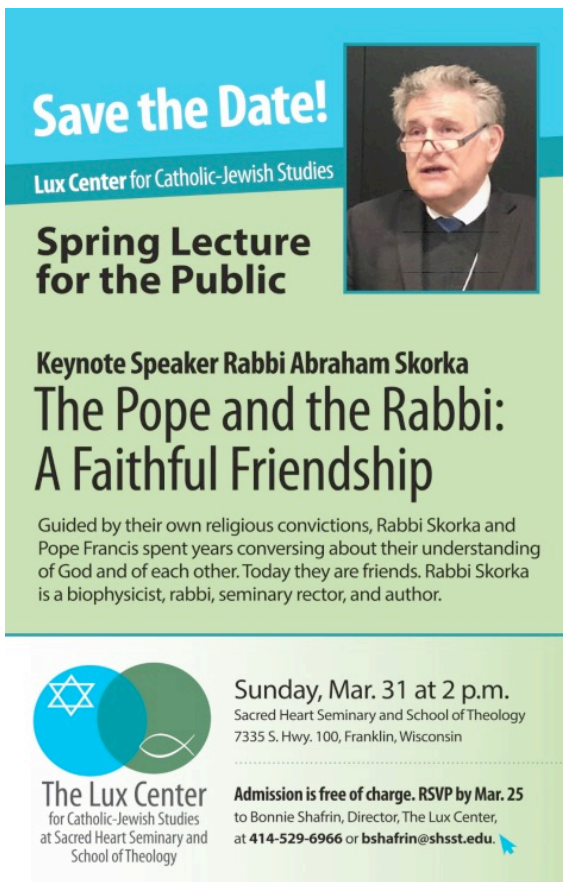
Josephus stressed that the Pharisees were popular among the common people during the time of Jesus. The Pharisees opposed an oppressive Roman authority. And, it was their approach to Jewish law that incorporated a fixed Written Law with an evolving and adapting Oral Law that ultimately laid the groundwork for ensuring the preservation of Judaism throughout the ages through the rabbinical tradition.

The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. not only reshaped Jewish identity, but Christian identity as well. The small Jewish sects that were followers of Jesus and became known as “Christians,” were increasingly populated by gentiles and were forced to define themselves as something distinct from 2nd Temple Judaism. Thus, the ever-widening chasm between Judaism and Christianity was set in motion.

The evolution of the authority of rabbinic Judaism lessened the need for the Jewish sects that existed in the first century. Representations and expressions of different interpretations of scripture and practice became part of the rabbinic tradition, and decisions relating to them were part of lengthy discussions that we can still study today. Contemporary Judaism continues to embrace diversity. The different movements of Judaism that include those

individuals who identify as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews are united in the continuing belief in the One God and in the dedication to the teachings of the Torah.

2019 Lux Center Events Mark Your Calendars!




Save the Date!
Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies

**Spring Lecture
for the Public**

Keynote Speaker Rabbi Abraham Skorka
**The Pope and the Rabbi:
A Faithful Friendship**

Guided by their own religious convictions, Rabbi Skorka and Pope Francis spent years conversing about their understanding of God and of each other. Today they are friends. Rabbi Skorka is a biophysicist, rabbi, seminary rector, and author.

**The Lux Center**
for Catholic-Jewish Studies
at Sacred Heart Seminary and
School of Theology

Sunday, Mar. 31 at 2 p.m.
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
7335 S. Hwy. 100, Franklin, Wisconsin

Admission is free of charge. RSVP by Mar. 25
to Bonnie Shafrin, Director, The Lux Center,
at **414-529-6966** or **bshafrin@shst.edu**

2019 Catholic-Jewish Film Series: Educational Films with Scholars
Showing the films ‘Pope Francis: A Man of His Word’
‘Constantine’s Sword’

Dates, Times and Locations to be determined (Watch for further notices)

Teaching Passover Seder for Seminarians, Seminary Faculty and Invited Guests
Tuesday, March 26, 6:00 p.m.
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

Sister Rose Thering Award Dinner
Honoring Bishop Richard J. Sklba
Thursday, September 26, 2019

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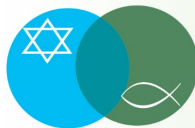
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