

In this installment of the Weekly Readers' Mailbag, I'll address two questions, one about the Jewishness of Jesus the other about my personal (bad) experience with editors. If you have a question, either send it via a comment here or zap me an email.

### **QUESTION:**

What is it in the NT portrayal of Jesus that tends to obscure the centrality of his Jewishness?

### **RESPONSE:**

The person who asked this question mentioned the fact that it is only in fairly recent times, since the second half of the twentieth century, that scholars have emphasized that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish. Prior to that, Jesus' Jewishness was commonly downplayed. So the question is, what about the New Testament led scholars away from recognizing how thoroughly Jewish he was?

I have three things to say in response to this very good question. First, my sense is that in no small measure, the earlier scholars who did not see Jesus' Jewishness were living and doing research in an environment that was itself anti-Jewish. Christianity, as we long know, has had an awful history of anti-Jewishness, and sometimes of even worse flat-out anti-Semitism. Anyone who devalues or even denigrates the Jewish religion, while believing in Jesus, is less likely to see Jesus as someone who thoroughly embraced it. For people like this, Jesus came to do away with Judaism, not to follow it. The most despicable form of this approach could be found, to no one's surprise, in Nazi Germany, where there were New Testament scholars who actually insisted that Jesus was not Jewish. He was Aryan. Of course.

Second point: scholars who downplayed Jesus' positive attitude toward Judaism could take comfort in...

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