

**How do you justify your statement in "Scholar's Corner" in the August 2006 issue of *Interchange* that Christians "believe God revealed Himself uniquely and supremely in Jesus Christ our Lord" when this belief has led historically to the denigration and suppression of non-Christian religions, and precludes any real dialogue with their adherents?**

– Norman Cary, St. Andrew's, Dayton

Thank you, Mr. Cary, for your e-mail. I've been thinking about what you wrote ever since I got it, thinking about how I might respond to your well-taken point.

I especially welcome comments that help me to improve what I write for Scholar's Corner. I don't want to misinform people or to perpetuate bad theology. And I certainly don't want to harm interfaith relations by encouraging negative attitudes towards adherents of other religions. So thank you for pointing out that the words "unique" and "supreme(ly)" that I used have historically contributed to exclusivism, triumphalism and supremacism.

I actually share your concern. To my mind, the "darkest page" in the history of Christianity is how we Christians have treated the Jewish people. Whenever we have been in an alliance with a government, we have a terrible

record of misusing that power to suppress dissent and make life miserable for those who would not conform (Jews, Muslims, pagans and even other Christians).

Perhaps a better concluding sentence would have been: "The difference is we believe the eternal Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus of Nazareth – but without Jesus' exalted status meaning there is any but the One God."

But these alternate words do not entirely remove the difficulty. There are strong differences of opinion between religions, and those differences are not likely to ever go away.

The task before all of us is to find a way to be true to our religious heritages and even proud of being Jews, Christians and Muslims, without "putting down" those who in good conscience choose not to join us. For

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a "foil" to make us look good by comparison.

Some progress has been made in this direction, but there is much more to do. Especially since the Holocaust, there has been more recognition that the Church's profoundly insulting and hostile attitude toward the Jewish religion (anti-Judaism) has for centuries fostered discrimination and acts of violence against Jews and prepared the way for modern racial anti-Semitism and Hitler's Final Solution.

There are efforts today to retell the entire Christian story, including the life and death of Jesus, in a way that does not make the Jewish people into villains, in a way that does not generalize the opposition Jesus faced from the Pharisees to all Jews. After all, Jesus drew huge crowds in Galilee, most of whom were probably Jewish. And we don't know of any followers of Jesus

Christians, the greatest task is probably how to have a Christian self-identity that does not need to denigrate Judaism in order to justify its own separate existence – one that does not need Judaism as

during his lifetime who were not Jews. The Pharisees were just one sect of Jews, and their opposition to Jesus should not be somehow generalized to represent the Jewish people as a whole, then or now.

The Roman Catholic Church and other Christian groups have publicly renounced the long-standing belief that the Jewish people bear an eternal guilt for having killed Jesus and that they are therefore rightfully discriminated against and their life rightfully made miserable. Rejecting this earlier theology is a definite step in the right direction.

No, we Christians do not agree with all the beliefs of Jews or Muslims or others (or else we would join those faith communities), but that doesn't mean we cannot respect those who differ from us. And we need to learn to respect the convictions and positions of others in the interests of peaceful coexistence.

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