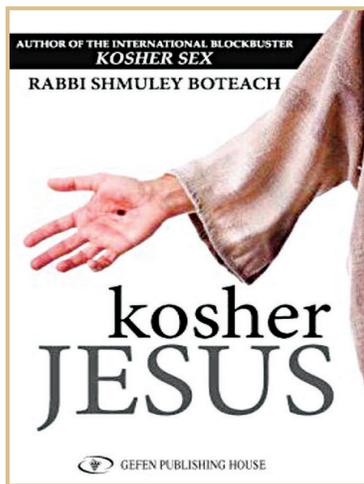


# Is Jesus Really Kosher?

Trying to make Jesus 'one of us' belies accepted historical scholarship



## Kosher Jesus

By Shmuley Boteach  
Gefen, 2012  
263 pages; \$26

By LAWRENCE H. SCHIFFMAN

Shmuley Boteach's *Kosher Jesus* is a bold attempt by a person of great ability with no formal training in New Testament studies or the study of Second Temple Judaism to present a Jewish treatment of the founder of Christianity, his relationship to the Jewish people and the narrative of his birth, career and death in the Gospels. Beyond that, Boteach sets forth an entirely new and controversial paradigm for Jewish understanding of Jesus and for Jewish-Christian

*Da Vinci's famous portrayal of "The Last Supper," supposedly a Pesach seder. According to Schiffman, while it was in fact Paul who "took the teachings of Jesus and his early followers and greatly magnified the wedge that these teachings drove between Jesus and his Jewish compatriots," the matter is not nearly as simple as Boteach claims.*

relations. This book, even before its publication, had already engendered more than its share of debate and even invective. The present review seeks to place this work in the context of the field in which it operates and to discuss its relevance for Jewish thought and Jewish-Christian relations today. If we may resort to an old cliché, we seek to throw light on a book that has already attracted a tremendous amount of heat.

From the beginning, Boteach wants us to see his book as totally revolutionary. We will see that parts of it are, in fact, totally unoriginal and that those parts that are most

original put forward ideas that this reviewer finds to be highly questionable. One of the supposedly original theses of this volume is that Jesus can only be understood by Jews and Christians if placed in the context of Second Temple Judaism. But actually, this is an axiom of all contemporary New Testament scholarship. One can hear it in virtually every single presentation given at the annual meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature where 9,000 scholars of all religions gather together to exchange scholarship. It is almost impossible to find anyone who would deny this notion. While it is true that it is not known in some Christian religious circles and in some countries not connected to the international academic enterprise, the claim that in this respect Boteach has discovered anything new at all is simply false. The only earlier scholarship cited in the book is the work of Hyam Maccoby, from whom Boteach seems to draw many of his ideas about Jesus and Paul. The book does not cite any other scholarly research on the topic. Whatever



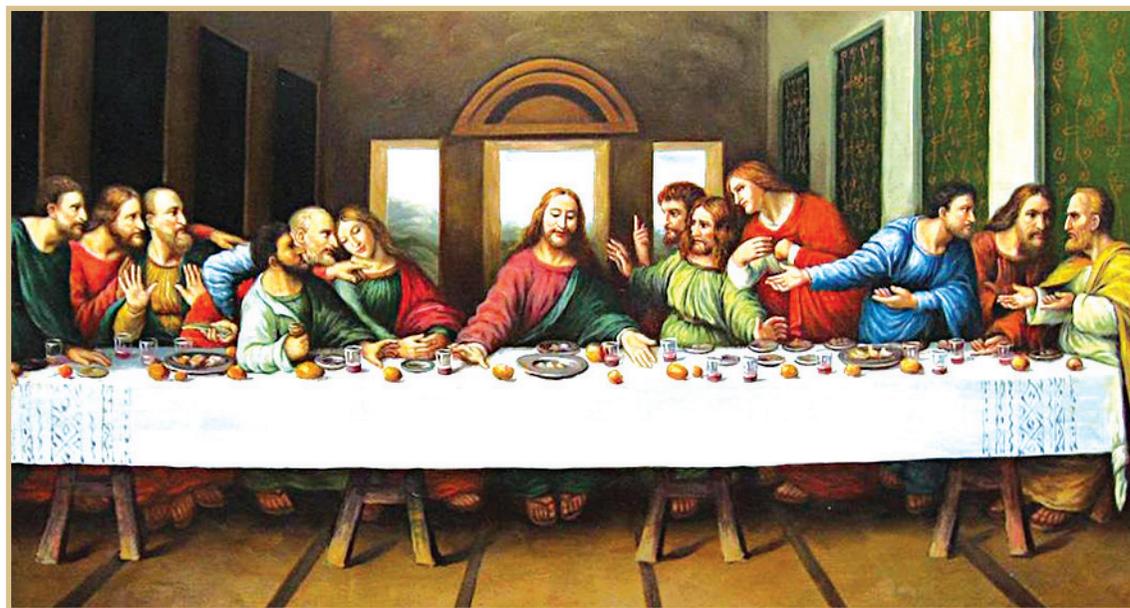
*At left, Pope John Paul II visits the Kotel with Chief Rabbi Israel Lau in 2000. Schiffman suggests that while Boteach is correct in observing the importance of recent popes in the development of a new friendship between the Jews and the Catholic Church, a basic tenet of the friendship is that "we may not tell our Christian neighbors what to believe."*

ples. But one of the most important lessons to be drawn from this material is that Jesus and the movement that he created cannot simply be seen as a Pharisaic, proto-rabbinic movement. The reality is that while the interpersonal ethics of the Gospels do indeed represent the Pharisaic-rabbinic approach, the messianic teachings and numerous terms and symbols of early Christianity are derived from a world of Second Temple Judaism that included sects that followed an alternative system of Jewish law. The theology of this approach to Judaism was based on a much more dualistic approach to

often connected with expectations of catastrophic violence, such as those espoused by certain of the revolutionaries in the Great Revolt against Rome in 66-73 CE and the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132-135 CE, are in some ways not in accord with what at least is reflected in later rabbinic teaching. The influence of such trends of apocalyptic messianism on Jesus and his early followers seems unquestioned.

Boteach argues that the descriptions of Jesus in the Gospels do not represent in any way an accurate picture of him. In his view, Jesus was a rabbi who adhered to the

Rather, there must be a method for distinguishing what is to be accepted from what is to be rejected. It is impossible to understand exactly by what process this was accomplished in the present volume. After all, the only evidence we have beside the brief mentions in Josephus and Tacitus and the Talmudic evidence that Boteach discounts is in the Gospels. Determining what to accept and what to reject in those accounts requires detailed philological investigation of the original Greek texts and comparisons between the various Gospels that relate to one another in a complex literary history. To say the least, this has not been done by the author to arrive at his conclusions. Instead, it



**Jesus' teachings as quoted in the Gospels, certainly in the ethical sphere, seem to be based on those of the Pharisees. But to call him a 'rabbi' is a ridiculous anachronism.**

the case, there is nothing new in this aspect of the book.

What is unfortunate, however, is that an entire world of scholarship on Second Temple Judaism, much of it the result of the discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, makes absolutely no appearance. This research has shown us the background of the apocalyptic messianism of Jesus and his early disci-

good and evil and, to be sure, very different, extremely apocalyptic messianic teachings. Indeed, the legitimization of Jesus as a Jewish teacher proposed by this volume presumes that his messianic views, or we might say those attributed to him by the Gospels, accord with some kind of normative, that is, Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism. The scrolls and related literature have taught us, however, that apocalyptic beliefs,

Pharisaic way, did not deviate from the observance of Jewish law and was a committed opponent of Roman rule who participated in revolutionary activity and was willing to sacrifice his life for this cause. These claims represent, to a great extent, speculation devoid of any kind of historical basis. History cannot be constructed based on a subjective selection of details that one wants to believe in ancient accounts.

appears that the author's thesis regarding Jewish-Christian relations and the Jewish reclamation of Jesus drives his attempt to reconstruct history in the image of his own beliefs.

The theory that Jesus was an anti-Roman revolutionary has been espoused for some time by a number of scholars. This view has failed to be accepted, precisely because there is absolutely no real evidence

*continued on page 11*

**Boteach essentially claims that the Jesus in whom Christians believe is not the historical Jesus, but rather a falsification by Paul and other later Christians. Such arguments do little to enhance Jewish-Christian relations.**

# Koshering Jesus A Bit Too Much

*Shmuley Boteach opens the Jewish-Christian dialogue on Jesus*

By HOWARD TEICH

I was thrilled when I read that Rabbi Shmuley Boteach had taken on the very controversial subject of the Jews adopting Jesus as a Member of the Tribe in his new

## COMMENTARY

book, *Kosher Jesus*. I was less exuberant when I went to Barnes & Noble to purchase it, and found that it was catalogued on the Christianity shelf and not under Judaism, even though it was titled *Kosher Jesus*, with the word *kosher* first, and written by a rabbi.

Unfortunately, it continued downhill, with a few uphill dashes from there, although on balance I am

pleased Boteach wrote this book. The rabbi tried hard to make the case that Jesus was not only a Jew, and a practicing Jew, but that everything about him arose from his Jewishness and Jewish heritage and learning, including his famous creeds and deeds. Boteach turned Jesus into his version of an Orthodox Jew of that time, who only came to Jerusalem during his final days to fight the Romans, and for which he was put to death by the Romans.

Boteach's essential thesis is that the Christians got it wrong. Nothing special was written about Jesus by other rabbis and scholars of his time; everything he said and did, and how it was recorded in the

New Testament (pre-Paul) was taken from the Torah, the Talmud and the great Jewish thinkers. Even Jesus' so-called miracles were common at the time. Yes, Jesus had a following, and called himself Messiah, but so did others. No credit is given to the unique life he led, and the way it was all woven together to lead people to a new

tently controlled Israel, built not one, but two Temples (which were both destroyed), lived under the domination of the Babylonians, then the Greeks and the Romans in the few hundred years before the Common Era, all of which led to a more secular ruling class of the Jews, who cozied up to their Greek and Roman authorities.

**Boteach ascribes the divinity of Jesus, which is anathema to the Jewish community, as well as the anti-Semitic overtones in the New Testament, to Paul's retelling of the story.**



*Rembrandt's Head of Christ, 1648-1650. The Dutch painter was probably the first European artist to depict Jesus with distinctly Jewish features.*

understanding of their lives.

Boteach sees the Jesus story as a Jewish thing, and actually not such a big deal, so in keeping with creating better Christian-Jewish relations today (which have improved), his message to the Jewish community is to get over it. The divinity of Jesus, which is anathema to the Jewish community, as well as the anti-Semitic overtones in the New Testament, he ascribes to Paul's retelling of the story. Boteach does that well.

Aside from what I imagine will be significant unhappiness in the Christian community about his historical revisionism (from their perspective), Boteach missed what I consider an important opportunity to make a significant contribution to our times.

I also have spent extensive time, as Boteach clearly did (the in-depth nature of his research is apparent), over the past 10-20 years reading and learning about Jesus and his times, and his importance to Jewish understanding of Christian thinking and (for me) a greater understanding of our Jewish people and Israel in historical context.

**W**hy did I start this journey of learning? I wanted to understand what it means for the Jewish people to be in Israel today, and how that relates to our earlier experiences in Israel each time we were conquered and lost our homeland. I wanted to learn from history, so we don't make the same mistakes and lose our land again.

I traveled back 2,000 years to the last time we had Israel, and there was Jesus. I found that it was a most significant time, as I even traveled back another thousand years, during which the Jewish people intermit-

By the time Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the high priest was appointed by the Romans, and the Temple had lost much of its original Jewish character. It appears that this is the Jerusalem that Jesus arrived in to change. And it should not be dismissed, as Boteach does, for we are facing some of the same conflicts today, and we must learn from them, and listen to people who are standing up for our people, Jews and Christians alike. How many of our current Jewish organizational leaders are in office simply because they were close to the current power structure, and how many have turned into apologists at a time when we need strength?

Boteach does not touch on the subject that perhaps, at that time, a Jew calling on other Jews to change their ways was also part of Jesus' message. Dangerous to Roman authorities? You betcha! Dangerous to the Jewish leaders who had sold out their people and religion for money and power? Yes, certainly. Sufficient to get the Jewish high priests and Romans to team up against him? That's certainly a possibility, and his sentencing and death could not have happened but for the Roman authorities. Truth is this last one gets us in trouble, though, so we should simply take a pass on it. I would assume that if there were some Jewish leaders against Jesus, there were others in his camp.

**W**e can use Jesus' example as a warning today, a wake-up call for our own people. And that is the direction I would have hoped, and actually expected, Boteach to have gone (and, candidly, he still can in his commentary and talks). Back in the 1920s, Rabbi Stephen

Wise spoke out for the Jewishness of Jesus, and others have studied Jesus as a Jew, some even as a Jewish prophet (I am not speaking about Jews for Jesus or conversion). The difference between Judaism and Christianity, and no Jew of note takes us there, nor should nor can, is that the latter views Jesus as the Messiah, the son of God, or God himself. That is not a Jewish interpretation of Jesus' life, nor will it ever be. Christians will just have to accept that Jews will always remain certain that the Christians got it wrong (this is a point on which to agree to disagree, although a distinctly central point).

This perspective does not belittle Jesus, and his life. It raises it. Jews can admire the life he led, and the way he led it. They can learn from him, and what he did. Boteach is right on target here; the learning must come from the pre-Paul Jesus, the real Jesus, yes, perhaps the Jewish Jesus. In the Jefferson Bible, President Thomas Jefferson tried to strip Jesus of his religious overtones; Boteach tries to fit him neatly into Orthodoxy.

I am convinced that we should kosher Jesus; I am just not convinced that Jesus was kosher. I do think Jesus understood that what comes out of one's mouth is more important than what goes into it ("listen and understand what goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of the mouth, that is what defiles them"). Boteach's interpretation insists that that is not what Jesus said or meant because Boteach wants to portray him as completely kosher. I would say that you don't have to be Orthodox to be a good

*continued on next page*

*bohemia*  
REALTY GROUP

2101 FREDERICK DOUGLASS BLVD NY NY 10026

PH: 212.663.6215

### UPTOWN MANHATTAN APARTMENTS FOR RENT

#### 1,2,3 & 4 Bedroom Apartments For Rent

##### Gut Renovated

Brand new kitchens and baths with granite countertops, oak cabinetry, and new appliances

##### Generous Layouts

All apartments have separate living rooms and bedrooms that can fit a Queen bed plus furniture, and feature high ceilings

##### Transportation

Steps to express trains - 20 minutes to midtown

##### The Neighborhood

Supermarkets, bars, coffee shops, laundry, delis, and retail shopping within a five block radius



TO VIEW, PLEASE CONTACT:

#### Jon Goodell

Principal/CEO

Bohemia Realty Group, LLC

2101 Frederick Douglass Blvd

NY, NY 10026

E: info@bohemiarealtygroup.com

O: 212.663.6215

F: 866.598.1059



# Kosher

continued from page 8

in the New Testament for it. Readers must understand that the question is not whether or not it is possible; rather, the question is whether this or any other author espousing this view has succeeded in proving it or showing that it is the most likely explanation based on the evidence available to us. We might add that similar claims are regularly made about the Dead Sea sect, in the latter part of its history after the Roman conquest of the land of Israel in 63 BCE. Here the contrast could not be greater, since in the scrolls the Roman enemies are certainly referred to under a code name. The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness represents an eschatological, indeed apocalyptic, expectation of such a war in which the sectarians would defeat the Romans. But no such evidence is found in the Gospels. It is for this reason that attempts to situate Jesus among the various Jewish rebels against Rome have not succeeded.

The author is correct that the later layers of New Testament writings seek to appear sympa-

thetic to the Romans, but let us not forget that during that very same period Christianity was regarded by the Roman Empire as an illicit religion and Christians were regularly being thrown to

in the decades after his crucifixion (c. 30 CE). In his own day, the term *rabban*, "our master," was beginning to be used for leaders of the incipient rabbinic class. But no system of ordination or designation of any

willingness to die fighting the Roman oppressor. The problem here is again the method by which evidence is selected. The earliest layers of the Gospels relate certain disputes between Jesus and the

pointed out by Jewish scholars for over a century, much of Christian New Testament scholarship has failed to deal with the details of these observations. However, in many cases the New Testament provides the earliest evidence for those particular rabbinic ideas, and the New Testament pictures Jesus as arguing subtly against their specifics. Indeed, he generally argues for a more lenient approach to Jewish law.

With our wider knowledge of Second Temple Judaism and the various streams of Jewish law within it, we can reconstruct an overall understanding of these debates. We find that Jesus and his early followers represented the most lenient approach, the Pharisees represented a middle of the road approach, and the Dead Sea sectarians preserved for us a much stricter take on these laws. In

continued on next page

**For many Jews, the symbol of Jesus is precisely the thing that is most unacceptable to them about Christianity. They know that 'Jews don't believe in Jesus.' Take that away by lowering our collective defenses and we open the way from Judaism to Christianity.**

the lions. He is also correct when he doubts the historicity of the trial of Jesus for which the Gospel accounts vary greatly.

Jesus' teachings as quoted in the Gospels, certainly in the ethical sphere, seem to be based on those of the Pharisees. But to call him a "rabbi" is a ridiculous anachronism. (Boteach admits this but does it anyway.) The term *rabbi* in Jesus' time, by which he is sometimes addressed in transliteration of the Hebrew into the Greek text, is to be translated "my master." There is no evidence that Jesus ever sat in a rabbinic academy, though the beginnings of such institutions were starting to congeal

individuals as rabbis existed at this time. Rather, this is the period of transition from the Pharisaic sages, who go without any title, to the later *tannaim*, the teachers of the Mishnah, who do indeed carry the title "rabbi" beginning only after the destruction of the Temple and the gathering of the sages at Yavneh, c. 80 CE.

The notion that Jesus in no way disagreed with, rejected or opposed any aspect of Jewish law and practice of his time is a necessary pillar of the author's claim that Jesus can be reclaimed by the Jewish people as a loyal rabbi. Indeed, the book constantly refers to him as a hero of the Jewish people to his alleged

Pharisees. The author must reject these disputes out of hand to define the position of Jesus as essentially that of the rabbis. We agree entirely with the author that there are similarities between Jesus' understanding of the law and his ways of reasoning with those of early rabbinic literature. While this has been

## Too Much

continued from previous page

Jew, although I have the utmost respect for Orthodox Jews and their traditional practices. I don't have the sense that Jesus was so traditional.

Where I do agree with Boteach, and this is important, is that perhaps Paul, and then Augustine, created a new Jesus, in a new story, that created an antipathy toward the Jewish people and the Jewish rabbinic tradition in its formative stage as Christianity was being launched, and as the Jewish people and religious practice was being transformed by the destruction of the Temple and the forced exile of the Jews from Israel. An extraordinary time for our people, with extraordinary and long-lasting consequences.

Yes, Rabbi Boteach creates an important conversation for Jews about Jesus as a Jew, our acceptance of him, and raising his status in our community to a man worthy of our open respect. And for that I applaud the rabbi. I just think that there is too much stretching to make Jesus a traditional Jew, which I don't think he was.

I think in modern parlance, as we so often look in America to Robert F. Kennedy, it may be termed that Jesus saw wrongs, and tried to right

them — of the Jewish people and humanity and, yes, the Roman rule of Israel. We can, and should celebrate him, and respect him, as a Jew, and as a human.

There are those in our Jewish community who have seen this book as an outrage, and even called for it to be banned. Others have ostracized Boteach for writing this book. Some

**Jews can admire the life Jesus led, and the way he led it. They can learn from him, and what he did. But the learning must come from the pre-Paul Jesus, the real Jesus, yes, perhaps the Jewish Jesus.**

have expressed their concern that at a time when we are losing too many Jews who have chosen to abandon our traditions, this book glorifies Jesus and makes him and Christianity more attractive. We need not fear. We, as Jews, are stronger than that, and

our religion, our story and heritage are extraordinary. We need not avoid confronting this historic person, a Jew, who has had such a monumental impact on the course of humanity.

As Jews, we should recognize that the Christian world found a new spirit, a new spirituality, in the life and message of Jesus, whether altered by Paul or not, and just accept that. But the message is not the same for us, and the Christians need to accept that. We don't need to lecture the Christians on how they are wrong. And I would hope that, as Rabbi Boteach opens the door a bit more, the Christian world continues its education about the Jewishness of Jesus.

As Israel once again faces dangerous threats from outside forces in our times, we need to know our history. As many in the Christian community stand with us today in support of Israel, and as the Jewish community now stands with the Christian community as it faces its own difficulties in many countries, we can bring more understanding, and closeness, into today's Judeo-Christian communities by continuing the discussion that Rabbi Boteach has started.

*Howard Teich, a practicing attorney in New York City, has held multiple leadership positions in the New York and the national Jewish community. Comments? E-mail howardbteich@aol.com.*



**Away for the Winter? No Worries!**

Worrying about freezing pipes this winter? If you're traveling, you should. Winter freeze-ups can cause serious water damage, lead to dangerous mold growth and require costly and inconvenient reconstruction. But with help from Quogue-Sinclair Fuel, you'll have no worries when you're away!

**Proud to be Locally Run.**

Quogue-Sinclair is the leading supplier of high quality heating fuel...both oil and propane...on Eastern Long Island. Family-owned and operated since 1954, Quogue-Sinclair is a local company that always puts our customers' best interests first! We have budget billing, offer early pay and senior citizen discounts, and take credit card payments. We



\*Mention this ad and receive \$125 credit when you set up a new account. May not be combined with other promotions.

have two state-of-the-art fuel storage facilities, so you know your scheduled delivery will be on time, every time. For emergencies, we offer 24-hour repair service and a staff of highly trained and experienced technicians.

**Prevent a Cold Weather Catastrophe!**

Our Shield Security division can install in your home a cold temperature monitoring device that will warn us if you have an equipment problem. That way, we can correct an equipment failure before it leads to a big problem. So, call Quogue-Sinclair today to get ready for winter and never again worry about home heating problems!



**631-728-1066**  
[www.quogue-sinclair.com](http://www.quogue-sinclair.com)

161 West Montauk Highway, Hampton Bays  
Dependable Fuel Oil, Propane and Security Services

**Serving the Hamptons Since 1954**

# Kosher

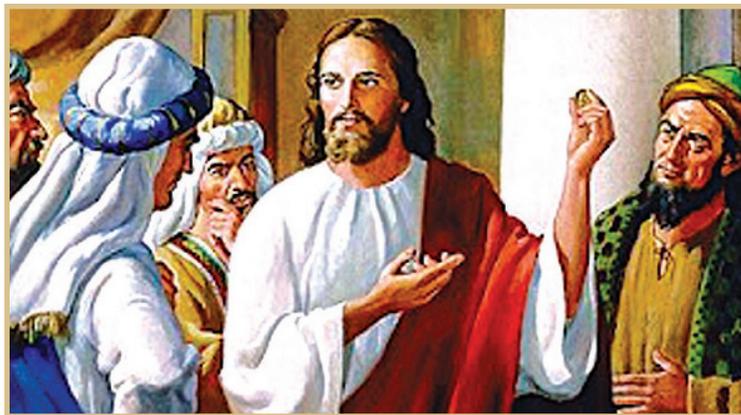
continued from previous page

other words, Jesus' followers, and most probably he himself, took issue not with the system of Jewish law as a whole, but rather with certain specific rulings of the Pharisaic sages. While it is convenient for Boteach to dismiss the accounts of the disputes in the Gospels, the fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that these very issues of Jewish law (for example the question of an animal that fell into a dangerous pit on the Sabbath) were being discussed by all Jewish groups makes the Gospel accounts highly credible, contra Boteach's claim. For this reason, we believe that Jesus was indeed in conflict with the Pharisees on the specific interpretations of issues of Jewish law.

Furthermore, the author compares rabbinic literature with the teachings of Jesus in an attempt to demonstrate that Jesus adhered to rabbinic law. This approach ignores the chronological problem that has plagued scholarship since the middle of the last century. While it is possible to date many rabbinic teachings, others cannot be definitely chronologically assigned. All in all, however, the greatest bulk of the Talmudic corpus, even its earliest major work, the Mishnah, is explicitly dated to the period after the destruction of the Temple. Again, it is possible to date specific laws and

teachings to earlier sages, even when the names of the teachers responsible for them do not appear in the text, but one cannot simply make a blanket assertion that New Testament teachings are based on rabbinic material often ascribed explicitly to sages who lived after the death of Jesus and the rise of Christianity.

Boteach claims that because Jesus' teachings represent Pharisaic-rabbinic Judaism he may therefore be reclaimed by the Jewish people as a great teacher, despite the fact that he thought of himself as a messianic redeemer. He correctly asserts that it is no transgression to identify oneself or anyone else as the messiah. Despite Boteach's assumption that Jesus did indeed see himself as the Messiah, a matter about which



*Though Boteach's book refers to Jesus as a Pharisaic rabbi, Schiffman believes that "Jesus was indeed in conflict with the Pharisees on the specific interpretations of issues of Jewish law."*

But these are not the fundamental questions to be asked regarding the reclamation of Jesus as a Jewish teacher. It seems that such a step is fraught with numerous difficulties:

We have no scientific way of establishing what the actual teachings of Jesus were in order to define them as legitimate expressions of

as based on traditional Jewish ideas and, hence, we can admit our agreement and even our respect for these teachings. However, there are numerous teachings attributed to Jesus with which Judaism totally disagrees, again as noted by the author. But we cannot simply accept Boteach's claim that whatever

secretary of state, Nicolaus of Damascus, preserved in Josephus? The reality is that the Talmudic accounts refer to Jesus despite the fact that some of the details are historically incorrect.

I belabor this point because traditional sources do indeed refer to Jesus and set forth the traditional way in which Jews have understood Jesus. These sources include Talmudic references and the discussion deriving from them in Maimonides Code of Jewish Law, as well as numerous medieval polemical texts that resulted from the Jewish-Christian debate. Further, Jewish legal sources teach us much about relations with Christians in antiquity, the Middle Ages and even modern times. Among the most important things we learn is that our sages have held what is essentially an ambivalent view of Jesus and, I would submit, such a view is appropriate even in modern times.

Let me explain: Our sages recognized that Jesus was associated in some way with the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition. But they also understood that in some ways he deviated from that tradition. In fact, they believed that his deviation was so serious that he led many Jews astray. For this reason, they did not seek to reclaim him as one of their own. Further, they understood that he had come to symbolize acceptance of another faith, since it was impossible to disentangle his image not only from the claim of messiahship but also from that of divinity that is attributed to him already even in the Gospels. These images are so strong in Christian texts and tradition that the assumption that one can reclaim for the Jews a different, Jewish Jesus is simply naïve. Jews are better off continuing to see Jesus as "the other," even as we recognize the extent to which in his own day he was truly one of us.

Indeed, I would argue that this ambivalence, much more than the constructed re-acceptance of Jesus suggested by the author, is a much more healthy position and allows us to treat our neighbors with respect while in no way confusing our beliefs with theirs. Most important, such an approach allows us to define ourselves and Jesus in a way that makes clear the lines between us and our Christian neighbors — lines that must be clear both to our community and to theirs, and especially to our children and youth.

**My own experience in Jewish-Christian relations tells me that when we recognize and overcome our differences we create stronger and better relationships than when we minimize these differences.**

Gospel accounts are difficult to pin down, he argues that Jesus in no way saw himself as divine. This is probably correct, specifically because the Gospel accounts do not in any way impute this point of view to him. However, we should note that already in the Pauline Epistles (c. 50-60 CE) and the Gospel of John (c. 90-100 CE) this identification is made explicitly.

Judaism. How, except by selecting what we believe in and excluding what we do not believe in from the picture in the Gospels, could we ever decide which teachings to espouse? Of course, any Jewish reader of the Gospels will see many things attributed to Jesus with which Judaism is in complete agreement. The author correctly interpreted many of these teachings

er Jesus says that we like is an accurate historical portrayal while whatever we dislike comes from later strata of Christianity when editors sought to distance themselves from the Jews and Judaism and so distanced Jesus from them. This is simply an arbitrary assumption and not scholarship.

The author denies (in an appendix) that the Talmudic references to Jesus (found only in uncensored manuscripts) really refer to the early Christian teacher. Rather, he claims that the Talmudic Jesus is someone else. This notion was put forward in the Middle Ages by those who sought to defend the Jewish people against the claim of Christians that our own sources indicate that we were involved in bringing about the death of Jesus of Nazareth.

The reality is that none of these sources can be taken as historical because early Jews had little accurate information about one of those numerous messianic pretenders killed by the Romans for political reasons. Knowledge in Jewish Babylonia of Christianity was even less. The difficulties posed by the fact that these sources give the wrong names for Jesus' students and provide incorrect dating for him should not be solved by claiming that they refer to somebody else. Would we claim that the Talmudic "Hordos" is not Herod simply because rabbinic sources lack historical information about him and provide legendary accounts instead of the accurate historical data available in the writings of Herod's non-Jewish

Nest Seekers  
INTERNATIONAL

**THE BEST TEAM IN THE HAMPTONS!**

 <p>WEB ID #34279</p> <p><b>WATER MILL 7300 sq.ft. of ELEGANCE!</b></p> <p>Opulent European Mansion in Water Mill 8 Bedrooms and 7.5 Baths on 2 Acres. Priced to Sell at \$3,595,000</p> <p><b>MARCY BRAUN</b> 516.375.6146 marcyb@nestseekers.com</p>	 <p>WEB ID #40495</p> <p><b>SAGAPONACK 5 BEDROOM with PRIVATE PATH to OCEAN!</b></p> <p>5000 square feet of Perfection with 360° of Breathtaking Ocean, Pond and Farm Views. MD/LD \$150,000.</p> <p><b>JOANNE KANE</b> 631.873.5999 joannek@nestseekers.com</p>
<p>WITH OVER 30 YEARS EXPERIENCE</p> <p>WE ARE COMMITTED TO EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE WITH MARKET EXPERTISE</p> <p>20 Main Street · Southampton · NY · 11968 · SOUTHAMPTON · EAST HAMPTON · BRIDGEHAMPTON</p>	

It is certainly true, as Boteach maintains, that Christianity as we know it was created by Paul, who admitted never having met Jesus except in a vision. There is nothing but conjecture to Boteach's claim that Paul was a pagan who converted to Judaism. Paul was indeed a Jew, deeply versed in Hellenistic Judaism. It was indeed he who took the teachings of Jesus and his early followers and greatly magnified the wedge that these teachings drove between Jesus and his Jewish compatriots. But the matter cannot be seen in as simple a manner as the author sees it. Rabbi Boteach seems to have absolutely no idea of the existence and nature of diaspora, Hellenistic Judaism.

Actually, the only way to understand Paul's teachings, as well as the development of Christianity in the New Testament, is to realize that the Jews in the Greco-Roman world lived a kind of Judaism that was in many ways not that of the Pharisees of the land of Israel. This was apparently a Judaism in which the division between spirit and flesh was a common theme. Further, observance of Jewish law was understood differently from the way it was lived in the land of Israel. Jews in the Hellenistic world mixed freely with their neighbors and there can be no question of the great extent of the Hellenistic cultural influence upon them. In other words, to some extent Paul is a product of that world and schooled in it; he did not simply create his view of Jesus and his construction of Christianity out of whole cloth. Rather, he did so based on the Hellenistic world in which he lived and to which he wished to "sell" the new religion. But at the same time, in the years immediately after Paul, as evidenced in the non-Pauline epistles, the greater forces of Hellenism continued to influence the formation of Christianity.

Boteach explains in detail why the distinctive Christian beliefs — such as virgin birth, the Trinity, the divinity and messiahship of Jesus — and the abrogation of the law are totally opposite to Jewish beliefs and must be rejected by committed Jews. It is this aspect of the book in which the author is most at home. He explains in detail why it is that the primary beliefs of Christianity are unacceptable to Jews and why Jews should continue to reject these distinctively Christian ideas. He explains that monotheism for Jews does not allow for a Trinity, son of God or incarnation. In other words, for Judaism it is impossible to think of a human being as a truly divine being. Regarding the messiahship of Jesus, he puts forward the age-old Jewish argument that we clearly do not live in a redeemed world.

Boteach makes room in his system for inner personal redemption and for the ability of people to create redemptive environments and acts in their own personal context. But he clearly distinguishes these from the cosmic notion of messianic redemption put forward by the Hebrew prophets and the Jewish tradition.

These visions have not been fulfilled, for which reason Christians expect the second coming. From a Jewish point of view, however, he

disagree, despite our disagreements. For this reason, I find greatly mistaken the author's claim that Jewish-Christian relations would be advanced by a Jewish re-acceptance of Jesus, as a hero of the Jewish people and as a teacher not only for Second Temple Jews, but for Jews of today. It is a step that would, in fact, work against rather than for close relations with Christians on an ongoing basis. My own experience in Jewish-Christian relations tells

**We cannot simply accept Boteach's claim that whatever Jesus says that we like is an accurate historical portrayal while whatever we dislike comes from later strata of Christianity when editors sought to distance themselves from the Jews and Judaism.**

explains that it is impossible to consider one who did not bring about the long awaited, complete redemption as the Messiah.

Boteach asserts that reclaiming Jesus the Jew makes it possible for Jews and Christians to continue the development of their new relationship. This relationship has come about in the aftermath of Vatican II, which created a new friendship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and as a result of the turning of Evangelical Christians to the support of Israel and the Jewish people. He is correct in observing the importance of several recent popes in these developments. On the other hand, in this context we should mention the fact that relations with liberal Protestant groups in the U.S. and Europe have declined in recent times, and some of them consistently take anti-Israel positions that border on anti-Semitism and certainly create a climate in which Jews and Israel are demonized.

My problem here is not with the author's argument that the relationship of the Jewish people with many Christians has changed radically for the better. I completely agree. My problem is with the strategy with which he wishes to expand and maintain those relationships. This gets to the very heart of intergroup relations. I would argue that our good relations with Catholic and Evangelical Christians stem from a full recognition of our disagreements. For me, true openness and tolerance come when we cooperate with and maintain friendship with those with whom we fundamentally

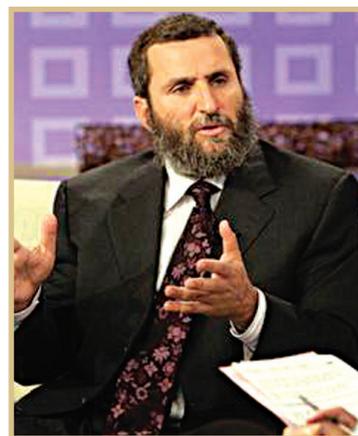
me that when we recognize and overcome our differences we create stronger and better relationships than when we minimize these differences.

One can gather from the book that Boteach's views on Jewish-Christian dialogue are directly opposite to those accepted in the Orthodox community and beyond. Within the Orthodox community, during and after Vatican II, Rav Moshe Feinstein and the Lubavitcher Rebbe both took a negative view of the Vatican's efforts, believing that this was nothing more than a ruse to attempt to convert Jews. It is true that some early ecumenical thinkers intended to create a universal religion. But it

**It appears that Boteach's thesis regarding Jewish-Christian relations and the Jewish reclamation of Jesus drives his attempt to reconstruct history in the image of his own beliefs.**

quickly became clear that there was great potential in the new proclamations of the Vatican.

It was because of the consistent work of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Cardinal Augustin Bea that the Vatican came to understand fully the implications of its own decision to truly eliminate anti-Semitism from its teachings. Certainly, this new approach for Christians in general was an outcome of the Holocaust. Christians recognized that their religious beliefs had helped to create an



**Rabbi Shmuley Boteach is familiar with controversy, having already titled a book *Kosher Sex*. Schiffman observes that his latest, *Kosher Jesus*, has "already engendered more than its share of debate and even invective."**

atmosphere in which genocide could occur.

The Modern Orthodox community sought the advice of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who put forward an approach to interreligious dialogue, based on his understanding of Jewish law, which has become the norm for the Orthodox community and that has given great guidance to other groups within the Jewish community as well. One of his basic principles was that we may not try to tell our Christian neighbors what to believe. Yet so much of this book aims to do exactly that. For underneath its argument is essentially a claim that the Jesus that Christians believe in is not the historical Jesus. Rather, the Jesus in whom the Christian faithful believe emerges in this book as a falsification by Paul and other later Christians. Such arguments do little to enhance Jewish-Christian relations. The advice of Rabbi Soloveitchik was truly sound. Jews should not be telling Christians what to believe or what not to believe, just as we would not want them to make such claims regarding our faith.

Most difficult to accept is Boteach's claim that Jews

messiah and divine figure. The author would agree, of course, that in no circumstances could a Jew see Jesus in that way. Rather, he suggests that we "construct" a new Jesus, one reflecting the original ancient figure in his Jewish context, shorn of the distinctive beliefs of Christianity, that he claims to reclaim for Judaism and the Jewish people.

In making this proposal the author ignores two major issues, the symbolism of Jesus in Western culture and the need for the Jewish people to draw clear lines between itself and Christianity to avoid losing adherents to the dominant faith. Each one of these issues is extremely important. Let's remember that Jesus came to symbolize for Jews not the "Prince of Peace" as Christians understand him. Rather, throughout Jewish history Jews were taunted, persecuted and killed in Jesus' name. They were accused of his murder and made to suffer dearly for this false accusation. So it is simply insensitive to expect, as Boteach does, that this experience should be forgotten so quickly. How can anyone expect the Jewish people to accept the total reinterpretation of this symbol by Boteach?

Further, and probably more important, the Jewishness of Jesus is regularly used in evangelizing Jews by Christian conversionists. The sad reality is that Jews throughout our country, and even in Israel, are often the target of groups seeking to convert them to Christianity. For many Jews, the symbol of Jesus is precisely the thing that is most unacceptable to them about Christianity. They know that "Jews don't believe in Jesus." Take that away by lowering our collective defenses and we open the way from Judaism to Christianity. So there is no sense to the proposal to reclaim Jesus as a Jewish teacher and hero. He is best left to his Christian adherents, even if he started out as a fellow Jew who lived by the Jewish tradition.

*Lawrence H. Schiffman, vice provost for Undergraduate Education and professor of Judaic Studies at Yeshiva University, has authored numerous books and articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Judaism. He also represents the Orthodox Union on the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), which he currently chairs.*