all the ways that they think with Jews and about Judaism today. For many Christians, the essence of the Jewish people lies in their embodiment of divine messages that Christians must properly interpret. Even in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, during a time when the precise nature of the Jewish covenant is under reconsideration, Christian theologians agree that the Jews play a significant role in Christian salvation history. To be clear, this is a supporting role. Jews have no part in producing, writing, or directing the script.

Separating actual Jews from the Jews that Christians have imagined for the past two thousand years is a colossal task. It requires Christians to recognize the degree to which they have assigned Jews a role in their own story, a role that most Jews do not recognize. It requires Christians to acknowledge their dependance on an imagined Jew, an imagined Judaism, and an imagined Pharisee, and it invites Christians to reassess their understanding of salvation history. Grilli and Sievers are correct to insist that Christians need not demonize Judaism in order to valorize Christianity. But Christian theologians have not yet resolved the matter of how, precisely, Jews can enjoy the salvific benefits of a living covenant outside of Christ. They have not yet developed a meaningful understanding of Judaism outside the allegorizing framework of Christianity.

By pointing out the differences between historical Pharisees and the Pharisees of the Christian imagination, this volume shines a light on the task of future generations of Christians, who will be called to construct a new model of Christianity that does not depend on an imagined Jew. This project may take centuries. But it is an essential step along the process of the "Parting of the Ways," which has not yet reached completion. Commitment to this project will help to ensure the integrity of Jews and Christians and the future of a healthy Jewish-Christian relationship.

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III

The Pharisees is a collection of essays that brings together a diverse group of scholars around the topic of an enigmatic historical group referred to as Pharisees. The various perspectives and methodological approaches both provide answers and raise new questions concerning who the Pharisees were, what they believed, how they were depicted, and the implications for how they are understood. The meticulous analysis by each scholar

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has resulted in a rich contribution to the study of Judaism and early Christianity.

The title of the volume itself invites the reader into a conversation, *The Pharisees*. Here, the definite article acts as a signifier that refers to something specific, a historical group. When employed disparagingly, however, the definite article generalizes the noun that follows, such as: "The Blacks," "The Women," "The Gays," "The Jews," and "The (fill-in-the blank)." Generalizations result in stereotypes of minoritized and marginalized groups. Although this serves as an example of the limits of language (we do not have a suitable alternative), it also points to how language is employed to limit, simplify, and distort our understanding of people. There are material implications of such distortions. Language is one tool used to construct an other: one who is different, often opposite of the self.

The rhetorical construction of otherness is well attested in early Christian literature. How we understand ethnic and religious differences in these texts, however, may be simply lost to time. Those who teach Paul's letter to the Corinthians may familiarize students with the phrase "acting like a Corinthian." This phrase may have been used in the first-century Mediterranean world to describe one's lewd behavior. Ancient Corinth, a cosmopolitan metropolis, was believed to have been home to diverse groups and ideologies. Outside of this context, the phrase has no meaning. Contemporary Corinthians would likely disagree with such a characterization, and perhaps ancient Corinthians, too. This context is significant. Modern readers familiar with this context may read Paul's letters to the Corinthians with a slightly different lens, one that is attempting to make sharp distinctions between this nascent Christian community and those outside this community. Likewise, understanding Pharisees within their historical context is paramount for any attempts to reconstruct who they were and what they believed.

In addition to understanding the historical context or the world in which a text may have been created, it is also essential to know how to read it. Gay Byron's work on blackness is instructive here. In her book, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, Byron examines the rhetorical functions of the terms "Egypt/Egyptians," "Ethiopians/Ethiopia," and "Blacks/Blackness."[4] She argues that "insiders" and "outsiders" were defined through symbolic language about blackness. For example, the blackness of Ethiopians became a metaphor for sin. The "Black One," as the ethnic other, symbolized both the devil and the perceived political and religious threats to Christian

[4] Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

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communities. There are also examples of blackness representing piety. It is important to note that these depictions are never absolute and are rarely straightforward. In her essay "Paul, the Perfectly Righteous Pharisee," Paula Fredriksen similarly reminds us, "But the relationships between Jesus and the Pharisees are not uniformly negative (e.g., they warn Jesus about Antipas 13:31), and they host Jesus at table, during which disagreements arise (Luke 7:36, 11:37-52; 14:16-24)" (124). These glimpses are a pulling back of the narrative veil. These examples reveal proximity. More often than not, these encounters between Jesus and various Pharisees are with individuals who become representatives of an entire group. Language is a tool used for discursive othering and was used as an intra-Christian polemic to define Christianity apart from its Jewish origins and the larger Greco-Roman culture, as we see in the Corinthians example.

Byron's womanist reading of ancient sources demonstrates the significance of language. She writes: "The rhetorics that have been identified call attention to the power of language to create the religious, political, social and cultural reality of ancient Christians."[5] Words create reality. This is why words matter. The differences that discursive othering asserts, us over and against them, means that we must search for meaning and reconstruct histories more circumspectly. Bryon concludes: "The submerged voices within early Christianity were not necessarily ethnic, but rather ideological, theological, and political."[6] Byron challenges interpreters of ancient Christian sources to consider the power of symbolic language in shaping attitudes, values, worldviews, and practices of the early Christians and reminds that "ethnopolitical" rhetoric is not limited to the ancient world.

Through the lens of "religious othering," the discursive use of the term "Pharisee" is further illumined. What political, ideological, or theological differences were these writers attempting to assert? As with all forms of othering, the similarity necessitates such sharp distinctions. As Jesus' opponents, Pharisees are portrayed as holding views contrary to his. The rhetorical construction of Pharisees in the New Testament often is conflated with the true representation of a historical group of Pharisees, and as a result, stereotypes are mapped on them. In their chapter, "The Pharisees in Modern Scholarship," Susannah Heschel and Deborah Forger provide an example. They write: "Portraying the Pharisees, like the German café drink named in their honor, as hypocrites who pretended to be pious served Christian interests. Jesus could then be depicted as the one who unmasked and challenged those Pharisees and introduced true religion, Christianity, while Rabbinic Judaism, the purported outgrowth of Pharisaic religion, could be condemned

[5] Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, 127.
[6] Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, 128.

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as legalism" (382). The Pharisees, antagonists in the Jesus narrative, become the convenient "other" in the construction of Christian identity. Fredriksen similarly observes: "Yet the imputation of harsh legal interpretation, in all the evangelists' accounts, always goes to the Pharisees. Their 'harshness' is a characterological constant, activated for narrative purposes to sharpen the contrast with Jesus" (123). Places of connectivity are ignored in order to highlight the differences. What does it mean to affirm that Paul is a Pharisee (self-described), include his letters in the Christian canon, and then demonize Pharisees? Who, then, are the hypocrites? The characteristics of these Pharisees (legalistic, harsh, hypocrites) become the template for all religious opponents or "others." All stereotypes are accompanied by the danger of violence, the violence of language itself, and physical violence. This violence is perpetuated when the historical Pharisees are believed to be the ancestors of contemporary rabbinic Judaism.

Violence can also be the result when we do not allow silences and gaps in our texts and historical understandings to stand. The time and distance between our world and theirs seem too great to declare with any degree of certainty what we may know about Pharisees. Many interpreters have taken it upon themselves to paint a more complete picture. It seems too difficult to say, "We simply do not know." Readers and interpreters have often filled in these blanks with stereotypes that have resulted in antisemitic and anti-Jewish sentiments.

As this volume has clearly demonstrated, the quest for historical Pharisees continues and continues to be complicated by new discoveries, assertions, and challenges. That the phrase "acting like a Pharisee" still has meaning today reminds us that we have work to do. Although a great deal of scholarship has been produced that addresses the Jewishness of Jesus and Paul, scholars must translate their work to a general audience and must be further engaged in classrooms that offer religious instruction. Clergy must be vigilant in their study and preach and teach responsibly. It is not enough to casually acknowledge Jesus' own religious and ethnic history if he is understood to be leaving it behind. Similarly, Paul's Jewishness often is dismissed or even erased, particularly when his transformation is understood to be a conversion. His epistles perhaps are evidence of the flexibility, even expansive possibilities of Pharisaic beliefs, not the rigidity of it.

The Pharisees reminds us of one notable reason why the work of historians and biblical scholars matters. This scholarship will shift the conversation. This scholarship, however, must be extended beyond the echo chambers of academia, where we talk only among ourselves. For it is both inside and beyond these walls where language still has material implications. We perpetuate the stereotypes when we leave these stereotypical assertions unchallenged.

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Yes, stereotypes are categorizations that simplify our understanding of the world. Yet, our world (and the ancient world) is complex and often ambiguous. In her article "The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism," Susannah Heschel reminds us that in the study of religion it is necessary to unveil how race is hidden or perhaps overlooked. She argues, "As society recognizes the horrors of racism—in slavery, Jim Crow, and genocide—shame often suppresses forthright declarations and instead creates 'hidden' institutions of racism, or racist ideas in different language."[7] She concludes that racism requires "constant questioning." This cautionary tale should be a consideration as we read, interpret, and teach sacred texts. We should constantly question and be mindful of how we, too, can reinscribe the very racism that we are seeking to eradicate (if that, indeed, is what we are seeking to do).

Many Christians today feel that the term "Christian" has been usurped. They do not identify with others who boldly proclaim their beliefs and ideals are Christianity's "right and true" form. There is dissonance, but there is also resonance. The Jesus movement that developed within and later morphed outside of Judaism was Judaism until it was not. In the United States, ideological divides in our contemporary moment are often condensed to "us versus them" rhetoric. This rhetoric has far too often resulted in extreme violence. The lessons from how to better understand the Pharisees abound, and perhaps a lesson for how we can better understand ourselves can come from how we understand Pharisees. Maybe we can learn to be more hospitable to our religious others, our racial and ethnic others, our gendered others when we acknowledge what we do not know—when we mind the gap.

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IV

The present volume represents the cornucopian product of Amy-Jill Levine, formerly of Vanderbilt University and now at Hartford International University for Religion and Peace, and Joseph Sievers, of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, whose individual efforts in promoting collaboration, one notably in print volumes and one notably by convening conferences, have provided contemporary scholars with a trove of high-level reflection on a

[7] Susannah Heschel, "The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35 (January 2015):1, 23.

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