Jewish Scholar Named President of Catholic Biblical Association

01.09.2026 | JCR

August 14, 2026 - Amy-Jill Levine has made history as the first Jewish scholar to be named president of the 90-year-old Catholic Biblical Association of America (CBA). The CBA promotes biblical study and allows non-Catholics to join.

Levine became a member 42 years ago after earning her Ph.D. from Duke University. She has long served the association as an editorial board member, consulter, and book review editor. Levine's fascination with Catholicism began at age six while watching Pope John XXIII’s funeral, whom her mother called "a friend to the Jews".

Levine (70) is a professor at Hartford International University and previously taught at Vanderbilt Divinity School. She will also teach at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland. Her life's work centers on understanding Jesus as a first-century Galilean Jew and analyzing how his original Jewish followers understood him. In 2019, she became the first Jewish scholar to teach New Testament at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and has met with Pope Francis three times.

Levine notes her work reciprocates the Catholic Church’s modern openness, referencing the landmark 1965 *Nostra Aetate* declaration that rejected antisemitism and cleared Jews of collective blame for Jesus' death. She has written 20 books, including *The Misunderstood Jew* and *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. During her one-year term, she aims to provide biblical interpretation guidelines for Catholic parochial school textbooks and offer recommendations for a revised lectionary.

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Levine's appointment as president of the CBA has generally been well received. However, it has also prompted a few negative comments. In response, the president and the executive director of the CBA issued a statement in support of the president. In their view, these comments demonstrate that "some neither understand the role of the president nor the nature of a professional society" such as the CBA. They emphasize that Professor Levine "was not elected because she is Jewish, but because she is an exceptional scholar and has played a very important role in Catholic-Jewish dialogue."

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