

Book Review:
Judaism and Jesus
By Zev Garber and Kenneth Hanson

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Abstract: *The authors show the Jewishness of Jesus and his teachings. They delve into what unites and what distinguishes Judaism and Christianity, especially in the Jewish liturgical practices that the early Christians, who were mainly Jews, took from their ancient traditions and modified to establish the liturgies that Christians practice today. They call, rightly, for dialogue between all Christians and all Jews, having established how much we can learn about ourselves by learning from the other.*

Keywords: *Dialogue, Liturgy, Passover Seder, Eucharist, Messianic Judaism, Shoah*

This is a book that I can highly recommend to scholars with some background in the field of Jewish-Christian studies. Zev Garber is an Orthodox Jewish scholar, long involved in the field, who has written numerous excellent works on the subject. Kenneth Hanson, as he tells the readers in his preface to this short volume, started out as an evangelical Christian who was drawn to the Hebrew language and, through interactions with the communities of modern Messianic Judaism, became a convert to Judaism.

Review

Zev Garber, in his introduction, speaks of his own efforts over the years to combat the ancient Christian teaching of contempt against Jews and Judaism which, as he rightly states, formed the bedrock of modern racial antisemitism that led to the Shoah (Holocaust). He describes his efforts, and those of other scholars, Jewish and Christian, to help people, Jewish and Christian, to understand the Jewishness of Jesus and his teachings. He briefly presents “a Jewish view” of Paul and John the Baptist.

Lastly, he states why the followers of Messianic Judaism, who hold to traditional Christian theology on the Trinity and the Incarnation, live their

lives as Jews and consider their faith to be a Jewish faith as well as a Christian faith. Garber considers this attempt to blend Judaism and Christianity together to be “unacceptable and incompatible” with rabbinic Judaism since the Trinity obfuscates the Oneness of God and the Incarnation and, from a Jewish point of view, is worshiping a human as if he is a god. Yet, as a pioneer in and practitioner of dialogue, he has engaged in “respectful dialogue” with Messianic Jewish leaders, while realizing that most Jewish academics and denominations believe Messianic Judaism to be an attempt by Christians to convert Jews away from their faith and people.

In the first section of the book, Garber describes his experiences teaching Jewish Studies, Bible, and “the historical Jesus” (i.e. Jesus as a Jew) in a public two-year college. Regarding the Hebrew Scriptures, studying it from both a Jewish and a Christian point of view, Garber notes, deepens the understanding of both communities. He concludes with a note on a Passover Seder open to both Jews and Christians, which would need to take into account not only the Exodus but also the Shoah. Hanson then describes the challenges he faced teaching about Jesus the Jew in the context of his Judaic Studies courses, taking into account the centuries long Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism which twisted the actual testimony of the New Testament and misrepresented the beliefs and practices of the Jewish People, thus ripping Jesus out of his actual historical context.

In Section II, Garber first looks at the Christian self-understanding of a community/church as “one in Christ” from the perspective of Jewish understandings and questions regarding the Hebrew Scriptures and the great tragedy of the Shoah. Regarding the first, Garber establishes, in my opinion, that Jesus was in fact a Pharisee, citing Matthew 23:2–3 (“The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it.”) and numerous other New Testament passages. He notes Jesus’ “caustic” words to Temple authorities, which mirror those of the Pharisees who were, as he notes the “proto-rabbis” of Jesus’ time. He could have described Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple to make this even more clear.

With regard to Paul, who opened the Jesus movement up to include Gentiles, who needed only observe the Noahide covenant commandments, which was also a Jewish view of God’s relationship with humanity at large that the rabbis ultimately adopted, Garber writes that “Christ not Torah is the centrifugal force” (p. 53). He then takes up the “theology” of the Shoah, noting the “deafening silence from Heaven” during it and how Jews since then have wrestled with their understanding of God. He notes, correctly, that the perpetrators of the Shoah were Christians, killing under the banner of the

respective houses of worship, and in the case of the *Seder* in our homes, and then sitting together in a circle or around the table and sharing our experiences and deepest emotions. I have invited Jews to come with me to my church to experience Mass on Sunday. More profoundly, Catholics can invite Jews to come and experience Holy Week services, especially on Holy Thursday, which celebrates the Last Supper and is, along with Good Friday and Easter, central to the Christian faith.

It would be helpful to let your parish priest know if you are inviting Jews to attend the Good Friday liturgy, given its history. For it was especially on Good Friday that Christians, hearing sermons about how “the Jews” killed Jesus (despite the fact that it was Pilate and Pilate alone who made that decision and the fact that the few Jews involved, the chief priests, were appointed by Pilate and did Pilate’s bidding in all things, as our Creed, “suffered and died under Pontius Pilate,” clearly and rightly states with no mention of Jews) stormed out of their churches and gathered into mobs that invaded the Jewish ghettos, stealing from them, raping their women, and killing men, women and children. If the priest knows that Jews are in attendance he is likely to preach a sermon that will make it clear that the Church officially has condemned the idea that “the Jews” were or are collectively guilty of the death of Jesus, as so many sermons over the centuries erroneously preached.

Finally, Easter represents the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In discussing it after mass, Christians can note that based upon ancient Jewish teachings found in the Hebrew Scriptures, both Jews and Christians look forward to an end time in which all humans will be raised from the dead and live in a time of universal peace, justice, health, and harmony. Jews and Christians are both equally called to prepare the way for this Messianic Age by working together *now* to help those in need, whether of food, health care, housing, or other needs. Our task, as Jews would say, is jointly *tikkun olam*, healing the world in preparation for the coming or return of the Messiah in whom both Jews and Christians believe.

Dialogue is not just talk. Central to both of our religious and liturgical traditions is the call to action. Joint Action. For the betterment of all humanity and, indeed, of creation itself, our world and home.

Conclusion

This slim book by Garber and Hanson will open up for readers volumes of ever deepening understanding into the true nature of the teaching

of Jesus, the Judaism of his time and our time, and the development of Christianity as we know it today in its varying forms of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianities. It illustrates how serious research into the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth will foster and deepen interreligious dialogue between Jews and Christians in a way that will help all involved understand their own religious traditions better and more deeply.

I used Chrysostom as an example of what went wrong in our relationships, a wrong that the book of Garber and Hanson seeks to make us aware so that we can acknowledge and move beyond the crimes of Christians against Jews over the centuries. I did not mean to cast sole blame on Chrysostom, of course. He was one of a number of the “fathers” of the Church who gave such sermons and wrote such tracts against Jews and Judaism. But he encapsulated this wider movement and significantly influenced it. Nor is this essay the time to go into detail on the ancient Christian contempt for Jews and Judaism. The major point to take from it, within the context of this paper, is that the anti-Jewish teaching of contempt obscured and for all practical purposes denied the fact that Jesus of Nazareth lived and died a faithful Jew of his time. It ignored that Jesus’ teachings, derived from the only Bible he knew (the Jewish bible), paralleled the teachings of Judaism, and—with regard to the social and ethical proclamations which he taught—are very similar to those of rabbinic Judaism. As we know, Jesus was close to and in constant dialogue with the Pharisees of his time who became the rabbis and, based upon the insights that Jews took from their exiles in Egypt and Babylon, found a way to preserve Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

Christianity, as Garber and Hanson illustrate, likewise began to emerge as a separate Jewish, then Gentile/Jewish, and finally mainly Gentile movement, that is the Church as we know it around and after the destruction of the Temple, the period when the Synoptic Gospels were written. The Gospel of John appears to represent a later period, around the turn of the first century, when the Jesus movement, the Church, was becoming increasingly Gentile. Where the Synoptic gospels speak of a variety of Jewish groups, John’s Gospel tends to speak in general terms of “the Jews.” What the Synoptics attribute negatively to the Pharisees—or at least those of the School of Shammai—the Gospel of John attributes negatively to “the Jews.”

It is this de-Judaization of Jesus and of early Christianity which became generally accepted by Christians over the centuries. And it is for this reason that the excellent book by Garber and Hanson that has been reviewed here had to be written. The point of the book has been to reclaim the essence of Christianity in the Judaism which gave it birth and to help modern Jews and

Christians come together in dialogue and—it is to be hoped—in working together, as the Hebrew prophets and Jesus strongly argued for, to bring about a better world, to help those in need, and prepare the way for the coming/return of the Messiah who will announce the Messianic Age, the age of universal peace, justice, and harmony for all Jews and for all Christians and for all humanity. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Zev Garber and Kenneth Hanson for helping to launch us on this journey.

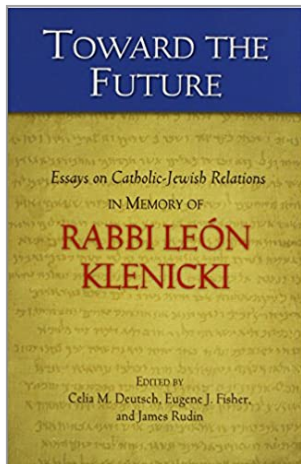
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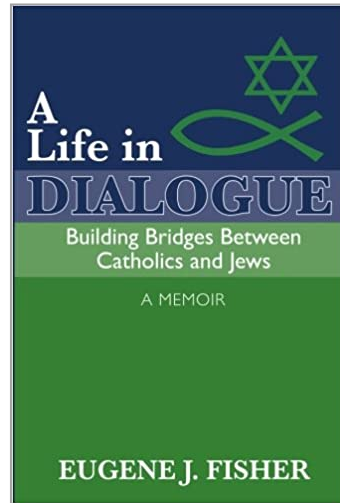
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Dr. Eugene J. Fisher](#) is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Saint Leo University. He has worked tirelessly for the reconciliation between Catholics and Jews. Ahead of his time, he effected change, directing Catholic-Jewish relations for the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops beginning in 1977 and as author of numerous works in the field. He has been a Consultor to the Holy See and a member of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee. Dr. Fisher is an active member of learned and professional societies, such as the Catholic Biblical Association, the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). He has lectured widely throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Latin America and Australia. He has published over twenty-five books and monographs, and some 300 articles in major religious journals, many of which have been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Polish and German for publication in Latin America and Europe. See: “*Nostra Aetate*: A Personal Reflection,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Fall 2015, Vol 50, no 4) pages 529–38, and *A Life in Dialogue, Building Bridges between Catholics and Jews: A Memoir*, St. Petersburg, FL: Mr. Media Books, 2017.

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