

REVIEW

Alan L. Berger, Editor

***Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Relations:
After the Flood, Before the Rainbow***

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David Fox Sandmel, Anti-Defamation League

This volume consists of the first ten years of the Annual May Smith Lectures in Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Relations delivered at Florida Atlantic University, where the editor, Alan Berger, teaches and directs the Center for the Study of Values and Violence after Auschwitz. Its subtitle—"After the flood, before the rainbow"—is apt. Most of the authors explicitly acknowledge the profound changes in Christianity exemplified by *Nostra Aetate* and, at the same time, recognize the persistence of unresolved theological questions and points of tension between Jews and Christians.

The first five essays are by Jews, and the last five are by Christians (four Catholics and one Protestant). All the contributors are well-known and respected scholars and practitioners of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Elie Wiesel speaks of the optimism engendered by the defeat of fascist and communist totalitarianism, as well as widespread opposition to racism, colonialism, and imperialism. He senses that "the world had learned vital lessons from its errors" (p. 1). He includes the progress in Jewish-Christian relations as a reason for such optimism. However, this optimism is dashed by continuing global conflict. In the face of this reality, human beings must "invoke and create hope where none is found" (p. 3).

Irving Greenberg also speaks of dashed optimism. He is disappointed by growing anti-Israel sentiment among mainline

Protestants, the supersessionism undergirding some Evangelical support for Israel, and the fact that the Catholic Church has not internalized *Nostra Aetate*, as evidenced by its response to Mel Gibson's 2004 movie "Passion of the Christ." Yet he believes that the emergence of Christianity from Judaism is part of God's plan, as is a pluralism that rejects the domination of one religion over others.

Alan Berger examines the interreligious tensions generated by Gibson's movie. The film, while highly controversial for its portrayal of Jews, also had the welcome effect of leading some "people to reflect on their own views of religion and to reread sacred texts" (p. 36). However, in the long run, the positive changes in Catholic teaching will have to be more widely known. The power of a film to shape attitudes is much greater than the positive influence of Vatican documents. Also, he asks whether the Church will continue to focus on these issues or whether its attention will be drawn to other, more pressing matters.

David Patterson explores the meaning of the Messiah, faith, covenant, and redemption in Judaism and Christianity, with special attention to the challenges of faith in a messiah in the post-Holocaust era.

Amy-Jill Levine proposes that Jews and Christians approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "from the perspective of Scripture and liturgy, rather than contemporary politics" in order to better understand the different perspectives they bring to the discussion (p. 62).

James Carroll calls for the establishment of a tripartite dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He stresses the need for Islam to engage in the kind of self-criticism that the Christians have begun (a process not yet finished). All religions have to ask the following questions: "How do we correct the foundations of our beliefs when they show themselves to be inhuman? And how can basic change in religious affirmations

be made without undermining the authority of the tradition?” (p. 79).

John K. Roth explores the topic of the sixth commandment prohibiting murder. He declares that “[the biblical] imperative is the most necessary, although not sufficient, condition for human civilization” (p. 97). He connects this to theological questions about belief in a God who allows murder and genocide to persist. Roth does not, however, consider the interreligious implications of his thought.

Mary C. Boys writes that every religion has texts that are “prone to sacrilegious uses” (p. 99). She offers five readings of the passion narratives to suggest how these texts—often used to provoke hatred against Jews—might nonetheless be “redeemed” (p. 108).

John T. Pawlikowski assesses the Catholic Church’s relationship to the Holocaust, focusing on the Vatican document “We Remember: A Reflection on the Holocaust,” Pope Benedict XIV’s views on anti-Semitism, covenant and the Holocaust, and the on-going issue of the role of the actions of the Church and especially of Pope Pius XII during the Second World War.

Donald Dietrich asserts “a common human morality that can be uncovered through an ongoing dialogue concerning God and the human condition” (p. 138). Through post-Holocaust understandings of human dignity rooted in praxis rather than abstract ideology, Jews and Christian can develop a dialogue in which “human values can be explicated more fully” (p. 142).

Each of the essays is informative, some of them provocative. They cover theology, hermeneutics, the practice of interreligious dialogue, and the politics within and between the Jewish and Christian communities. While the book’s title refers to “Jewish-Christian relations,” the Catholic Church features prominently in many of the essays, not only in the contributions of the Catholic scholars but also in those of the Jews.

This highlights the dominant role the Catholic Church has taken in Jewish-Christian relations since the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, an iconic statement for Jewish-Christian relations in general. The Church has produced the most sophisticated theological reflections on Jews and Judaism, both in official documents and in the writing of popes and other church leaders. It is also most often involved in controversies with the Jewish community, a function as much of its size and of the attention given to the Church and the popes as of anything inherent in Catholicism itself. This focus on Jewish-Catholic relations is not unique to this collection. Nonetheless, the topics the contributors address transcend the parochial.

Those with an interest in Jewish-Christian relations, and in interreligious relations in general, will find much of value in this anthology. It would be an excellent text for a course in Jewish-Christian relations or for discussion by a clergy association. The volume has an index; the essays, however, are not dated, which would have been helpful when current events are being discussed.