
Charlesworth, J H (ed) 1992 — Overcoming Fear

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Reviewer: Prof P M Venter

This book deals with the roll which fear plays in the relationship between Jews and Christians. Most of the contributions hail from a symposium held by the American Interfaith Institute in Philadelphia, United States of America in 1987. The participants discussed the impact of fear on the conflict between Jews and Christians, in many instances from personal experiences.

Some of the contributions discuss the theme of the symposium from the viewpoint of Biblical and post-Biblical literature. In an excellent paper Culpepper points out that the term 'Jews' in die Gospel of John should be understood against the social background of the conflict between Christian Jews and other factions of the Jews during the first century. This conflict is transposed in the strategy of the narrative onto the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. The viewpoint of Hanson is that the conversation between Jews and Christians should take place on the cognitive as well as the affective level. Better knowledge of the literature which they have in common would contribute towards greater willingness to talk about differences and agreements. Tatum shows in his work that Clement of Alexandria of the second century, in contrast to others of his time, showed a positive attitude towards the Jews. He was willing to acknowledge that Christianity had and could learn much from them. Murphy uses a Tanak/Old Testament theology and points out that the 'fear of the Lord' forms a central theme in the collection. In this theme he sees a mutual point of agreement which should draw the two groups closer together.

Another group of contributions deal with trends in the relation between the two groups. Fenn describes fear as a phenomenon of the modern secularised society which is manifested in various forms where larger groups dominate smaller groups. Anderson points out that the trend towards absolutising and the fantasy of superiority among Christians constrains the dialogue between Jews and Christians. Mendels talks from an Israeli point of view. He thinks that Christians and Jews are in need of each

other. Jews should be seen as equal partners in the dialogue. He makes the interesting statement that Christians ought to show the same loyalty towards present-day Jews as they show towards the Israel of the Bible, making the objectionable supposition that modern Jews are identical to biblical Israel. Segal wants to get rid of offensive names and hidden agendas. These do not belong to the dialogue between the two parties. Both parties should rather be taking the opportunity to learn from each other and to explore their common history. Borgen joins in at this point by pleading for frank, but well structured dialogue between the two parties. To this Fisher adds his impressions from the experience he had when talks took place on an official level between the Roman Catholic Church and a number of Jews. These talks presented many problems, but just as many challenges. The best contribution in the collection comes from J T Pawlikowsky. He approaches the problem from an educational viewpoint. According to him the New Testament is imbedded in the Old Testament. The same is true for the culture and thought of both. He thinks that more attention should be paid to the historical context in which religion operates. Along that way it would be possible to move away from a destructive situation like that of the Holocaust into a more nuanced multicultural approach in which there is room for multiformity in modern society.

Three contributions have an autobiographic character. Wiesel perceives trends in the present time which still reminds him of what he experienced during the time of the Holocaust. In his paper Hengel shares some of his recollections of Germany in the time before 1945. After World War II he became a New Testament scholar. During his studies he became very much interested in the pre-70 C E Judaism. He sees the future in an alliance of Jewry and Christendom where the boundary between the two is kept, but their powers are harnessed together against the ideologies and anti-religious trends in modern society. Leighton reports on the discussions which took place between a group of Americans and Christians in Russia during 1990. The problems people are dealing with after the dissolution of the Soviet Russian Republic has been dissolved are totally different from those in the United States where the ideal is held of a new social order in which Jews and Christians can take part in peaceful dialogues with one another.

This publication is much more practice orientated than the publication *Jews and Christians* which came from the same group in the same year. [See next review — editor.] The speeches of this symposium are in general not on the same academic level as those of the other symposium. The contributions of Culpepper and Pawlikowsky, however, are much better than any of those in the other publication. This publication does give a good impression of the extent of the problems and questions at grass roots level in the relation between Jews and Christians. The reader interested in the problem at this level, wanting to listen to both sides of the problem, will enjoy reading this book.
