

**Charlesworth, J H (ed) 1990 — Jews and Christians**

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**Reviewer: Prof P M Venter**

This book explores the past, present and future relationship between Jews and Christians. Anti-Semitism has been present in Christianity right from the start. Over the years it caused the death and persecution

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of thousands and thousands of Jews. In Christian circles, Jews were held collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. These and other related topics were discussed at a symposium held in May 1987 in Philadelphia under the leadership of Professor J H Charlesworth. Seven of the papers read at the symposium, along with the discussions which followed each paper, are published in this book.

What is presented here is an historical survey of the interrelationship of two religions with a common origin which divided into Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C E, each going its own way. In the nearly 2000 years of their parallel existence the relationship between them has varied from undisguised hatred to an eagerness to join in mutual discussions. This history is studied here from the perspective of different disciplines.

Martini shows in his historical-theological overview how the conflict between the two had its origin in religious fanaticism, intolerance and religious biases which very often went hand in hand with political motives. In his opinion a vast area of common ground can be found which can be explored towards a better understanding of each other and the greater prosperity of mankind.

For Charlesworth, it is a matter of academic integrity to take part in the dialogue between Jews and Christians. According to his paper, recent investigations into the New Testament provide the basis for this dialogue. Detailed analysis of the background of the New Testament indicates a common heritage between Judaism and Christianity which can no longer be ignored.

Another New Testament scholar, Beker, works with the hypothesis that several Judaistic factions existed side by side during the first common era. They were divided on several theological issues. The faction which eventually became Christian was more inclined towards eschatological messianism, while the faction of rabbinic Judaism was orientated towards wisdom and law. The present discussion should keep this difference in theological orientation in mind. Christians ought to be aware of their Judaistic heritage and the polemical inclination found in their literature.

In his lecture Smith pays attention to the roll played by the Gospel of John in the attitude of Christians towards Jews. The Gospel uses the term 'Jews' for indicating the Jewish leaders and the authorities of the first century rather than the Jewish population in general, to which Jesus and his disciples also belonged. The Gospel reflects a crisis in Jewish-Christian relations which started when Jews started persecuting Christians. The term 'Jews' in the Gospel of John should therefore be understood within the social context of the controversy between Johannine Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism.

Zinn, a historian, makes an iconographic study of the Middle Ages. In the work of Hugh of St-Victor in Paris he finds some willingness to apply exegetical methods used by Jewish scholars of the time. Several Christian exegetes followed him in borrowing from these exegetical results. Zinn therefore pleads with Christians of his own time to accommodate interpretations of Scripture coming from Jewish circles. In the discussion following his paper, it was pointed out that Zinn was working with an isolated trend, as the undisguised hatred of Jews by the Crusaders occurred at the same time.

Hillerbrand indicates in his paper that a shift occurred in the attitude of Luther towards the Jews. Luther became rather disappointed with the Jews' reaction towards the efforts of Christians to have better relations with them. According to Hillerbrand the anti-Semitism of the Nazis is linked more to Luther's German *Weltanschauung* than to his disappointment with the Jews.

For Eckardt anti-Semitism is nothing less than sin. He sees the Holocaust as an accusation against the integrity of Christendom. According to his view the best way of fighting anti-Semitism is by joining in with Jewish feminism. Fenn uses the term 'secularisation' to prove that the removal of people from society in the form of a Holocaust is nothing less than a pathological phenomenon. In essence it boils down to a collective effort to cope with death by evicting people from society and eventually killing

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them. Osborn looks at anti-Semitism from a theological viewpoint. In anti-Semitism Jesus is detached from his Jewish roots, a severe unaccuracy. Right from the start a trend towards self-centred ecclesiasticism existed in the Christian church. It surfaced especially in anti-Semitism where the church renounced its dependence upon Jesus the Jew and upon Judaism.

Anti-Jewishness and ecclesiastical arrogance were expressed in modern times in especially the German church at the time of National Socialism. Reading this book one becomes aware of the actuality and surprising extensiveness of the problem. The multi-disciplinary approach towards the problem followed at this symposium clearly indicates how this topic touches on even the remotest aspects of Christian theology. The level on which the discussion takes place, the intensity with which the problem is dealt with and the application of more recent research, all contribute to wrestling with a problem which Christianity has never really succeeded in solving. This book is highly recommended for every one interested in the relationship between Judaism and Christianity wanting to study the problem on an academic level.

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