

Garber, Zev, and Hanson, Kenneth, *Judaism and Jesus*. Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. xiii + 170 pp.

Reviewed by Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, Distinguished Professor of Theology, Saint Leo University.

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.

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 Torah/Law/Hebrew Scriptures and the great tragedy of the Shoah. Regarding the first, Garber establishes, in my opinion though others may disagree, 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.

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With regard to the epistles of 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 "Crooked Cross," the swastika. He concludes by noting that "the acts of concentration camp inmates, whose caring, kindness, nurturing, sacrifice and suffering" (p. 56), especially by women inmates, placed God's presence there.

Garber then returns to the first century, explicating his understanding of Jesus as a revolutionary, anti-Roman figure, traces of which he finds in the earliest gospel, Mark. Increasingly, though, as events drew nearer to and after the crushed Jewish rebellion and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 CE, Christians sought to placate the Romans, especially by exculpating the one person who had the power to order the crucifixion, Pontius Pilate. I would note our common Christian Creed that Jesus "suffered and died under Pontius Pilate" does not mention any Jewish involvement.

Garber, unfairly in my estimation, accuses Mark of being "anti-Jewish." Personally, I do not believe that a close reading of Mark, or the other two Synoptic Gospels, justifies such a conclusion. It was, many scholars would assert, later generations of Christians who misread the gospels to make them appear to justify the essential calumny of the teaching of contempt, that Jews were and are collectively guilty of the death of Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels, the Jews clearly involved in Jesus' death were "the chief priests and the elders." Jesus is arrested in the night for fear that the Jews of Jerusalem would rise to save him. The scene in which Jews are said to shout "Crucify him!" takes place in Pilate's walled-off courtyard, which could have held at best a hundred people, again out of sight of the Jews of Jerusalem, not to mention the Jews in the rest of Judea and in the Diaspora.

Hanson convincingly argues for a more positive understanding of the Pharisees and Jesus' interactions with them, a position with which I agree. He argues for critical biblical scholarship, citing a lack thereof in evangelical circles. This is likely true. I would note, however, that Catholic and mainline Protestant scholarship has been doing just this for many years.

Hanson delves into how Jews and Christians might understand, react to, and engage in dialogue with Messianic Jews, about whom I knew little before reading this book. He makes a serious error when he states that Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians believe that "faith in Jesus alone is the ground for 'salvation'." This is simply not true, as one can see in the official declarations of the Catholic Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council, and likewise in many of the official statements of Episcopalian, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. Hanson is correct to state that what divided Judaism and Christianity is the Incarnation, that idea that Jesus was/is fully human and fully divine. For Jews, as he notes, this is the dividing line. Messianic Jews, he also notes, cannot be accepted by Jews as practicing a form of Judaism if they hold to this doctrine, even if, as many do, they observe the laws and practices of rabbinic Judaism. But if one does not believe in the Incarnation, one cannot be called a Christian.

A leading Messianic Jewish scholar, Mark Kinzer, has observed that "the incarnation of Jesus/Yeshua mirrors that of the Divine Presence in the Jewish People as a whole" (p. 89). However in the Bible, Hanson notes, the Jewish People are often shown as veering away from the Covenant Commandments and falling into sin, and are thus hardly "divine" as Jesus is said by Christianity to be divine. Can a person be considered to be fully a Jew, adhering in the Shema ("Hear O Israel the Lord,

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your God, is One.”), if s/he believes in the Trinity and the Incarnation. Jews can, arguably, believe that Jesus was/is the Messiah, was raised from the dead, and will return and the end of time, and still be considered Jews. But not if they believe in the Trinity and Incarnation. Hanson concludes that there are “non-Trinitarian” Messianic Jews who might well be considered to be Jews and as such be eligible for Israel's Law of Return.

In Chapter Seven Hanson delves into what we know of the ancient Hasidim (pious persons) and whether Jesus/Yeshua might have been part of that movement, wondering whether it (and Jesus) might have been militant or pacifist. He describes what can be learned about this amorphous group through study of the books of the Maccabees, rabbinic literature and Josephus, with interesting comments on the Essenes and the Dead Sea Scrolls along the way.

In Section III Garber and Hanson argue, convincingly in my opinion, for academic and direct dialogue with Messianic Jews. They are not, the authors believe, simply a modern version of age-old Christian attempts to convert Jews away from their faith and practices, but a group with which both believing Christians and Jews can engage and learn with in dialogue.

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