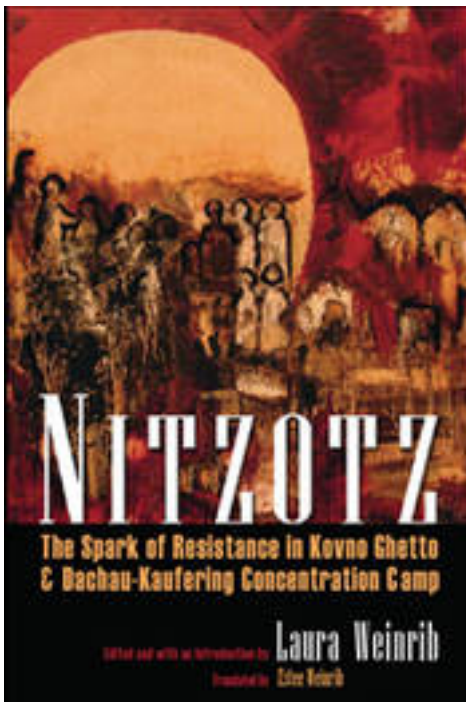


Boys, Mary C.. Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding

| Rudin, A. James

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Confronting Supersessionism

A. James Rudin

Mary C. Boys. Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding. Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah, NJ, 2000

The world-famous 13th century stone figures of two women in the European cathedrals of

Strasbourg, Freiberg, Bamberg, Magdeburg, and, in Paris, Notre Dame, all convey the same

triumphant message: a crowned woman proudly representing the conquering Christian Church

stands in glory next to a blindfolded and bowed figure who symbolizes the defeated

Synagogue.

No words of interpretation are needed when a person views such sculptures. For more than

700 years these graphic stone images have transmitted a potent spiritual claim: Christianity

and the Church have replaced Judaism and the Synagogue.

The technical term for this widely held belief is supersessionism, which asserts the New

Testament fulfills the Old Testament. As a result, Judaism is obsolete and the stubborn

Jews, rejected by God, are a theologically surplus people. To this day, supersessionism

remains one of the major obstacles in the Christian-Jewish encounter. Throughout history, it

has provided Christians a theological justification for the teaching of contempt toward

Judaism and, tragically, supersessionism has frequently led to physical violence against the

Jewish people.

Happily, Sister Mary Boys, a prominent Roman Catholic scholar, has confronted

supersessionism head-on in her extraordinary new book whose title says it all: *Has God*

Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding (Paulist Press).

Boys, the Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological

Seminary In New York City, ardently believes authentic Christianity does not require the

spiritual annihilation of Jews and the destruction of Judaism. Her remarkable book is of

historic importance because it thoroughly repudiates the spiritual arrogance and religious

competition that have bedeviled Christian-Jewish relations for 2,000 years.

Has God Only One Blessing? destroys the carefully nurtured belief that is

artistically embodied In the cathedral statues. Writing in an effortless style, Boys takes

her readers back to the "complex world of first-century Judaism" when Christianity

began. She vividly describes the dynamic Jewish civilization into which Jesus was born, and

she describes the "parting of the ways" between Judaism and what came to be known

as Christianity.

That parting, Boys asserts, was "neither orderly nor sequential." She believes

the separation process took centuries, not decades, and Boys shows that even 800 years after

the death of Jesus, some Syrian Christians "could not distinguish between Judaism and

Christianity." While she doesn't call for the church's "reunion" with

Judaism, Boys urges her fellow Christians "to acknowledge ... the complexity of the

partings" and to set aside any oversimplified and erroneous understanding of that

event.

Boys tackles many "hot button" issues including the divinity of Jesus, the

cross as a symbol of Christian faith and Jewish dread, the Trinity, anti-Semitism, the Nazi

Holocaust, the state of Israel, the Pharisees, the virulent anti-Jewish writings of some

Church Fathers, and the discredited charge that Jews are "Christ killers."

But the major achievement of the book goes far beyond Boys' superb scholarship. From 1993

through 1995, she directed a unique program that involved 22 Catholic and Jewish educators

who wrestled with many aspects of Jewish relations.

During those two years, the participants strengthened their own faith commitments because

of the intense encounters with members of the "other" religion. They also

discovered that their previous beliefs about the "other" were sharply challenged

when the "other" was present in the same room.

One Catholic educator said she now understands the gospel in a new way and thinks of her

Jewish colleagues whenever she hears painful negative references to Jews and Judaism in her

church services. When Christians and Jews seriously engage one another face-to-face,

long-held stereotypes, cliches, and caricatures often disappear. It's one thing for

Christians to mouth ancient negative teachings about Judaism when no Jews are present, but

it's far different when one recites those same teachings in the presence of religiously

committed Jews.

I consider *Has God Only One Blessing?* one of the most important books I have ever

read. It is the gold standard for faithful Christians who wish to end 2000 years of

religious enmity toward Jews and Judaism. The book has the compelling power to replace

inaccurate and negative beliefs with accurate and constructive ones.

It may be impossible to remove the cathedral statues after all these centuries, but

thanks to Mary Boys it is now possible to clearly see those stone figures for what they

really are: transmitters of a spiritual poison regarding Jews and Judaism. She reminds us

God has many children – and more than one blessing.

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