



Eckardt, Roy

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Roy Eckhardt

It is difficult to remember a time when we did not know that there was new ground to break. We Christians have long remained oblivious to the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism and blind to the theological challenges of creatively engaging the Jewish tradition. The imperative to develop a critical aptitude that would enable us to see ourselves through the eyes of the other emerged with the daring scholarship of a precious few, and lamentably, two of them died this past spring.

Drs. Roy Eckardt and Paul van Buren were members of the original Christian Scholars Group on Judaism and the Jewish People, the premier Christian think tank in Jewish-Christian relations over the past twenty-five years, now sponsored by the ICJS. Both of them were profoundly committed to their respective Christian communities, and they saw their scholarship first and foremost in the service of the church. Roy studied extensively with H. Richard Niebuhr and James Parkes. He and his talented wife, Alice, went on to become outstanding professors at Lehigh University and more recently at Oxford. After his studies at Harvard, Paul pursued his doctoral work with Karl Barth in Basel before assuming his academic responsibilities at Temple University, and subsequently at Heidelberg and the Shalom Hartman Institute, Jerusalem. Both published extensively, and their writings are now staples for anyone who dares to consider the impact of Christian-Jewish relations on contemporary theology.

Although the depth of their commitments and the rigor of their scholarship reflect their debts to their teachers, they pioneered new theological terrain that, thanks to them, we now take for granted. We depend mightily on their achievements. Their theological formulations may prove provisional, for their thinking was undergoing constant revision right to the end. Yet, the questions that they framed deliver an inescapable challenge to the Christian community. Their voices continue to remind us: the ethical character of the Christian life—not only how Christians treat one another but how they engage the Jewish people—will reveal the adequacy of the churches' theological answers. The task is to advance their daring in ways that render Christians and Jews more faithful to the best within and between their respective traditions.

Christopher Leighton