Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity

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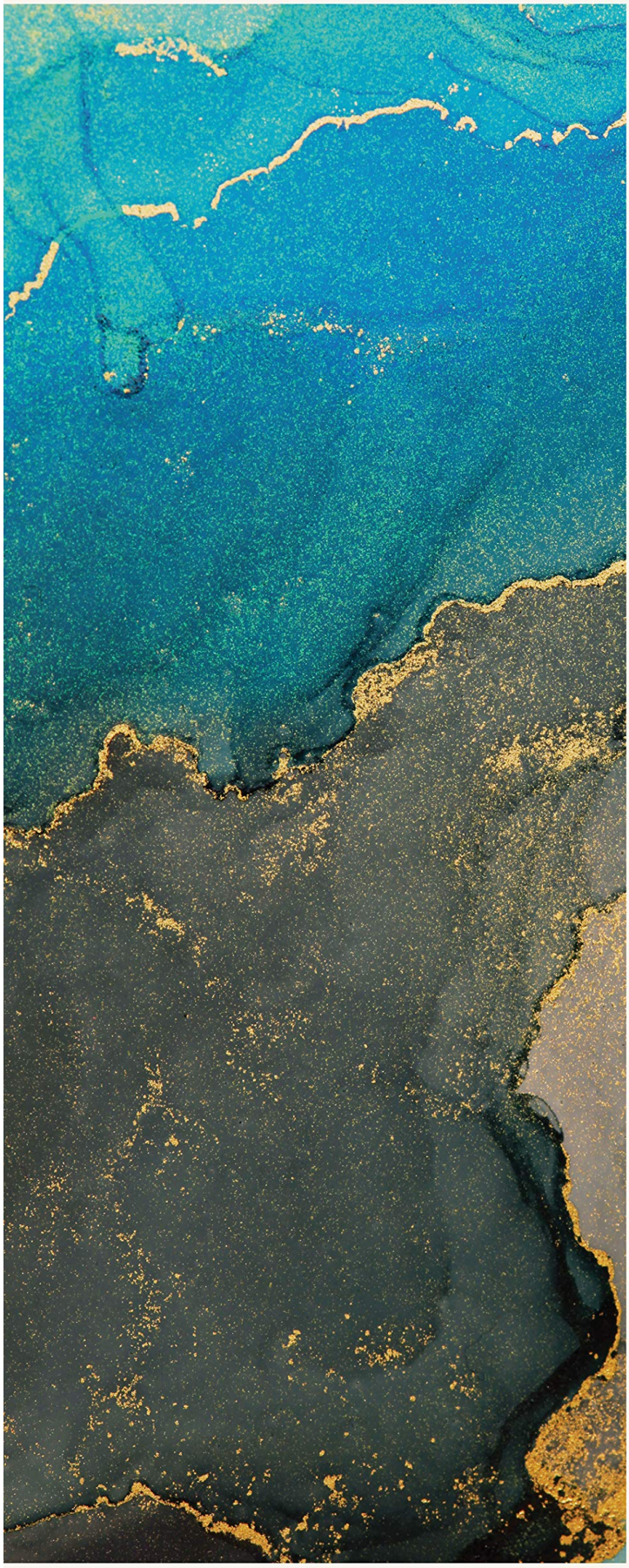

UNDERSTANDING *the* JEWISH ROOTS *of* CHRISTIANITY

Biblical, Theological, & Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity & Judaism

EDITED BY
GERALD MCDERMOTT

STUDIES IN SCRIPTURE & BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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The papers in this volume were all presented at a conference held in September 2019 under the auspices of the Institute for Anglican Studies at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University in Homewood, Alabama. The conference was con-vened by Gerald McDermott, then the Anglican Chair of Divinity at Beeson (he has since retired), and it represents a serious attempt to reassess Christianity's debt to Judaism. All of the conference presenters are represented in the volume. Al-though scholars' religious confessions do not necessarily dictate their approach to scholarly research, it is worth noting here that the preponderance of scholars in this conference and in this volume teach and / or preach at Beeson or other institutions of higher theological learning, almost all of them on the evangelical end of the Protestant / Anglican spectrum. Of the five Jewish contributors, three (if I count correctly) are Messianic Jews.

Listing these affiliations is by no means an attempt to undermine the contribu-tions of the evangelical and messianic Jewish contributions which make up the bulk of this volume. It is, instead, intended to emphasize the collection's refreshing char-acter; many of the readers of this journal will not have encountered a serious attempt to understand Christianity's indebtedness to Judaism as evangelical schol-ars understand those terms. This writer found himself needing to wrestle with theological approaches that were entirely new to him, although admittedly he is not particularly versed in the subtleties of Christian theology. I was struck by the world-historical quality of (the exceedingly rare) conferences and volumes like this one; they are a clear example of how academic discussion can change the world.

One general concern this writer has, if I need to articulate a concern, is a certain failure on the part of a number of the contributors to this volume to define what Judaism is before attempting to characterize Christianity's relationship to it. Only Matthew Thiessen (McMaster University) deals seriously and critically with the difficulties in knowing what "Judaism" is in his essay "Did Jesus Plan to Start a New Religion?" (18-32). Many of the authors of these essays identify Judaism with the religion of the Hebrew Bible or with the Temple-centered cultus which came to an end at about the time of the publication of the canonical Gospels. That that form of "Judaism" reached its fullest flowering at about the same historical moment as did nascent Christianity is not of great moment to most of these authors. The interconnectivity between Christians in the Patristic period, say, and of rabbinic Judaism (an interconnectivity which certainly existed and certainly went both ways) is not much considered here. So the relationship being explored in this vol-ume, mostly but not exclusively, is the relationship between Jesus, his immediate followers, and the authors of the books of the New Testament on the one hand, and either the religious messages of the Hebrew Bible or of the Temple-centered Juda-ism practiced while the Second Temple stood. This latter form of Judaism came to an end with the destruction of the Temple, living on in the nostalgic memory of many Jews, who largely formed a new non-sacrificial religion out of the crushed stones of the old.

Mark Gignilliat (Beeson Divinity School) in "How Did the New Testament Authors Use Tanak?" offers a strong recommendation for the puissance of the Ta-nak. He writes, "without [the Tanak] the New Testament would not even exist. It would have no substance. It would not even be" (16). Gignilliat outlines a Christo-logical argument for the divine character of the Tanak, and, to make his point, draws on the work of Karl Barth and his students. The essay is a significant state-ment of an orthodox theologian's appreciation of the importance of the Hebrew Bible, although it is not about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism (nor does it claim to be). It does offer a nice personal anecdote about the importance of the Hebrew Bible to one of the author's students.

In his essay "Did Jesus Plan to Start a New Religion?" mentioned above, Thiessen answers his title question in the negative and deals, uniquely among these essays, with a consideration of the thorny questions involved in defining "religion," "new religion," "Judaism," and "Christianity." He examines Jesus' views on such topics as Temple (22-25), ritual purity (25-27), and sacred time (27-30). He con-cludes that "the gospel writers are consistent in depicting Jesus as seeking to observe these aspects of the Jewish law and using generally accepted legal argu-mentation to

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defend any actions deemed controversial" (31). That Thiessen's own statement will be viewed as largely non-controversial by most of the readers of this review is a mark of how scholarship in both historical Jesus studies and study of Second Temple Judaism has evolved in our time.

David Rudolph (The King's University) argues in his essay "A New Freedom From—Or End To—Jewish Law" (33-50) that the question whether Paul urged Jews to abandon the laws of the Torah must be answered in the emphatic negative. Arguing from a series of texts in which Paul legislates for his audience (his episto-lary audience in the case of 1Cor 7:17-20; his literary audience in the case of Acts 15:22-29 and 21:17-26), Rudolph concludes that "Paul lived as a Torah-observant Jew and taught fellow Jews to remain faithful to Israel's laws and customs" (50). For Rudolph, "Judaism" is "Torah-observance," although this is not a definition he offers explicitly.

Donald Moffitt (St. Andrews University) in "Jesus' Sacrifice and the Mosaic Logic of Hebrews' New-Covenant Theology" (51-68) argues, contrary to some prominent NT scholars, that the notion of sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews is dependent on biblical ideas of sacrifice, not antithetical to them. Matthew S. C. Olver's (Nashotah House) "Missed and Misunderstood Jewish Roots of Christian Worship" (69-103) might be seen as an extension of Moffitt's argument, viewing sacrifice as the shared space, not the dividing line, between Jewish and Christian worship. Olver (refreshingly) acknowledges four "false paths" in the comparative study of Jewish and Christian liturgy and offers his own correctives: 1) Judaism in the Second Temple period was not monolithic (72); 2) the very idea of worship was altered substantially between that period and our own (73); 3) our knowledge of Jewish liturgical practice in the formative years of classical Judaism is still poor (73-74); and 4) modern scholars tend to confuse the ancient synagogue with the modern church (74-75), a confusion which continues to plague modern compari-sons of Jewish and Christian liturgies. He makes the similarly refreshing point as well that the influential relationships among Christian and Jewish liturgies went both ways (70).

Isaac Oliver (Bradley University) in "The Parting of the Ways—When and How Did the Ekklesia Split from the Synagogue" (104-27) argues against assigning a definitive date or event for any kind of decisive division of Christian and Jew and notes that the texts held in highest regard in the churches were written well before any kind of split occurred. For Paul, Christ's crucifixion healed a split, but it was the split between Jew and Gentile, not Jew and Christian. Yet Paul did not antici-pate that this healing would create a new split between Jews and "Christians," a term which Oliver refuses to use of the earliest generations of Jesus' followers (107 n. 7). Oliver considers that both the ancient and modern categories of "Messianic Jews" test the concept of the parting of the ways, a point Mark Kinzer will make a few essays later. The ancient category of Torah-observant followers of Christ was challenging for both synagogues and churches; the modern category of Jews who accept the messiahship of Jesus has found a relatively comfortable pew in the churches but not in the synagogues. Both ancient and modern groups need to fit into any explanation of how Jews and Christians found themselves to be different worshipping communities in the first place (126-27). Oliver's comment in his pe-nultimate footnote is a fitting summary for the entire volume: "The joint collaboration represented by the various essays gathered in this volume, composed by gentile Christians and Messianic Jewish scholars, is a remarkable achievement in itself" (127 n. 73).

Eugene Korn (Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation, Jerusalem) offers an essay "From Constantine to the Holocaust—The Church and the Jews" that concisely summarizes the development of the "teaching of con-tempt" as the dominant strain in Christian theology about Jews from the early centuries of Christianity to Luther. He also documents those Christian thinkers who offered a less hostile understanding of the perseverance of the Jews (129-36). Korn illustrates his points with images of *Ecclesia et Synagoga* and the *Judensau* from Strasbourg, Paris, and Wittenberg as well as exemplary (and extremely painful) texts from the Church Fathers and Luther. He summarizes the "Copernican turn" (147) in Christian theology regarding Jews and Judaism after the Holocaust, as well as providing a useful summary of Jewish thinkers since the Middle Ages, from Maimonides to Samson Raphael Hirsch, who found a positive place for Christians and

Christianity in God's world (138-44). Korn notes that contemporary Judaism is no more monolithic than ancient Judaism with regard to the religious other: "Jews remain divided today in their theological valuations of Christianity and the extent to which they are willing to endorse active cooperation" (147). However, he concludes on a positive (and Shakespearean) note: "Today, mutual Christian-Jew-ish appreciation is no longer only a distant fantasy—and it is this amity that is stuff of which messianic hopes are made" (147).

In "Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Relations—Challenging Boundaries and Rethinking Theology," Jennifer M. Rosner (The King's University) covers some of the same ground as did Eugene Korn in the previous essay, but focuses on two 20th-century theologians, Karl Barth (probably the dominant theological presence in this volume) and Franz Rosenzweig. Rosner quotes Stephen Haynes to under-score the importance Barth places on the Jewish people in his theology, noting that it "had the kind of influence on Protestant theology that 'Nostra aetate' has had on Catholic thinking about Israel (150). Despite his positive influence, though, Barth continues in the tradition of denying the authenticity of non-Christian Judaism after the time of Jesus. Overlooking the continuing obedience of the Jewish people to the Torah, Barth "seems to want Jewishness without Judaism" (154). In contrast to Barth's failure to assign a positive role to contemporary Jews in God's schema, Rosner notes Rosenzweig's positive attitude toward (Gentile) Christianity because of its historical rootedness in Judaism. Christians express their devotion to the God of Israel spiritually, while Jews express their "redemptive vocation" in their obedi-ence to the *mitzvot* (158). In the concluding section of her essay, Rosner summarizes the work of a cadre of theologians, including Thomas Torrance (159-60), Elliot Wolfson (161-62), and Michael Wyschogrod (162-63) before turning to the work of Mark Kinzer, whom she considers to have taken "a final step to link Judaism and Christianity, fusing them together in the way that he suggests they are represented in the New Testament" (164). For her, Kinzer connects Israel and Jesus but avoids Barth's error by celebrating the authenticity of the Jewish theological tradition itself. Rosner ends her essay with an approving nod to John Paul II's state-ment that Judaism is "intrinsic" to Christianity and then extends it: "In sum, if Judaism is intrinsic to Christianity, then *no doctrine of Christian theology can be understood without reference to Judaism and the Jewish people*" (168; emphasis in original).

In "Anglicans and Israel—The (Largely) Untold Story," Sarah Lebner Hall (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) recounts the influence of evangelical An-glicans on the evolving attitude of the British government to the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. She starts with the support offered to Theodore Herzl by the Rev. William Hechler, whose behind-the-scenes advocacy paved the way for the Balfour Declaration (180-82). Were it not for a serious interest in bringing Christi-anity (back?) to the Jews, the Zionist history of the 20th century would have been altered considerably.

Mark Kinzer (Congregational Rabbi emeritus, President Emeritus of Messi-anic Jewish Theological Institute) offers "Messianic Judaism—Recovering the Jewish Character of the *Ekklesia*," wherein he expresses his goal: "the recovery of the Jewish character of the *ekklesia* in the present and the future" (184). For Kinzer, Messianic Judaism not only offers Jews an authentic way to be Jewish, but it offers the Christian *ekklesia* an authentic way to be Christian. Kinzer considers a wrong turn to have been taken in the kind of mainstream underpinnings of contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue (the kind represented by this journal). He quotes Philip Cunningham with disapprobation (and, to my mind, unfairly) for viewing the Part-ing of the Ways as God's will, rather than as some kind of world-historical error. (Kinzer quotes Cunningham's *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews*, 199-200 [185-86].) For Kinzer, this schema is a wrong turn, for it created a situation in which Jews-in-Christ, to borrow Paul's term, have no authentic way to express their belief in Jesus' messiahship as part of their Judaism other than to join a Gentile movement (186-87). The Parting of the Ways was tragic, not providential, and Kinzer is doing his best (in this essay and else-where) to undo it. As Kinzer sees it, it led in the 2nd Century CE to a conflict between "three corporate characters in the drama rather than merely two": The

wider Jewish community, the Jewish members of the *ekklesia,* and the emerging gentile Christian church (190). In antiquity, those Jews who wanted to remain both Jewish and Christian found themselves at odds with the authority structures of both groups.

The wrong turn represented by the Parting of the Ways bears, for Kinzer, bitter fruit in the modern era, where Messianic Jews still find themselves at odds with non-Messianic ones (or ones for whom the Messiah is someone other than Jesus of Nazareth), although they find themselves more accepted by Christians than for-merly. He traces the history of modern Messianic Judaism, including Catholic outreach to Hebrew Catholics that has spanned the papacies of John Paul II, Bene-dict XVI, and Francis and has involved the leadership of the late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, an outreach which Kinzer views in a highly positive light. In his conclusion, Kinzer notes that what is at stake in the contemporary reevaluation of Christian-Jewish relations, in which he believes the Messianic Jewish movement plays a crucial role, is the "opportunity [for the *ekklesia*] to rediscover her Jewish roots *and* to recapture her Jewish character" (200; emphasis in original). Kinzer ends his essay with a confessional statement (unique among the essays in the vol-ume) in the form of an extended metaphor: "Something extraordinary has occurred in recent centuries among Jews who believe in Jesus. Through them an exit ramp may lead off the highway of schism, with signs pointing back to the road not taken long ago. May all members of the *ekklesia* be blessed with eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to turn the wheel" (200).
Archbishop Foley Beach (primate of the Anglican Church in North America and rector of Holy Cross Anglican Church in Loganville, Georgia) contributed a chapter entitled "Christian Churches—What Differences Does the Jewishness of Jesus Make?" He reminds his readers, as he reminds his parishioners, of various aspects of Jesus' Jewishness, that he was born "in the midst of Judaism" (203), that he "was raised in a Jewish family who practiced their faith" (203-05), and that he "lived the lifestyle of a religious Jewish man" (205-06). Jesus's Jewishness impels his modern-day followers in a variety of ways. There should be no antisemitism at all; modern Christians should want to learn about the Jewish roots of their faith; they should value the "Jewish Bible—the Old Testament" (207); they "should seek to understand [Jesus'] teachings in light of his Hebrew background" (208); they "should seek to share Jesus with our Jewish friends" (210); and they should recog-nize their indebtedness to the Jewish people. Archbishop Foley ends his essay by repeating the common arboreal metaphor, that Christians are "only the branches grafted into the historic tree of Judaism" (211; see my discussion of this metaphor below).

Gerald McDermott, who convened the conference and edited the volume, sums up many of these themes in "Christian Theology—What Difference Does This Make?" (213-22). McDermott summarizes (rather more succinctly than I have here!) all of the essays in the volume, up to Foley Beach's admonition that the Jewishness of Jesus impels all of his followers to repudiate antisemitism in all of its forms (218). McDermott suggests an extension to Beach's admonition, namely that "there would be no Christians without the Jewish people. Worse yet, we would still be in our sins and the realm of death without the God of Israel and His Jewish people, who brought him and is the way of salvation to the world," (218, referring to 1 Cor 15:17). Furthermore, to McDermott, ignoring Jesus' Jewishness renders meaningless the terms "Christ" (218) as well as "Jews" (218-19), "law" (219-20), and "kingdom," (220-21), all terms essential to the Christian message. McDermott ends his essay, and the volume, on a high and clear note: "By exploring the history and faith of the people whom God loves, we will learn more about God himself" (222).

I am a Jewish scholar who seeks historical and not religious truth in my re-search. I found much to quibble about in a number of these essays, but I was more than a little surprised to find that these quibbles were across the board and not con-centrated on those authors whose religiousness I found most foreign to my own. I learned a great deal from every essay, and every essay left me enthusiastic to find opportunities to discuss these issues further.

I found a certain variation in what each author thought "Judaism" was or is: Is Judaism the religion of the Hebrew Bible? The Temple-based cultus of the time of Jesus and Paul? Is it a living tradition

or merely an ancient one? These are questions not entirely ignored by all of the essayists in this volume, but a number of the essays would benefit from a reconsideration of these questions, at least in the opinion of this reviewer. I also suggest that we should free ourselves of the arboreal metaphor by which we have become used to describing the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, a Pauline metaphor which pokes its shoot through the earth a little too frequently here and everywhere else. Judaism and Christianity, at least in the way those terms are used by many modern Christians and Jews, are not root and branch.

If we need to keep planting trees in Israel, then we need to start describing Judaism and Christianity as branches on the biblical trunk, a metaphor which admittedly has its own problems. Perhaps we should just say that Judaism and Christianity each emerged from the religious genius of the Hebrew Bible, finding overlapping ways of understanding the God of Israel.

Metaphor aside, *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity* brings home to me both the difficulties and the pleasures of apprehending the opinions of schol-ars for whom the texts they are dealing with are living texts. The difficulty, and it is a significant difficulty, is that living texts can resist historical exegesis, and that resistance can create an impasse in conversation. But I suggested at the beginning of this review that the symposium from which these essays are taken and the essays that are herein published, represent a world-historical event (a *kairos*?), that is, an impressive and provocative gathering of minds and hearts that has the potential to effect so much change. We must thank the editor McDermott and the institutions that supported this conference and this publication and enthusiastically encourage all the contributors to carry on their work.

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