

REVIEW

James K. Aitken and Edward Kessler, eds.

Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations

(New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), vii + 282 pp.

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Compiled predominately from papers given at a 1999 conference commemorating the first year of the Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*, edited by James Aitken and Edward Kessler, is a recent addition to the growing collection of collaborative works examining various aspects of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations* utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, reminiscent of such texts as *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (2000), *Irreconcilable Differences?* (2001), and *Seeing Judaism Anew* (2005). Published in 2006, Aitken's and Kessler's compiled work is a worthy successor to these texts both in terms of content and chronology.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters including the introduction, which was written by the editors. The introduction offers a brief overview of the history of the contemporary dialogue—a dialogue that Aitken and Kessler describe as a “complex enterprise.”(p. 5) The scope of the dialogue and, by relation, that of the book reflects this complexity in the many disciplines covered in the articles. The editors define these disciplines as “politics, sociology, education, language, history, biblical studies, hermeneutics, and ... theology.”(p. 5) Even with such a variegated approach, the individual articles themselves belie the inherent complexity of the Jewish-Christian dialogue in the way each touches upon other categories in addressing a particular point of concern.

In his article discussing the effects of history on the dialogue, Marc Saperstein makes the case that a comprehensive understanding of the historical relationship between Jews and Christians is an essential component of the on-going dialogue. He stresses, however, the importance of recognizing the positive aspects of the historical relationship as well as the many negative ones. Indeed, the text in general examines the many ways in which Jews and Christians influenced one another long before there was any conscious attempt at formal dialogue. A shared scriptural story was one of the many points of commonality, and the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures to both Jews and Christians was a theme found throughout the articles in general and in John F. A. Sawyer's analysis in particular. The variety of interpretative methods that Sawyer covers also points to one of the inherent difficulties associated with this type of collaborative work. Often, out of convenience, broad terms such as church, liturgy, Christianity, and Judaism are used in a generic sense but require nuance that is difficult to impose in such short examinations. This issue is less problematic when dealing with a focused analysis concerning the state of the current dialogue with respect to specific Christian churches, such as those found in the discussion of the interaction of the Orthodox Church with Judaism as described by Nicholas de Lange and Irina Levinskaya and that of the Roman Catholic Church as offered by Remi Hoekman. The book works best in these instances when authors speak from their specific faith traditions in assessing the current challenges affecting Jewish-Christian

dialogue. To be sure, the editors seem to have recognized this difficulty by devoting a chapter, by Friedhelm Pieper, to the nature of institutional relations in the current dialogue.

No contemporary discussion of Jewish-Christian relations would be complete without a discussion of the dual twentieth century watershed events that impacted the way Jews and Christians would interact—that of the *Shoah* (discussed by Stephen D. Smith) and the founding of the modern state of Israel (covered by Andrew P. B. White). Both events shaped the view of Jews and Christians not only of one another but also of themselves. The importance of these two events is indicated not only in the specific examinations of these two authors but also in the attention afforded the *Shoah* and the state of Israel by many of the contributors.

Additionally, the text offers insight into the two major statements known as *Nostra Aetate* and *Dabru Emet*, authored by Christians and Jews respectively, concerning the state of relations between the two communities. With regard to the latter, the editors themselves offer their particular views concerning the document published in September of 2000. In their emphasis on a realistic view of the other and self, the editors' comments regarding *Dabru Emet* are reflective of those of other contributors throughout *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations*. Many of the authors, for example, caution against couching the dialogue exclusively in terms of Christian guilt or Jewish suffering and look to a broader grass roots initiative as the agent for a better understanding of other and self, which Kessler and Aitken see as foundational for improved relations.

Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations serves well as an introductory text into the major categories within which Jewish-Christian dialogue takes place. Hopefully texts such as this will help spur the publication of books investigating the individual chapter topics in much greater detail. Having said this, the book is noteworthy in the attention paid to the Orthodox Christian-Jewish relationship. That the topic, for the most part, has been ignored is understandable considering the inertia surrounding this specific aspect of the dialogue. Nevertheless, this neglected feature of the Jewish-Christian dialogue is important not only within the contemporary context but also as part of the historical relationship between Orthodox Christians and Jews, dating back to the earliest days of the common era. Future books in the same vein as that of *Challenges in Jewish-Christian Relations* would do well to expand the investigation of Orthodox Christian-Jewish relations to include those surrounding the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which has a significant and important role to play in the on-going dialogue.