

REVIEW

James Rudin

*Christians & Jews, Faith to Faith:
Tragic History, Promising Present, Fragile Future*

(Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2011), hardcover, xii + 267 pp.

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Rabbi James Rudin has been involved in Jewish-Christian relations for over forty years and has been one of the pioneering leaders in the dialogue for much of that time. In this book, he looks back over the post-Shoah relationship, in which he has played such a vital role, and also over the previous two millennia which led up to the tragic events of the mid-twentieth century in "Christian" Europe. He offers a narrative and a series of reflections that introduce people to the field and also deepen the understanding of those of us who have been involved in it.

Recently, I used Rudin's book as one of two required texts for a graduate course in Catholic-Jewish Studies at Saint Leo University, along with the now-classic introduction to the field by the Catholic scholar Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000). I can attest to the usefulness of Rudin's work not only for dialogue groups but in more formal coursework as well. His Jewish perspective was especially valuable since virtually all my students were Catholics, with two Protestants and no Jews.

To illustrate the complexity of competing religious identities, Rudin begins with a reflection on the possible names for the Jewish people, citing the biblical terms "Hebrews," "Israelites," and "Jews," and noting the positive and pejorative uses of the terms over the ages. Against these, he notes traditional Christian claims to be the true Israel, which directly clash with these Jewish claims. Similarly, in a later chapter, he mulls over the differing names for the Hebrew Scriptures, naturally preferring the Hebrew *TaNach*, which refers to the books Jews and Christians share as *sacred texts* but excludes those additional texts which Catholics, following the Septuagint, include. Such sharp disputes about Scripture and claims to the biblical heritage, which paradoxically unite and divide Jews and Christians, illustrate the vagaries and inconsistencies of relations across the many centuries. I might have made "rule number 1" in his "user's guide" to the dialogue, which Rudin handily and helpfully includes at the end of his volume, "Agree to disagree agreeably" (which, I know from experience, Rudin does quite well).

Rudin's approach is partly chronological. Early in the book he discusses the first few centuries CE. However, his emphasis is on key topics. He raises the core historical or theological issues from our ancient, mutual past (e.g., the teaching of contempt and the *Shoah*; mission and witness; notions of covenant with the One God of Israel; and Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel). He concludes with recent developments in the dialogue and thoughts on how to take the next steps toward deeper understanding. Rudin takes into account Muslim views and the growth of a Jewish-Christian-Muslim three-way relationship (or "trialogue" as I prefer to call it), since this tripartite relationship differs essentially from that between the two peoples, Jews and Christians, especially in light of their shared texts.

I recommend this book most highly to readers of this journal for personal reading as well as for use in academic and in less formal dialogical settings. This does not mean that I do not have some disagreements with Rudin. Chief among these is Rudin's treatment of Paul, whom he sweepingly describes as having "rejected many Jewish observances, especially the kosher dietary laws and ritual circumcision" (p.48). Many scholars have argued (correctly, in my view), that Paul is arguing only that *Gentile* converts need not observe all Jewish laws. For them, observance of the requirements of the Jewish "Noahide covenant" are sufficient for the Gentile "branches" to be "engrafted" upon the root of the Chosen People, Israel (cf. Romans 9-11; Acts 15). Also, Rudin (citing Christian scholar Barrie Wilson) argues that Paul envisioned "a brand-new religion entirely," separate from Judaism. But Paul may not have seen it that way, nor would he have viewed his turn to faith in Christ as a "conversion" to another faith but rather as a deepening of his own Jewish faith. Most early Christians, as Jews, understood themselves in similar ways. Interestingly, Rudin rightly acknowledges that the "parting of the Ways" took many centuries and was not accomplished by the late 40's of the first century of the Common Era, which his view of Paul as leaving Judaism would require if true.

Rudin, while rightly castigating the "teaching of contempt" against Jews and Judaism developed by the Fathers of the Church in the centuries parallel to the development of rabbinic tradition and the Talmud, omits the crucial and benign role played by St. Augustine and his theology of the Jews as witnesses to the validity of the Hebrew Scriptures. He argued that in their disbelief they played a crucial role in the spread of the Gospel, an idea that laid the theological groundwork for the acceptance of Judaism as a *religio licita* when Christians gained political power over Jews. The adoption of St. Augustine's counsel that the Jews should be allowed to live among Christians and to worship freely was accepted by the Church, and especially by Pope St. Gregory the Great, who made it indelible papal policy over the centuries to protect the rights of Jews. Thus it was due to Augustine and Gregory that Judaism alone of all the non-Christian religions of the Roman Empire was allowed to survive, and in places even to thrive, within triumphant Christendom. The worst Christian beliefs about and practices against Jews and Judaism, in fact, did not appear or begin to prevail until after the massacre of Jews during the First Crusade in 1096. Rudin, however, fails to precisely place such things as blood libels, pogroms, expulsions, ghettos, and distinctive clothing in their correct periods, implying they were present during the entire history of Christianity. The fact that a full millennium had to pass, I would argue, before these evil beliefs and practices became common is a significant fact that Jews no less than Christians need to take into account when narrating Christian history and evaluating Christian theology.