

**REVIEW**

Elisheva Carlebach and Jacob J. Schachter, Eds.  
*New Perspectives on Jewish-Christian Relations:  
In Honor of David Berger*  
(Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2012), 547 pp.

Ruth Langer, Boston College

David Berger has been a trailblazer and leader among Jews studying the relationship between Jews and Christians, especially in the medieval world. It is thus entirely appropriate that this massive *festschrift* honors him with important contributions from many of the other leading scholars in the field, all but one of them Jews. This wide-ranging collection presents many of the approaches to the study of the relationship between Jews and Christians typical of orthodox participants in the world of Jewish Studies today.

The editors have loosely organized the volume into a series of thematic sections, each collecting several narrowly focused, detailed articles. It begins with a rather miscellaneous section titled “Christian Triumphalism and Anti-Jewish Violence,” that, in four articles, spans from Josephus to the anti-Jewish riots in Spain in 1391. The second section, titled “Christian Mission and Jewish Conversion,” moves from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, also in four articles. The third, “The Imprint of Christian Society on Internal Jewish Cultural Patterns,” consists of three studies of cases that demonstrate the integration of medieval European Jews into their wider communities. The fourth, “Jewish Evaluations of Christianity,” ranges from the Meiri and the Tosafists to eighteenth-century concerns about Sabbatianism and Frankism, also in four articles. The fifth, “Jewish Polemical Strategies in Light of Christianity and Islam,” also ranges widely in five articles, most of which focus on medieval biblical hermeneutics. Finally, the volume concludes with “Contemporary Jewish-Christian Relations,” which receives only two articles.

The “new perspectives” offered by this volume never address large, overarching themes. Instead, the articles each focus narrowly on a very specific topic, presenting new documents or new interpretations of known texts. This makes for a volume filled with individually excellent articles, each expanding our knowledge in some “new” way, but they neither individually nor collectively provide the breadth of interpretation or method implied by the volume’s title.

Many fascinating articles will be accessible to the reader not versed in the discourse of rabbinic Judaism. This, in general, includes the articles on antiquity. Of those discussing later periods, William Chester Jordan traces transformations in the presentation of Jews in medieval passion narratives. Benjamin Gampel has dug deeply into archival material from Aragon to determine how the action or inaction of governmental authorities actually impacted the course of the 1391 riots. Elisheva Baumgarten argues that there is evidence for Jewish and Christian cultural interchange in shared understandings of the efficacy of trial by fire to demonstrate spiritual power, especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Miriam Bodian analyzes the forces shaping the views of Christianity among the early modern Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam in light of their own *converso* pasts. Jacob J. Schacter’s discussion of the eighteenth-century Rabbi Jacob Emden’s attitudes to Christianity and their intersection with his inner-Jewish polemics against Sabbatianism and Frankism is an exceptionally clear and nuanced presentation of a complex topic. Daniel Lasker presents a concise summary and analysis of changing Karaite thinking about Christianity. Michael Wyschogrod’s essay responds, from a Jewish perspective, to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2001 document “The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible.”

In contrast, a significant number of the articles will not be accessible to many readers because of their technical nature. For example, Judah Galinsky’s essay on “The Different Hebrew Versions of the ‘Talmud Trial’ of 1240 in Paris” is important, but presumes significant knowledge about this event. Yaakov

Elman's article "Meiri and the Non-Jew: A Comparative Investigation" presumes familiarity with previous discussions, some of them in Hebrew, and while it presents lengthy texts in translation, does not help the reader unfamiliar with medieval rabbinic terminology to make sense of them. Ephraim Kanarfogel's article on the Tosafists' changing attitude to apostates is similarly technical. Robert Bonfil provides a fascinating analysis of a sixteenth-century sermon preached by a six-year-old convert to Christianity, but then publishes the sermon itself only in its original Italian. Debra Kaplan discusses the changing applications of halakhic restrictions on Jewish women's being in the presence of Christian men in light of changing economic conditions, but does not sufficiently contextualize her discussion of the (today "difficult") presumptions about the nature of non-Jews on which this is based. Sid Z. Leiman primarily is correcting earlier readings of texts about Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschetz and his supposed heretical leanings.

Several other articles are slightly more accessible and worth delving into by those interested in pursuing their topics, as they address the thinking of very influential figures or texts. These include Avraham Grossman's article on the intersection of Rashi's understanding of prophecy among the nations and medieval polemics. Martin I. Lockshin continues this question of medieval exegetical method in his discussion of interpretations of Genesis 36. Elliot Horowitz discusses interpretations of Isaiah's Suffering Servant and the history of the Neubauer-Driver collection of commentaries. Mordechai Z. Cohen discusses Maimonides' attitude to Christian biblical hermeneutics.

For readers of *SCJR*, perhaps the most important article here is that of David Shatz, titled "Morality, Liberalism, and Interfaith Dialogue." Although admittedly somewhat inconclusive, Shatz opens a philosophical discussion between Jews participating in dialogue with Christians and those refusing to because of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's teachings. He offers analyses of both sides of this discussion, suggesting that the objections to proselytization among those participating in

dialogue are not well-grounded philosophically. However, he notes, Soloveitchik's objection to proselytization was grounded in an argument for the privacy of religious commitment. Shatz suggests that this argument itself provides a meeting point, allowing the Jewish world to think more deeply and productively about how and why it engages its Christian neighbors. Shatz's essay requires development beyond what was possible for this context, but it deserves serious attention and discussion.

Thus, this tome truly honors David Berger with a collection of twenty-two essays, most of the highest quality. All contribute to the field in significant ways, and in this, they pay deepest tribute to Berger's own leadership. They vary primarily in what audiences, beyond Berger himself and his immediate circle, will readily be able to benefit from them.