

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM – CONSULTATION

Topic: Rethinking Christianity’s Relationship to Judaism
 Convener: Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College
 Moderator: Andrew Massena, Loras College
 Presenter: Mia Theocharis, St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto
 Presenter: Ellen T. Charry, Princeton Theological Seminary
 Respondent: Michael Berger, Emory University

Elena Procario-Foley opened the session and remarked at how pleased everyone was to be back together “in-person.” Procario-Foley explained that circumstances related to the pandemic prevented Mia Theocharis from traveling and that Nicole Reibe, of Loyola University Maryland, would read Theocharis’s paper. Procario-Foley introduced Andrew Massena who expertly moderated the session.

Responding to the convention theme, the consultation’s call for papers focused on the responsibility of Christianity to rethink its relationship to Judaism. Ellen Charry’s paper, “Augustine’s Blinkered Israelology,” did so by focusing on Saint Augustine’s tract *Adversus Judaeos* (hereafter, *AJ*) and the harm that came to Jews at the hands of Christians because of Augustine’s teaching. She argues that *AJ* “invents special missions to convert Jews.” After a brief exposition of other scholars’ interpretations of *AJ*, Charry offered a detailed analysis of Augustine’s text. Charry insists that *AJ* is more an instructional manual for converting Jews than a sermon. The text, she explains, is “two discourses, one within the other.” The first discourse has Augustine addressing a live audience of his students, and in the second he rebukes an imagined Jewish audience. Augustine employs the trope of Jewish “blindness.” This so-called “blindness” constitutes a two-fold hermeneutical error. Augustine castigates Jews for refusing to use a Christological lens to interpret the Bible, and then derides the inability of Jews to read their text literally and recognize God’s desire for the nations. Charry concluded by noting how ineffective Christian missions toward Jews have been, how successfully they generated “fear of and antipathy toward Jesus, the church, and Christianity,” and how Augustine’s complete supersessionism led to missionary efforts that were a “gentle form of genocide.”

Mia Theocharis proposed the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig as a solution to the problematic language of “fulfillment” in the 2015 document issued by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “‘The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of ‘Nostra aetate’ (No. 4).” Theocharis’s introduction provided an overview of the status of the question of Catholic mission to the Jews since *Nostra Aetate*. She introduced the main ideas of “Gifts and Calling” and focused on the theological challenge of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable: how does the church affirm God’s covenant with the Jews *and* its belief in universal salvation through Jesus? Theocharis suggested that the significant issues of fulfillment language that harm Jewish–Christian relations can be solved if the covenants are presented as “*complementary* rather than as one being *fulfilled* by the other.” Theocharis turns to Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption* to propose a theory of

complementarity. For Rosenzweig, Judaism and Christianity are intended by God to work together for the redemption of the world. Each religion has a role. Theocharis explained that “for Rosenzweig, Judaism is presented as the fire at the heart of the Star, the eternal *life* while Christianity is the disappearing rays, the eternal *way*. . . Jews are people of election who *are* with God while Christians are *on the way*.” Theocharis rejected Rosenzweig’s insistence that Christians must proselytize (excepting Jews), but maintained that Rosenzweig’s approach to the covenants could move Catholics beyond fulfillment language.

Michael Berger generously provided a Jewish response for the consultation. A quite exciting and lively discussion ensued. Berger presented two anecdotes that spoke to the “crucial” work of the consultation. About Charry’s paper he wondered if Augustine’s audience was Christian and not Jewish and if his “*ad hominem* attacks against the Jews” were really intended to bolster Augustine’s “*audience*’s belief in the core claim of Christianity.” Berger also suggested that Augustine may have been perplexed by the fact of Jewish survival. Berger appreciated Theocharis’s effort to mute fulfillment language and posed four questions: Rosenzweig excludes Islam and Asian religions, does complementarity obstruct the ability of Christianity to form relations with other religions? If Rosenzweig’s theory is grounded in a Jewish doctrine of God that tilts the scales in favor of Judaism, then does his work really overcome the lack of parity in “fulfillment” language? Does complementarity truly overcome the Christian “no” to two paths to salvation? Does the Rosenzweig approach allow for the same understanding of Christianity on its own terms that Theocharis expects Christians in the dialogue to grant to Judaism? Finally, Berger concluded with an invitation to consider Joseph Soloveitchik’s analysis in his article “Confrontation.” While applauding the work of the consultation, he questioned whether our practice of inviting a Jewish respondent was warranted.

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