

Jon W. Sweeney, Ed.
***Jesus Wasn't Killed by the Jews:
Reflections for Christians in Lent***

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At this moment, the United States is in upheaval. Against the backdrop of a global pandemic was the killing of George Floyd, a black man, by three white police officers, one of whom crushed Floyd's neck as he lay handcuffed and helpless. A bystander captured on video the nearly nine minutes it took for Floyd to die. The video went viral and engendered waves of mass protest and civil disobedience across the country and around the world. Much of the nation is taking a hard look at the realities of white privilege and the injustice of systems rooted in oppression. We look into the abyss of racism, and then into the mirror: the picture is not pretty. To create lasting change, the abyss must be made plain before we can turn to repair.

Other recent acts of violence—two deadly attacks on synagogues in 2018 (in Pittsburgh) and 2019 (in Poway, California)—spurred the writing of this book. They were carried out by men influenced by anti-Jewish ideas, with their racial, religious, and political threads, now so pervasive on the internet. The authors of the fourteen essays in the edited volume *Jesus Wasn't Killed by the Jews: Reflections for Christians in Lent* look into the abyss of historical and contemporary anti-Judaism. Many are renowned, and they include Christian scholars, both Catholic (such as Mary Boys, Bishop Richard J. Sklba, and Massimo Faggioli) and Protestant (such as Walter Brueggemann and Greg Garrett), as well as Jewish scholars (such as Abraham Skorka and Amy-Jill Levine) who contributed an introduction, a chapter, and an afterword. The text is divided into two sections, entitled “Foundations” and “Progress.” The authors look at anti-Judaism from different vantage points and issue calls for deep personal and communal redress of systemic “othering” of Jews by Christians and in Christianity. Specifically, they ask Christian readers to grapple with their tradition's supersessionism and teachings of contempt.

This book, while similar to others by both Christians and Jews challenging anti-Judaism, also addresses praxis. The authors offer pastoral and spiritual practices to help Christians face and overcome this history. Though not formally devotional, it is intended for readers as a Lenten reflection. This is not only because

violent manifestations of anti-Judaism often occurred on Good Friday, when historically some Christians attacked Jews, but also because Lent is a time of penitence. The authors issue a call for repentance and express the liberative hope that comes from being honest with oneself and one's religious tradition about that tradition's dark places.

The authors challenge Christians to read texts critically, with an awareness of their own (unquestioned) assumptions and the distorting effects misunderstandings have had on Christians' views of Jews for many centuries. Sweeney offers guidance for a non-supersessionist *lectio divina*, as is appropriate for the days of Lent, and for celebrating Holy Week in "Spiritual Practices on Ash Wednesday" and "Caution about Maundy Thursday Passover Seders." Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, in "What Do We Say to Our Children?," touches on an underexplored topic: how do we foster in children a strong identity and cultivate epistemological humility? Richard Lux offers the clearest chapter-length unpacking of supersessionism I have read in "Supersessionism / Replacement Theology." Some of the chapters are more scholarly. Brueggmann's "Israel is My Firstborn Son" and Wes Howard-Brook's "Why We Need to Translate *Ioudaioi* as 'Judeans'" call for some background and seem less accessible to lay readers. This creates some unevenness in the book.

This book will be especially valuable for Jewish and Christian seminarians and clergy. Sadly, rabbis are being called upon to address public acts of anti-Judaism, and this book will provide a deeper understanding of history and theology. It will give Christians as well an awareness of the history of anti-Judaism and its practical manifestations today and encourage them to struggle with their own views. For them, this book will not feel comfortable. Some of the critiques are difficult to read, and that is precisely why this text is important. Ultimately that difficult message, presented here largely by Christians and not by Jews, is necessary before we can have hope for the future.