

**Karma Ben Johanan**  
***A Pottage of Lentils:***  
***Mutual Perceptions of Christians and Jews***  
***in the Age of Reconciliation (Hebrew)***

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A new book in Hebrew about the changes in the relations between Jews and Christians in the contemporary age should be a cause for celebration. To some extent, this book is that. But it falls short of expectations and I would suggest that the book be at least partially revised if it is to appear in English.

The author is a young Israeli researcher now based in Berlin. Her title is taken from Genesis 25:34 and the reference is to rabbinic depictions of Jacob and Esau as symbols of Judaism and Christianity. The cover design is a powerful representation of Jacob and Esau from a series of photographs called “Bible Stories” by the Israeli photographer, Adi Ness.

In the first half of her book, Ben Johanan opens up for the Hebrew reader the dramatic story of the significant changes which have taken place in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries within Christian and specifically Catholic theology vis-à-vis Judaism and the Jewish people. Focusing on the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger—later Pope Benedict XVI—this material is relatively familiar to the English-reading public, but perhaps contains more theological depth than is usual in historical surveys. Ben Johanan is to be commended for her interest in, and grasp of, nuanced Christian theology.

Of particular interest to Hebrew readers may be the Christian theological responses to the Holocaust and the key role in promoting the dialogue played by Jews who converted to Christianity, such as Gregory Baum, John Oesterreicher, and the French Ratisbonne Brothers. (The name Ratisbonne may be familiar to some because it is the name of a prominent Christian monastery in Jerusalem.) Knowing the name Torquemada from the Spanish Inquisition, Jews may think that Jewish apostates have always been adversaries and hostile to the faith they left, but in this book we see that some actually sought to build bridges between the two faith-communities.

The writing in this volume is refreshing and fascinating, and it is accessible to readers who do not deal directly with these issues. Clearly, the author has done extensive research. However, it is disappointing to find typographical mistakes, incorrect transliterations (especially of names of people), and misattributions of denominational identifiers.

But the problematic section of the volume is its second half, which is about Christians and Christianity according to Orthodox Judaism. The Jewish material presented is both philosophical and Halakhic (legal). There are extensive essays on the anti-Christian attitudes of HaRav Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook and his son, HaRav Tzvi Yehudah Kook. Other Orthodox leaders are discussed who continued in this vein, but conspicuous by their absence are, for example, the dissenting Italian-Jewish voices from the 19<sup>th</sup> century like Shmuel David Luzatto and Elijah Benamozegh.

As far as the later 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are concerned, i.e., after *Nostra Aetate*, there is no mention of some of the Orthodox rabbis in Israel and abroad who are leaders in the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The late Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks appears in a footnote. Rabbis of the British Commonwealth and many European rabbis from France, Germany, and Scandinavia with long traditions of dialogue with their Christian colleagues are not in this book. Rabbis Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, David Rosen, and the late David Hartman, who have thought seriously about Christianity and who were and are extensively involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue, are each mentioned only a few times, and the spouses of the first two (also both active in interreligious affairs) are not mentioned at all.

The author's decision to limit herself only to Orthodoxy is somewhat surprising, as if they are the only truly authentic Jewish voices. This decision partially accounts for the lack of women in the book, although there are Orthodox women as well as Catholic sisters (e.g., from Notre Dame de Sion) who could have been mentioned. Ben Johanan seems to feel that the more open or tolerant voices are better known and that her task was to highlight the mainstream and leave the avant-garde or the pioneers for a later study.

To take a model from another field with which I am familiar, imagine a researcher writing 30-40 years ago about Jewish feminism. It would be a disservice to the readers if he or she confined the research to the responses of the mainstream Orthodox Rabbinate, and omitted the rabbinic vanguards (among them Rabbi Greenberg). I am suggesting that Jewish-Christian dialogue within Orthodoxy is in its nascent stages, similar to Jewish feminism in the 1980s. But non-Orthodox Jews have been involved in such dialogue for close to a century. The Israeli public should be exposed to these facts.

"Mutual Perceptions of Christians and Jews in the Age of Reconciliation" is a broad title for this very focused work, in light of the focus on Orthodox Jews alone. The book presents the reader with a pessimistic view of the state of Jewish-Christians relations. In my opinion, this reinforces negative stereotypes that many Israelis hold to begin with. The question remains whether the lacunae will be filled in a later edition or translation of the work.