

**Thérèse Andrevon and William Krisel, Eds.**  
***Réflexions juives sur le christianisme***

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One of the challenging aspects of our plurilingual world is that scholarship in one language is frequently not easily accessible in other languages; the desirable cross-pollination of ideas is often hampered by the limitations of market-driven scholarly publishing and the prohibitive costs of translation. While many scholars are comfortable in a number of languages, those without that fluency are frequently stymied in their access to the research and insights of their colleagues in other parts of the world. This book, *Jewish Reflections on Christianity*, represents an attempt to bring four influential English-language Jewish commentaries on Christianity to a new French readership, together with responses from francophone scholars from a range of Christian traditions. It is a stimulating blend of interfaith engagement and Christian ecumenism, in which leading voices in one part of the world are able to speak to, and enrich, the work of others an ocean away for the benefit of the dialogue overall.

The project leaders and editors, Thérèse Andrevon and William Krisel, bring complementary expertise and background to this work. Andrevon is a professor at the Domuni Universitas, a virtual university campus sponsored by the (Catholic) Dominican Friars. A resident of Israel and a member of the Elijah Interfaith Association, she has been active in Jewish-Christian dialogue for three decades and teaches Jewish Studies, with a focus on Catholic theologies of Judaism. Krisel is a lecturer at the Institut catholique de Paris, where he has taught in the fields of ecumenical theology and Old Testament studies, and he has several publications in Biblical studies. They have assembled a diverse panel of knowledgeable Jewish and Christian scholars and commentators, including Christophe Chalamet, Luc Forestier, Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Alexandru Ioniță, Jonas Jacquelin, David Meyer, and Christian Rutishauser.

At the heart of the book are significant essays by four major rabbinic figures spanning the last 60 years of the dialogue: Joseph Ber Soloveitchik (author of “Confrontation” from 1964), Abraham Joshua Heschel (“No Religion Is an Island” from 1966), Irving Greenberg (“Covenantal Partners in a Post-modern World” from 2004), and David Novak (“Supersessionism Hard and Soft” from 2019). Each

essay, and its author, is introduced by another rabbi who provides helpful biographical and theological context for readers who may be unfamiliar with these four thinkers. Three Christian theologians—one Catholic, one Protestant, and one Eastern Orthodox—then provide their own responses to the original essays, highlighting and critiquing the ideas presented. I believe that it is these responses that provide some of the most interesting and thought-provoking parts of this book.

As Andrevon notes in her introduction, there have been dozens of Christian statements regarding Judaism. But the 2001 joint statement “Dabru Emet” proved to be the catalyst for a number of other Jewish statements on how Christianity might be understood from a Jewish perspective. More than 20 years after DE, Andrevon and her colleagues want their audience to appreciate the evolution in Jewish conversations about Christianity and to trace for themselves the theological shifts as that dialogue has deepened and expanded over nearly 60 years.

Andrevon notes the obvious limits to such a selection: all four of the rabbis showcased are either naturalized or native-born Americans and therefore not representative of thinking in Israel or in other Diaspora communities. (Novak currently teaches in a Canadian university.) They represent either Modern Orthodox or Conservative / Masorti Judaism. Although they all served as professors, all of them are also deeply steeped in traditional Jewish learning. They also represent very different historical contexts, and so it is difficult to fairly compare their ideas. However, there are definite common threads in their thinking.

In commenting on these rabbinic contributions, Chalamet (a Reformed Christian pastor and theologian) points out that many of the early Protestant Reformers spoke of Judaism with comparatively some respect and devoted great attention to the concept of covenant. He particularly highlights the work of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75) and his treatise “On the One Eternal Covenant,” which emphasized the fundamental continuity between the covenants of the Old and New Testaments (a message that Chalamet finds in both Greenberg and Novak). For Bullinger (and his contemporary, Ulrich Zwingli [1484-1531]), there could be no split, and certainly no contradiction, between the messages of the two parts of the Christian Bible. He emphasized New Testament passages that underscored this theological connectedness. (Bullinger’s approach earned him the scorn of some of his peers, who mocked him as an Ebionite.) John Calvin espoused similar sentiments, and Chalamet quotes extensively from writings of the Swiss Reformer who honored the authentic faith of Jewish figures who lived before Christ. Chalamet argues that the idea of God’s unshakeable covenant with the Jewish people—so central to *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents—is already powerfully present in the writings of several 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation leaders, although it has sometimes been minimized by later theologians.

Forestier is a Catholic priest and theologian who teaches at the Institut catholique de Paris. He emphasizes one key term for each of the four Jewish authors: “1964,” “mission,” “branch,” and “fulfillment.” “1964” is the year when Soloveitchik wrote, and this is essential for understanding his thinking. *Nostra Aetate* had not yet been promulgated, and mainstream Christianity had not seriously begun a new and different trajectory in its attitude toward Jews. For Forestier, that

date reminds us of the importance of historical context in situating and understanding a theologian's views. Soloveitchik was reacting to still-unreformed attitudes, out of a perceived sense of vulnerability as a Jew in a majority-Christian society, which makes his opposition to theological engagement with Christians understandable. For Heschel, "mission" was closely linked to proselytism and traditionally strong pressure on Jews to convert to Christianity, which he forcefully rejected. (As Forestier points out, Novak develops similar themes decades later, in a context when some Catholic theologians were again debating the desirability of encouraging Jewish conversion.) The American experience certainly colors these discussions, as do the influential ideas of John Courtney Murray on religious liberty and conscience. Once again, context is enlightening. Next, "branch" applies to Greenberg's discussion of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. Forestier highlights some of the pitfalls in the "family" language that has often been used in the past, but he also sees Greenberg's use of this language as an organic way to express a relationship that Christians have often spiritualized. The final term, "fulfillment," touches on questions raised by Novak: How can Christians see their faith as "fulfilling" Judaism and yet engage with Jews in a non-supersessionistic way? How can Jewish and Christian claims co-exist respectfully? And what new, less exclusivistic models of "fulfillment" might we be able to explore? Forestier's chapter raises detailed questions for exegesis, sacramental theology, and ecclesiology.

The third Christian respondent, Ioniță, is a Romanian Orthodox priest, theologian, and researcher at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu. Ioniță points out that, just as many Orthodox Christians know very little about Jews and Judaism, so these four contributors seem to show very little familiarity with Eastern Orthodoxy. He grants that this is understandable, because there were few Orthodox Christians in the diaspora until after the fall of Communism in 1990. Furthermore, "Eastern Christianity has remained more or less a stranger to the theological developments of recent decades" (186). Novak's focus on supersessionism resonates for Ioniță since, as he says, "in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the idea of supplanting Judaism is very palpable, and the temptation of Marcionism ... is more obviously present in Orthodox Christianity than in any other Christian denomination" (187). Orthodoxy's deep rootedness in patristic thought has resulted in liturgical and theological texts which, Ioniță suggests, combine both "hard" and "soft" forms of supersessionism. The very limited place of Old Testament texts in Byzantine liturgy means that the Old Testament is often unfamiliar to Orthodox believers. (Heschel sees familiarity with the Hebrew Bible as an essential step in Christian renewal.) Also, the tradition has privileged New Testament texts apparently critical of Judaism. Ioniță pushes for a greater awareness of the moral and spiritual heritage common to both Orthodox Christianity and Judaism as an important step in transforming the current situation. He points out that, while it is an uphill battle to change these anti-Jewish texts, there have been small victories and minor liturgical reforms, and his research team is making Romanian translations of key Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish dialogue texts available on their Web site.

In her concluding comments, Andrevon celebrates that a collection of voices that could have yielded a cacophony has, in the end, turned out to be more of a

symphony. She hopes that the book itself can be a model for how interreligious dialogue and ecumenical discussions can intersect in fruitful ways. She appreciates that the Jewish authors studied in the book both appeal for Christian change and offer a critique of certain areas where Judaism needs to examine its attitude toward others.

Andrevon points out some interesting areas that were not addressed by the contributors. None of the Jewish authors seems to contest the idea of Christianity as a monotheistic religion, despite the historical assessment by some Jewish theologians that Christianity is *avodah zarah* (idolatry). Even Soloveitchik (arguably the author who most wants to keep Christian theology at arm's length) does not try to refute or condemn Christianity *per se*. Andrevon was also surprised that there seemed to be little discussion of the importance of Jesus' Jewishness and humanity as an important (and helpful) component in healthy dialogue between the two communities. What does come through, however, is the importance for both Jews and Christians of a need to remain rooted in their traditions as they engage in a project of renewal. Many of the authors draw upon authoritative (but often neglected) voices or texts from the past which permit a different, more dialogical approach to the Other. For Christians, "a theology of Judaism can only be constructed by delving into one's own heritage. Tradition is, simultaneously, both the problem and the remedy" (207). Similarly, the rabbinic evocation of past figures like Yehuda Halevi and Menachem ben Shlomo Meiri is a reminder of the diversity of Jewish voices on these topics, many of which remain somewhat marginal and little-quoted.

This is a remarkably rich, nuanced, and revelatory book and a major new contribution to French-language resources for Jewish-Christian dialogue. It celebrates the undeniable achievements of the post-Shoah period, reminds us of how much work remains to be done, and inspires us with hope by revealing what is possible when goodwill, openness, faith, and patient listening combine. It also reminds us of the ongoing problem of linguistic "silencing" in scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations, and of the need for increased efforts to translate and share the best thinking in languages other than our own.

Andrevon suggests that the modern Jewish-Christian "duet" can be a prophetic sign to the rest of the "orchestra" of humanity of how we need to unite our efforts to serve a needy world and to prepare together for the coming of the Messianic Age. The four Jewish thinkers highlighted in this volume are giants upon whose shoulders all those in the field now stand. The commentaries assembled here point us in new directions so that we can continue that momentum and encourage us to reflect on how our contributions today can be vital building-blocks for the generations who will come after us.