

Eugene Korn
***Israel and the Nations:
The Bible, the Rabbis,
and Jewish-Gentile Relations***

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Since the Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, there have been many books and articles written by Catholic and Protestant scholars on the dramatic changes in Christian-Jewish Relations. However, very few have been written by Orthodox Jewish scholars. Rabbi Eugene Korn's book sets out to answer the important questions: "What does Jewish thought and Jewish law (*Halakah*) have to say about how Jews should understand, evaluate, and relate to Christians, Muslims, Asian believers, and secular gentiles in the past and today? And should Jewish-gentile relations change when Jews are a minority in the Diaspora and when Jews are the dominant majority in the State of Israel? What are the bounds of tolerance and Jewish religious pluralism?" (2).

In part one chapter one, Korn lays out the terms and boundaries of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants and the mission of Israel as keeper of the commandments / *mitsvot*. Korn in chapter two analyzes different rabbinic interpretations of Israel's chosenness for Jewish self-understanding and for its relation to all of humanity. In chapter three, entitled "*Extra Synagogam Nulla Salus?*" (a play upon the Catholic phrase "*extra ecclesia nulla salus*" [outside of the Church there is no salvation]), he focuses on what the Jewish tradition teaches about religious tolerance. For example, he considers whether there is a way to God available outside of Jewish faith. Also, he considers interpretations of the Noahide covenant from Maimonides to the present and what they tell us about how Jews view gentiles, especially regarding salvation and the afterlife. Chapter four, "Revelation, Gentiles, and the World to Come," is a challenging chapter for a Christian not familiar with the nuances of Maimonides's views on whether the resident alien and the righteous gentile must also accept the Mosaic covenant. A discussion of textual variants and modern interpretations makes this the most challenging chapter. In chapter five Korn examines past and present concepts of biblical idolatry and whether these have relevance today.

Part two of the book, entitled "Judaism, Jews, and Christianity," is Korn's most creative and exciting contribution to present-day dialogue between Christians and Jews. He pays particular attention to the views of Orthodox Jews. In chapter six, "Rethinking Christianity: Rabbinic Position and Possibilities," Korn surveys Orthodox Jews' views of Christianity as a faith. He also presents an appreciative Jewish view of Christianity and the idea of the image of God found in Christians, especially in the wake of *Nostra Aetate*. He draws upon traditionalist thinkers from Maimonides through modern-day rabbis Abraham Joshua Heschel and Irving Greenberg to posit a new Orthodox view of Christianity. Korn in chapter seven, "Esau Hates Jacob," reviews the age-old rabbinic dictum about unchanging hatred between Jews and Christians along with new Jewish attitudes toward Christians.

Korn's eighth chapter, "The Man of Faith and Religious Dialogue," is an extensive discussion of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's prohibition from 1964 against theological / religious dialogue between Jews and Christians. This view has encouraged Orthodox Jews to avoid dialogue with Christians. However, Soloveitchik could not have foreseen the developing revolution over the next 30 years in Christian attitudes toward Judaism in "Nostra Aetate" and subsequent Catholic and Protestant documents. Korn gives a ringing affirmation of dialogue with the statement that, "once Jews leave the safe intimacy of their synagogues, religious Catholics, who have renounced triumphalism and accepted what Pope John Paul II has call their 'shared spiritual patrimony with Judaism', will be among the few who understand Jewish religious and spiritual dilemmas" (162). For Korn, Soloveitchik's wary and negative view of traditional Christianity no longer applies, at least among Catholics. Korn thus encourages dialogue, which has often been highly fruitful. His last chapter, "The People Israel, Christianity, and the Covenantal Responsibility to History," is a definitive call for a new "Jewish understanding of contemporary Christianity that allows traditional Jews to see Christians as participants in the covenant of Abraham, and as partners with Jews in a mission to be a kingdom of priests to bring divine blessing to humanity and human history" (3).

As a Catholic Christian who has been engaged in dialogue with Jews since 1975, I have bristled at the Jewish notion that Christians are merely potential Noahides. This is an identification that I, and I think many Christians, find not only insufficient to our self-understanding as covenanting with the God of Israel but verging on the offensive. For Korn, as an Orthodox Jew, to connect Christians to the blessing and mission of the covenant with Abraham is a giant step forward for our sacred, mutual dialogue and a humbling and encouraging view of Christians as they see themselves. He is to be applauded for his courage and creativity. However, the Christian belief that Christians too were present at Sinai through Jesus the Jew is the next challenge for Jewish-Christian relations, since, at least according to Korn's logic, it is not the concept of the Trinity that is a problem for Jews but the incarnation. The challenge for Christians is to clarify for themselves and for Jews a better understanding of this doctrine and to make a more irenic presentation of it.

This book is above all a thorough analysis of the relationship of Israel as a people and a State with the Christian world from an Orthodox Jewish perspective.

Korn is to be praised for his careful analysis of the long rabbinic tradition, especially of its applications to the Noahide and Abrahamic covenants in the context of modern-day post-Vatican II Catholic Christianity. I highly recommend this book not only to Jewish and Christian scholars interested in the application of the rabbinic tradition to gentile Christians but also to Jews who question whether there is any justification from a traditional perspective for dialogue with Christians. Furthermore, it will be valuable to anyone interested in interreligious dialogue.