

REVIEW

Alan L. Berger, Ed.

***Triologue and Terror: Judaism,
Christianity, and Islam after 9/11***

(Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012),
paperback, xv + 271 pp.

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Alan Berger has brought together 15 interreligious relations luminaries at the nexus of scholarship and practice to ponder Abrahamic triologue in the post-9/11 era. In his helpful conclusion, Berger identifies the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim themes of the fifteen essays, summarizing the five contributions from each of the three traditions. But as he readily acknowledges, each of the essays stands on its own, representing diverse reflections on a vast question: as 9/11 moves closer to history than experience, has this epochal event altered the interreligious landscape?

The volume is a record of the 2007-2010 Global Shemin Trialogues at Florida Atlantic University, where Berger serves as a professor of Holocaust and Judaic Studies. The book's topics are as diverse as the authors, including Bible (Theresa Sanders); geopolitics (Akbar S. Ahmed); human rights (Donald J. Dietrich); afterlife (David Patterson); interreligious journeys (Mary C. Boys, Muhammad Shafiq); Jewish-Muslim history (Anouar Majid); education (Deborah Weissman); salvation (Gilbert S. Rosenthal); evangelization (John T. Pawlikowski); peace (A. Rashied Omar) and the evolution of interreligious relations (A. James Rudin, Ricardo Di Segni, Eugene J. Fisher, and Khaleel Mohammed). In short, there is something for everyone here: academicians, clergy, and lay-people.

Berger presents the representatives of the three Abrahamic religions in order of their faith's appearance in the world—

Judaism, then Christianity, and finally Islam. The opening essay in each section is a tour d'horizon, featuring respectively, A. James Rudin (Judaism), Eugene J. Fisher (Christianity), and Khaleel Mohammed (Islam). They each excel in telling us where we were, are, and need to go.

Rabbi Rudin, the American Jewish Committee director of interreligious affairs during the pre-9/11 decades, opens the volume with a sobering assertion: the interreligious golden age now faces serious complications. The passing of Pope John Paul II, initiatives by mainline Protestant churches to divest from corporations doing business with Israel, and the significant challenges in Muslim-Jewish relations post-9/11 combine for a difficult letdown after the heyday of interreligious relations in the post-Holocaust era. It is hard to surpass the Catholic-Jewish transformations of *Nostra Aetate* and John Paul II's papacy. Liberal Protestants and Jews have been mired in disagreements over Israel for close to a decade. Notwithstanding some progress, Muslims and Jews remain wary of one another.

Dr. Fisher directed Catholic-Jewish relations for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for thirty years. As Fisher notes in his contribution, during the first ten years he also served as the *de facto* director of Catholic-Muslim relations. Fisher writes, "September 11 may have inaugurated a world of fear and terrorism...but it also prompted innumerable people of goodwill...to turn toward one another in dialogue.... Sometimes, good can be wrung out of evil" (p. 100). Islam, Fisher asserts, did not have to face the Enlightenment challenges to religious tradition the way Judaism and Christianity did. "This imbalance...means that the three are not on the same page, or even in the same chapter, in their respective histories" (p. 100).

No doubt it is the writings by Muslim contributors that will be read with greatest interest, because it is about Islam that most Americans interested in the possibilities of dialogue feel a gap in their knowledge. Khaleel Mohammed begins to narrow that

gap. He is a controversial figure who has been attacked for his unconventional views, and he does not cower here. With chilling candor he writes, “It is easier to start a new religion than to seek to reform any of the cherished constructs of Islam. Later triumphalist, absolutist teachings have so supplanted the pristine Qur’anic worldview that they are now viewed as the pure Islam of the early generations” (p. 178). But he concludes with hope: “In the Muslim world, there is a rising swell against retrogression and malaise” (p. 182).

Beyond the heavy analysis, there are also artfully crafted pearls of wisdom. Rabbi Rosenthal, a veteran interreligious relations scholar and practitioner, offers my favorite in the book: “When people do not speak to one another, they do unspeakable things to one another” (p. 36). *Dialogue and Terror* moves us closer to the speaking and further from the unspeakable.

Appropriately, this collection does not offer a Pollyanish view of dialogue. Of course, the writers reveal a passion for interreligious relations and the personal transformations inherent in their respective journeys. But notwithstanding the significant advances of select dialogue endeavors, *Dialogue and Terror* affirms the challenges of dialogue when two of the communities (Judaism and Christianity) have significant mutual histories in modern interreligious relations and one (Islam) does not. We need more practice juggling with two balls (Muslim-Christian and Muslim-Jewish) before we can perfect juggling with three.

Berger writes in his introduction, “Everywhere with the exception of Western Europe, religion appears resurgent” (p. 2). Yet in his conclusion, he suggests, “commitment to organized institutional religion appears to be waning” (pp. 253-54). The contradiction is resolved in this fine collection. The human need for religious insight has only increased since 9/11. It is the institutions of religion and religious views of the Other that need to catch up. The essayists in this volume, or perhaps their disciples, will play an important role in that process.