

REVIEW

Celia M. Deutsch, Eugene J. Fisher, and James Rudin, Eds.

Toward the Future:

*Essays on Catholic-Jewish Relations
in Memory of Rabbi León Klenicki*

(New York: Paulist Press, 2013), paperback, xii + 387

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In honor of their friend León Klenicki (1930–2009), the editors have put together a volume with an introduction, eighteen chapters, and a concluding epilogue. Klenicki, who for many years served as the Director of Interfaith Affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, was a leader in working for improved Jewish-Christian relations. After a series of tributes to Klenicki (written by Abraham H. Foxman, Eric J. Greenberg, Judith Banki, Peter Stravinskis, and William Cardinal Keeler), there are two chapters on Scripture (one by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, and one co-authored by Jean-Pierre Ruiz and Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández), two on identity (by Shira Lander and Elizabeth Groppe), two on theology (by Adam Gregerman and Hans Herman Henrix), two on liturgy (by Ruth Langer and Philip A. Cunningham), two on mysticism (by Arthur Green and Michael Barnes), two on Latinas/os and Jewish-Catholic relations (by Hillel Cohn and Jacqueline M. Hidalgo), a concluding chapter (co-authored by David M. Gordis and Peter C. Phan), and an epilogue written by Celia M. Deutsch, who is also one of the editors.

This is an outstanding collection of essays and a worthy tribute to a person committed to interreligious dialogue. Throughout the book, Judaism is presented, in the words of Pope John Paul II (quoted on p. 75), as a “living heritage” of faith. One general observation is that the chapters have to be quite short

and regrettably succinct in order to fit into a book of no more than some two hundred and fifty pages including a select bibliography of Klenicki's publications. There are instances when one may have wished that the authors of the chapters would have had more space in order to develop their thoughts.

Additionally, in a collection such as this one, the purpose of which is to serve as a tribute to a particular person, there are necessarily some repetitions, for example Klenicki's famous critique of some forms of interreligious dialogue as only "tea and sympathy" (e.g., p. 6 and 10). As in other edited volumes, there are both overlapping chapters and tensions between the various parts of the book. One such instance in the Jewish-Christian dialogue is the discourse of otherness and sameness. On the one hand, some contributors have a Levinasian emphasis on the radical *otherness* of the Other. Eskenazi, for example, insists that "the integrity of the other is [to be] protected" (p. 29). We find, on the other hand, some contributors emphasizing the essential *sameness* of the Other, e.g., that Jews and Christian together constitute one people of God, that they have much more in common than is usually believed, and that *die Heimholung Jesu ins Judentums* (seeing Jesus within his Jewish milieu) is to be celebrated in liturgy and theology. Indisputably, both these lines of thought are accurate. On the one hand, because of texts, traditions, and terminology, Jews and Christians *are* joined together in a way that seems without parallel in other interreligious relations. On the other hand, although commonality is a non-negotiable starting-point for interreligious dialogue between Jews and Christians, it can never be the sole answer to the challenges that face people of faith. That is why the Levinasian claim about the distinct otherness of the other is essential, especially when complemented by an emphasis on each person being created in the likeness of God. As Green writes, "[a subjective feeling of] Love is too shaky a pedestal on which to stand the entire Torah" and hence there is a need for such a theological affirmation to avoid the two absolutes of *otherness* as well as *sameness* (p. 156).

While all sections in the book are significant and stimulating, it is only natural that some will appeal more than others to each reader. One of the chapters that the present reviewer finds particularly illuminating is written by Eskenazi. The task that she sets before herself is to explore biblical resources for interfaith dialogue. While admitting that it would be “a misrepresentation to claim that the Bible overtly advocated interfaith dialogue,” she nevertheless claims that “the Hebrew Bible affirms continuity between contemporary goals and biblical foundations” (p. 30). She finds both an acknowledgment of the importance of difference—and it has already been pointed out that she stresses that the integrity of the other is to be protected—as well as commonality, i.e., Jews and Christians rejoicing over common Scripture, common roots, common thoughts, etc.

Another stimulating contribution is the concluding essay by Gordis and Phan. It is only fitting in a collection of essays on Jewish-Christian relations called *Toward the Future* that this chapter is jointly written by a rabbi and a Roman Catholic theologian. They, too, draw attention to the discourse of otherness and sameness. They state that dialogue cannot be just a matter of approaching areas of convergence; it also has to include open and honest considerations of areas of divergence (p. 217). A necessary condition for this is clarity of thought (both one’s own and regarding the Other), even in the face of disagreement. There is room for appreciating the Other, without necessarily adopting the Other’s position. It is in sincere dialogue that one discovers that much of the theological discourse was born “in the context of controversies and imperialism,” and that it is “highly liable to misunderstanding today” (p. 220). The two authors argue in favor of a theological discourse which is rooted “not in our conviction about all that we know, but rather in the conviction that there is much that we do not and cannot know” (p. 221). Hence, they argue in favor of an epistemological modesty, because, whereas only God is divine, humans are only human, and theology has to take this into consideration. Their chapter makes one ask whether it is possible to be truly humble—which is a virtue in

arguably all religious traditions—without such an epistemological modesty. Indeed, is this insight not the beginning of wisdom in interreligious dialogue? Readers are in debt to the three editors for taking this initiative and for preparing these texts for publication.