

**Zev Garber, Ed.**  
***Teaching the Historical Jesus:  
Issues and Exegesis***  
(New York: Routledge, 2015), hardcover, 273 pp.

**MICHAEL MCGARRY**  
mcgarry@paulist.org  
The Paulist Center, Boston, MA 02108

Fr. Lawrence Boadt, a biblical scholar with long involvement in Jewish-Christian relations, used to say, “Christians too often think that they know Judaism by reading the Old Testament. And too many Jews think that they know Christianity without reading the New Testament.” Zev Garber seems to be responding to this challenge, especially by opening the New Testament, first in new ways for Christians, and, in some cases, for the first time to Jews.

In his helpful volume, *Teaching the Historical Jesus: Issues and Exegesis*, Garber has gathered essays that address, many in very practical ways, how the initial historical issues of the Church’s emergence and separation from Judaism (e.g., Jesus’ teaching, destruction of the Temple, the Pharisees, the crucifixion of Jesus) might be approached both for Jewish and Christian students. Garber’s book title is accurate, for the essays range from the very practical (e.g., how to put together a curriculum for undergraduates) to how one situates Jesus within his social and anthropological matrix. Assembling twenty other scholars in addition to himself, Garber, emeritus professor and Chair of Jewish Studies and Philosophy at Los Angeles Valley College, has gathered articles that speak to the experiences of teaching the historical Jesus in many venues: from small liberal arts colleges in the American South to rabbinical schools in Israel. Most of the authors are Jewish, with a smaller number of Christians, and they have diverse backgrounds and interests. (However, he only includes three women among the twenty-one contributors.) With so many authors, the essays are consequently short, some only a few pages. What is gained by breadth sometimes entails sacrificing depth. For those looking for more, Garber has provided a very helpful, if limited, bibliography.

In his introduction, after a short description of the various “quests for the historical Jesus,” Garber gives a short précis of each essay, situating them within the tripartite book. These sections are: I. Jesus in Undergraduate Education; II. Some Issues in Teaching Jesus; and III. Teaching Views on Jesus.

Section I is by far the most practical, personal, and anecdotal, including, in a few contributions, excerpts from essays written by Garber’s students. Garber

begins this section by recounting his own experiences teaching about Jesus in his Southern California college. His experience contrasts and complements well with that of Steven Jacobs in the latter's Alabama location. By including reflections on the particularity and diversity of the writers' locations, the book helps the reader recognize the inventiveness of each professor. Section I will appeal most to professors teaching at secular institutions, but also at Catholic and Jewish institutions of higher learning. Indeed, in his essay, Joel Gereboff reviews "the approach of major American rabbinic schools to teaching about Jesus and early Christianity" (p. 69).

What emerges in all the essays in Section I is the importance of students' leaving their own faith-commitments and presuppositions at the classroom door in order to adopt an historically oriented approach to studying the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth. In addition to situating Jesus within his geographical, social, and religious milieu, many of the authors note positively the transformation of Jewish-Christian relations since the Roman Catholic Church's change of course at the Second Vatican Council. James Moore and Joseph Edelheit, in an interesting dialogical, co-written essay encapsulate this by asserting that "any course on Jesus requires a serious review and consideration of Jewish-Christian relations as foundations to a critical understanding of Jesus. This challenge goes to the very core of post-Shoah interfaith dialogue. One of the purposes of a course about Jesus is the expanded praxis that is the antidote for the anti-Jewish polemic within Christian texts and doctrine" (p. 94). Moore and Edelheit also, gently and delicately, raise the place of the State of Israel when approaching biblical topics. Also prominent in almost all the courses reviewed in this section is a focus on the "parting (or 'partings') of the way (or 'ways')" between what became Judaism and Christianity.

Section II addresses primarily issues of scholarly method. Especially compelling is Joshua Schwartz's "Teaching Jesus in a Halakhic Jewish Setting in Israel: Kosher, Treif, or Pareve?" While most of this volume's essays address American and Canadian settings, Schwartz lifts up Israeli challenges and historical contexts quite different from a more diverse North American situation. Having lived and worked in Israel for more than ten years, I found Schwartz' insights especially interesting. Schwartz bolsters his findings by citing a number of surveys that show Israelis' ignorance of the historical Jesus and argues that they need to study this topic as part of their own history. Some in Israel who advocated the study of Jesus saw it as a way to "know your enemy" (pp. 161, 163). While North Americans might find such a designation difficult, nonetheless it reflects the effects of a sad, bloodstained history. A final highlight of this section is Michael J. Cook's "Gravitating to Luke's Historical Jesus: Help or Hindrance?" For generations, Cook has taught the New Testament and the historical Jesus to rabbinical students and other Jews, and the cumulative knowledge found in this essay reflects a lifetime of scholarly wisdom.

Section III covers more predictable issues of historical Jesus research. Essays in this section address Jesus' relations to the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the politics of his time. Although not the first to consider the political implications of

Jesus' message, Fernando Bermejo-Rubio provocatively addresses the issue in "Jesus as a Seditious: The Intertwining of Politics and Religion in his Teaching and Deeds." While this is well-worn territory, Bermejo-Rubio clearly and succinctly reviews the evidence for the reader. S. Scott Bartchy's "Jesus, the Pharisees, and Mediterranean Manliness" illustrates his own methodological insistence that "a solid knowledge of the dominant cultural values and social codes in the world of Jesus and his followers is essential for any serious *historical* understanding of the traditions about this Jesus" (p. 210; emphasis in original). Bartchy lifts up the critical meanings of "honor" and "shame" in Jesus' society in order to better understand Jesus. My Israeli experience among Jews, Christians (mostly Palestinian), and Muslims (all Palestinian) deepened my own similar appreciation for these topics. In particular, the works of such scholars as Bruce Malina, John Pilch, Kenneth Bailey, K.C. Hanson, Douglas Oakman, and Richard Rohrbaugh (all discussed here) are absolutely essential to an accurate understanding of the historical Jesus. Sadly, Bartchy's social cultural insights seem to be lacking in many of the other essays. Finally, in this section, John Pawlikowski addresses in clear fashion Jesus' relation to the Pharisees—an understanding of which can only improve Christian preaching about Jesus.

In too many places, this volume would have benefited from a more careful editorial eye (e.g., on page 8, John Pawlikowski's name is misspelled and "reflects" should be "reflect" in the last paragraph; on page 252, in second paragraph "extensive" should be "extent" and "no" should be "not" in third paragraph).

From many vantage points, most of the essays underscore "the Jewishness of Jesus," and some point out that, as obvious and fundamental as that insight may be, its import and ramifications still remain to be worked out, in both scholarship and Church life. Eugene Fisher's essay, "Typical Christian Misunderstandings of Jesus and Judaism," in his usual clear-and-direct style, is particularly helpful in this regard. While few female authors contribute to this volume, it is clear that Vanderbilt University scholar Amy-Jill Levine, who is not a contributor, has had an extraordinary influence on virtually all the contributors.

Zev Garber has assembled a wide range of scholars whose experience and writing will help readers who have the opportunity and privilege to teach about the historical Jesus in many settings. Indeed, the joy and satisfaction found in the testimonies of those who teach the historical Jesus was another theme found among many of the contributors.

As is the case with other titles in the Routledge catalogue, the retail price (\$145) makes this a book for specialized libraries. However, those teaching about the historical Jesus will find it a helpful resource for its varied content, its practical approach (in many essays), and for its useful bibliography.