Books in Review

The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement, by Michael R. Cohen. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

In his new book, Professor Michael Cohen intensively examines the previous interpretations of the founding of the Conservative movement, formulates his critical analyses of these interpretations, and offers his own, very cogent and quite controversial, alternative proposal of how to properly understand the founding, growth, and (of late) decline of American Conservative Judaism, all issues that warrant close analysis and study by the current (and future) leaders of this movement.

There are two dominant theories of the rise of the Conservative movement. One (promoted by Moshe Davis and Mordecai Waxman) drew a direct line between the positive-historical school of nineteenth-century German leader Zacharias Frankel and the institution-building of Solomon Schechter, the formation of the United Synagogue and expanding numbers of congregations related to the Seminary and the United Synagogue. The second (offered by Marshall Sklare) offers a sociological explanation for the growth of the movement: second-generation East European Jewish immigrants wanted recognizable Jewish rituals in their synagogues, but refused to adopt the church-like forms that had become prevalent in the Reform congregations. These newly adapted institutions formed the core elements of the emerging Conservative movement, and it was largely pioneered by these Americanizing second-generation children of the earlier immigrant population.

Cohen rejects both of these interpretations. The Sklare analysis, Cohen maintains, could easily have described the development of most modern Orthodox synagogues, just as reasonably as it did the Conservative synagogues under analysis. The Davis/Waxman interpretation, based on the Historical School and the Frankel connection, Cohen suggests, fails to take into account the strong resistance noticeable as late as the 1940s and 1950s, to the creation of a new movement. Indeed, it is clear, he writes, that in their day Schechter and his disciples continually tried to *avoid* creating a "third movement," and made many concessions (unsuccessfully) to induce the

modern Orthodox to maintain a unity of traditionalist congregations, in line with their firm belief in "Catholic Israel."

Instead, Dr. Cohen offers his own revisionist interpretation. American Conservative Judaism was in reality created by a group of younger rabbis, he argues, who took over the mantle of leadership in the Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue from Schechter's "disciples," and began to assert their new-found power and confidence in the 1940s and 1950s. They finally decided to abandon the search for unity with the modern Orthodox and laid the concept of "Catholic Israel" to rest. They reconstituted the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards and began to entertain the possibility of departing concretely from accepted Orthodox halakhic norms. In 1950, they adopted two major rulings: one permitting driving to synagogue on the Sabbath, and the other allowing use of electricity on the Sabbath. Once these *heteirim* (permissions) were in place, the stage was realistically set for additional innovations and the rapid separation of the Conservatives from the Orthodox, and a new movement now became a clear reality.

Cohen documents this interpretation with a broad variety of supporting archival material, most notably from the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism and the Archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He also interviewed family members of some of the central figures in the Schechter disciples' generation: Rabbis Charles Kauvar (Denver), Elias Solomon (New York), Herman Abramovitz (Montreal), and Max Drob (New York). Each of these men had decided at particular points that there had been a conscious break with the Orthodox, and that they themselves could no longer go along with this break, deciding instead to remain loyal to their Orthodox beliefs.

There is, however, data to challenge this narrative. The modern Orthodox felt that the Seminary and its supporters had been drifting toward separatism, merely unwilling to make a clear break until about 1950. Yet, to hold such an opinon requires glossing over the fact that the Orthodox Union (established in 1898) very early on decided that JTSA represented a separate movement. The Reform leadership clearly recognized by 1905 that Schechter and his associates were not going to blend in with their movement's ideology and activities. Cohen further glosses over the fact that the United Synagogue actually published a new prayer book in 1927, on the title page of which is inscribed: "Adapted for the Use of Certain Conservative Congregations by Doctor Jacob Kohn."

The Conservative movement devotees, for their part, had long been champing at the bit for a clearly stated, official parting of the ways. Judah Magnes, for instance, despite his closeness to Schechter, insisted in 1913 that unless the new United Synagogue declared itself to be a third movement, he would not participate in their further organizational efforts. It did not, and he never came back. Mordecai Kaplan and his followers did try to work with the United Synagogue, but found that they finally would have to establish their own (Reconstructionist) movement. Louis Epstein probably tried hardest to remain nominally Orthodox, but the

agunah issue in the 1930s—the issue of the so-called "anchored" woman who cannot move forward with her life because she lacks a formal bill of divorce from her husband—finally convinced him that independent (non-Orthodox) action would have to be taken. Most pointedly, in the 1930s Morris Silverman decisively pioneered the development of a widely used movement-wide prayer book, which was eventually (1945) adopted as a joint Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue publication.

Cohen's study will provoke conversation and is a very timely academic analysis. It comes when Conservative Judaism's star has been in decline for the past several decades, prompting many questions: why did it succeed so mightily during the 1950s and 1960s, and why did it begin to decline in the 1980s and 1990s? Cohen has provided some very illuminating insights into these questions, and they will be debated, pro and con, for a long time to come. Meanwhile we should all be grateful to Dr. Cohen for making so many hitherto unpublished sources available to all of us engaged in the study of American Jewish history.

Finally, another valuable feature of Cohen's study is that it emphasizes the parallels between the birth of Conservative Judaism and the rise of other, non-Jewish, religious, social, and corporate organizations, which have been characterized by the inspiration of charismatic new leadership (e.g., the early Mormons, the Amana Society, Christian Science, the Unification Movement, Hare Krishna, Scientology, and Bahai), which need further study in the emerging research into NRMs (New Religious Movements). The progression from Schechter's charismatic leadership to the organizational activities of his disciples may very well be an illustrative chapter in the developing studies of NRMs. Religious Studies departments may find this publication to be an instructive case study in the understanding of the emergence of new religious movements.

HERBERT ROSENBLUM

Marriage and Metaphor: Constructions of Gender in Rabbinic Literature, by Gail Labovitz. Lantham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009.

In *Marriage and Metaphor,* Gail Labovitz provides an illuminating analysis of the metaphors that structure and shape rabbinic conceptions of marriage. She draws on the cognitive metaphor theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who understand metaphor as the primary means through which humans reason and imagine. Metaphors profoundly structure our lives, shaping and constraining our knowledge and imaginations. Accordingly, Labovitz argues that metaphors do not simply convey rabbinic ideas *about* gender, but that they serve as the central means through which a culture's gender system is made. She probes the implications of the dominant rabbinic metaphor of marriage as an act of acquisition and demonstrates the stark disparities of power and agency these metaphors encode.

In her first chapter, Labovitz analyzes how Mishnah Kiddushin situates marriage within the context of property

transactions. Acknowledging the fraught history of scholarship regarding rabbinic marriage, Labovitz eschews both apologetics and condemnation. Her emphasis on the capacity of metaphor to express both likeness and difference allows her to sidestep problematic binary oppositions. Rabbinic wives were simultaneously like and unlike slaves, and rabbinic marriage was simultaneously like and unlike the acquisition of property. Particularly exciting is her insight about how the acquisition-metaphor accounts for diverse rabbinic approaches to marriage: the designation of the wife as merchandise, the potential for marriage to be "a purchase made in error," and the motif of the marketplace as a threat to men's proper ownership of women.

In her second chapter, Labovitz examines an alternative rabbinic paradigm for marriage: the framework of *kiddushin*. While scholars have often read *kiddushin* as a later, more egalitarian turn away from an ancient purchase-model, Labovitz argues that the new paradigm does not undermine the power relationships of acquisition: the man still dedicates, while the woman becomes dedicated to him. Labovitz demonstrates that the shift toward the terminology of betrothal and sanctification does not actually replace the metaphor of marriage as acquisition. Instead, *kiddushin* reinforces ownership. Through their repeated comparison of betrothed women to property dedicated to the Temple, the rabbis justify and reinforce a husband's right and obligation to set apart his wife and have sole use of her.

The third chapter analyzes two specific applications of the property metaphor: woman as field and woman as house. Building upon the excellent work of Cynthia Baker and Charlotte Fonrobert, Labovitz demonstrates how the rabbis use metaphorical transfers from the realm of agriculture and architecture to conceptualize marital sex and women's bodies. Her insightful discussion of the shared sensibility that underlies rabbinic metaphors of women as house and field makes a strong case for her argument regarding the deep cultural significance of ownership-metaphor in rabbinic marriage discourse. Labovitz also makes a compelling case for the way these metaphors constrain women's agency. Yet despite the disparities of power encoded by these metaphors, it seems that a few texts (such as the Bavli's use of the "flooded field") turn paradigms of acquisition to women's occasional benefit. While this hardly challenges the broader structures of inequality produced and reinforced by these metaphors, it would be interesting to examine more explicitly the effect of metaphor on women's material position within marriage.

In her fourth chapter, Labovitz argues that the legal status of women and slaves was deeply intertwined in both tannaitic and amoraic sources. She shows that the single significant factor linking slaves and wives is the paradigm of ownership: both are legally purchased possessions of a master/husband and both labor on his behalf. Labovitz provides a particularly helpful discussion of the similarities between divorce and manumission—underscoring the ways in which both occur solely at the man's discretion and release the wife or slave from the man's authority. Labovitz also emphasizes critical differences between wives and

enslaved persons, including the way a wife's status as free entitled her to material support from her husband and granted her power over slaves. While a wife's labor was conceptually similar to a slave's labor, a wealthy wife had the potential to deploy slaves to labor on her behalf, for the benefit of her husband. Yet despite these distinctions, Labovitz argues that both women and slaves are viewed as subservient to a human master—constrained by the authority claims of others and thus unable to engage in full, proper service to God.

Labovitz's fifth chapter moves away from discussions of metaphor into a social and historical consideration of the rabbinic marriage economy. She begins by reviewing the social and anthropological implications of different bridewealth and dowry arrangements, as well as the economic dimensions of pre-rabbinic and rabbinic marriage. This chapter is perhaps the most technical, engaging closely with previous scholarship and contesting scholars' claims that rabbinic marriage was not an ownership system. Labovitz contests Boaz Cohen's claim that rabbinic acquisition language arises primarily from the husband's claim on his bride's property. Instead, she argues that the rabbinic paradigm of marriage as ownership legitimizes the husband's ability to acquire a wife and thereby gain control over her goods. Contra Judith Hauptman, Labovitz also argues that the presence of the *k'tubbah* does not overturn the cultural force or legal significance of the ownership metaphor, suggesting that the rabbinic *k'tubbah* further legitimizes the husband's acquisition of and control over conjugal property.

In *Marriage and Metaphor*, Labovitz makes visible the deep significance of ownership paradigms in rabbinic thought, illuminating how profoundly the cognitive framework of marriage as acquisition structures rabbinic gender relations. Labovitz makes a convincing argument that these power differentials cannot be defanged by professing that rabbinic marriage is "not really" an act of acquisition or that the rituals of marriage are "merely symbolic." The metaphors of marriage have a powerful and pervasive reach. Amidst her recognition that paradigms of acquisition characterized her own wedding ceremony and those of many contemporary Jews, Labovitz closes with a moving acknowledgement of her own unsettled questions—and invites further reflection on the metaphors by which we marry.

Julia Watts Belser

The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust, by Rafael Medoff and David Golinkin. Jerusalem: David Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, 2010.

The three students featured in this book are among the relatively few American Jews who relentlessly drew attention to the Holocaust while war raged in Europe. Telling their story are two authors driven by disparate motives. For Golinkin the book is inescapably personal. David Golinkin's father was one of three students at the Jewish Theological Seminary who refused to remain silent in the face of the slaughter of European Jewry. For Medoff the book was a contribution to an exten-

sive oeuvre on American Jewish response to the Holocaust. Within the field he draws attention to people who resisted governmental policy during World War II. Dissatisfied with the American government's insistence that the only way to save Jews was to win the war, they insisted upon immediate measures designed to rescue the surviving remnant. They exerted every effort to awaken the consciousness of the Jewish plight within American Jewry and the American populace at large.

Medoff has his heroes and his villains. In previous books and articles he shined a light upon the daring and controversial activities of Peter Bergson, and he repeats some of them here. In contrast to this heroic figure, he paints a sorry picture of the quarrelsome and ineffective Jewish establishment. Bergson had to contend with the villain of this book, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, president of the World Jewish Congress, who is portrayed as Roosevelt's cat's paw. To him and other Jewish leaders, the Bergson group was a distasteful agent of the Revisionist Zionists, whom they tarred with the brush of fascism. They were horrified at the group's confrontational style, manifest in raucous rallies and in-your-face ads in the general press.[1]

Medoff and Golinkin position Noah Golinkin, Bertram (Buddy) Sachs, and Jerry Lipnick, students at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in the heroic category. Dissatisfied with the absence of a public response to confirmed reports of the murder of European Jewry, these three devised strategies to draw attention to the catastrophe and to find concrete means of rescue. Rebuffed by the Jewish establishment, the JTS students contacted counterparts in rabbinic programs at the Jewish Institute of Religion and Yeshiva College. All agreed that the United States government's promise of postwar retribution was preposterous in the face of Nazi resolve to annihilate European Jewry. Aware of the value of non-Jewish allies, they recruited young people who attended ten Christian seminaries. Together they pursued two objectives: protest and rescue. Representatives of the thirteen institutions formed an Inter-Seminary Conference, held on February 22, 1943 at JTS and UTS. Some 200 attendees passed resolutions to end U.S. restrictions for refugees, to negotiate with Germans to release Jewish (and political) prisoners, to send aid to starving civilians, and to open Palestine to Jewish immigration. The three JTS students composed a joint article for *The Reconstructionist*, condemning U.S. policy: "We do not want retribution for Jews who have already died. We prefer help for those Jews who yet live." The article suggested a course of communal action based upon the proposals of the Inter-Seminary Conference. It goaded to action the Synagogue

[1] *See, e.g., Rafael Medoff,* Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002). See also Joseph Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers? The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938–1948* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

Council of America, which represented the three religious streams in Judaism.

In the spring of 1943, the organization set up a six-week mourning campaign. There were religious services featuring special memorial prayers and bans on festive activities celebrating family milestones. When pressures on the British and American governments led to the Bermuda Conference in April of 1943, and when that conference proved deliberately ineffectual, many sympathizers protested, but to no avail. Only in the last week of that year did the tide turn. Roosevelt's friend, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr., exposed the U.S. State Department's policy in the aptly named "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews." With the obstructionism of State Department official Breckenridge Long uncovered, a War Refugee Board was formed in 1944. It managed to save some 200,000 Jews and 20,000 non-Jews.

An epilogue follows the postwar careers of the three rabbinic students. All assumed Conservative pulpits; all engaged in the black civil rights movement of the 1960s. But there is a greater discrepancy between reports of the incentives that prompted their participation in the publicity effort. David Golinkin recounts his father's early life in detail; his birth to a *talmid ḥakham*, his prewar life in anti-Semitic Poland and Lithuania, and his Zionist activities at JTS. The backgrounds of Sachs and Lipnick, however, are more sketchy. Only their parents' fealty to Orthodox religious practice is (gratuitously) discussed. Their early life receives scant attention, and it is partial or incorrect. For instance, the Baltimore City College, an admittedly misnamed public high school, is referred to as a college. Careful examination of Sachs's and Lipnick's childhood and youth would position their activism in a Hebraic and Zionist context. Both their fathers were energetic supporters of the ZOA. Through their high school and college years, they benefitted from supplementary instruction at the Baltimore Hebrew College under the guidance of Dr. Louis L. Kaplan, a strong Zionist—Arthur Herzberg was also in the group—at the same time they were active in Gordonia and Habonim, Labor Zionist youth organizations.

Despite this omission, *The Student Struggle Against the Holocaust* is a worthy addition to Medoff's library of books and articles on a painful episode in American Jewish history as well as a poignant token of a son's admiration for his courageous father.

Baila R. Shargel

Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do About It, by Mike Comins. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.

Many books about *t'fillah* (Jewish prayer) try to inspire the reader to a life of prayer through explanations about the history of the *siddur*, the structure of the liturgy, and brief explanations of individual *t'fillot*. Rabbi Mike Comins's

book, *Making Prayer Real*, begins with the premise that a meaningful life of *t'fillah* can only be achieved when we identify why it is so personally difficult for so many people, and when we each then take complete responsibility for our own prayer lives. Comins is a Reform rabbi and Jewish wilderness spirituality teacher who lived in Israel for many years and who has learned in traditional *yeshivot* as well. His book is a primer for a largely non-Orthodox readership that is unfamiliar with Hebrew and liturgy, put off by the unfamiliarity of synagogue services, and unwilling to accept the idea of a personal, commanding God who literally listens and responds to obligatory prayer. The first two chapters examine, from Comins's perspective, contemporary Jews' stumbling blocks in traditional prayer: the liturgy is too wordy and long; we pray with our minds, neglecting to engage our bodies or emotions; we rely too much on the *keva*, the words of the *siddur*, instead of cultivating the *kavvanah*, the intention of our personal prayer voices; we are unsure of the efficacy of *t'fillah*; too many synagogues treat *t'fillah* as a social and communal experience more than as a ladder to reach God.

Comins then undertakes to show the individual worshipper how to become a "prayer-person," someone who is constantly developing a sense of the divine presence within him or herself and within the world. His approach is uniquely multivocal: he draws upon the insights of more than fifty Jewish spiritual leaders, mostly rabbis, of all denominations. Rather than simply edit a series of fifty-plus consecutive essays—a technique that is used fairly extensively in books published by Jewish Lights—Comins introduces a topic, then inserts brief comments from these teachers which he intersperses with his own ideas and teachings. What results is a somewhat cacophonous but lively conversation among these teachers and practitioners of *t'fillah*. This allows the editor to move to the background and give space to a variety of opinions and experiences around Jewish spiritual practice and formal prayer, in the energetic manner of a page of Talmud. Comins also includes a number of essays on topics in contemporary *t'fillah* and spirituality for those (like me) who process full-length comments by individual writers more easily than we process snippets of writing.

Equally enriching in *Making Prayer Real* is the actual variety of topics, concerns, and spiritual goals that are addressed by him and his fellow teachers. The five parts of the book describe in detail personal experiences and counsel for developing a life of *t'fillah*. These focus on the spiritual dynamics of prayer; how to begin to pray; growing and healing through prayer in the realms of loss, grief, and *t'shuvah* (repentance); and how the individual can begin to enter the world of traditional Jewish prayer meaningfully. (This last point is a major goal of this book and of Jewish religious education in general.) The book ends with an extensive section of spiritual practices and exercises that show the reader, step-by-step, how to personalize what he or she has been learning in the first four parts. This "how-to" section does not purport

to show the reader how to acquire ritual skills or chant prayers, but rather the means by which to make one's prayer life with God a daily reality.

I was particularly moved or intrigued by the chapters that deal with the efficacy of prayer, developing an "attitude of gratitude," using prayer to grow in *t'shuvah*, and the value of addressing God personally even if this does not match our theologies. The brief section on yearning for God, what spiritual directors sometimes call "holy longing," has more than once given me pause to think about my own spiritual life and struggles. This is indicative of the potentially broad reach of *Making Prayer Real*. It reads vibrantly like an introductory set of modern *hanhagot* (brief statements or lists of spiritual counsel found largely in the hasidic tradition) for the uninitiated Jewish spiritual seeker, and it also contains voluminous teaching and discussion material for the seasoned rabbi, cantor, or educator. Also, by presenting us with the experiences of "advanced pray-ers" that are the basis for their advice, Comins reassures all of us that the search for God through worship is often difficult, no matter who we are. All of us can benefit from one another's good counsel in this most important and complex realm of Jewish religious life.

I was somewhat surprised by the paucity of responses from Orthodox and Israeli teachers, though a couple of writers from each of those parts of the Jewish world make brief appearances in this book. More problematic is how the author responds to the fact that the majority of (American) Jews—non-Orthodox and likely many Orthodox-affiliated as well—do not find the traditional belief that God commands us to pray especially resonant. Comins certainly is correct that on the American Jewish landscape, many people reject *halakhah* as a discipline and no longer accept God as personal, commanding, and literally responsive, especially after the Shoah. However, why should the notion of *ḥiyyuv* (the obligation to pray, in the halakhic sense) not be an equally important part of modern prayer discussion, even if in a non-literal, "post-halakhic" manner? If we can discuss ways to address God as "You" or "Thou" non-literally, we can certainly find ways to talk about how that same God "commands" us to pray on a regular basis, even if we don't always feel moved to pray.

Rabbi Comins has done a tremendous service to contemporary Jewish spiritual seekers and teachers alike, and many of his chapters can be helpful to non-Jewish seekers as well. *Making Prayer Real* advances honestly and thoughtfully our shared quest to find God, meaning, and deepened Jewish commitment through the old/new words and practices of *t'fillah*.

Dan Ornstein

Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity, by Matthew Thiessen. Oxford University Press, 2012.

There are certain tensions that I believe to be existential in Judaism. That is to say, Jews and Jewish groups must map out their beliefs and practices to fit

somewhere on the continuum between the opposing poles concerning these issues. For instance, there is a tension in Judaism between *t'fillat keva* (fixed prayer) and *kavvanah* (intention). There is a tension between a focus on *talmud torah* as of primary importance and a focus on righteous and pious action. Matthew Thiessen's book focuses on perhaps the greatest tension of all in Judaism, one that has accompanied it from its very outset: the tension between Judaism as a genealogically defined ethnicity and Judaism as an open, universal religion. Throughout Jewish history there has never existed a group that has not, in one way or another, been forced to provide some answer to the question posed at the beginning of this book: can one who is born a Gentile become a Jew?

This question is so essential and determinative of a group's identity that nearly any book addressing the topic is bound to be of interest. And Thiessen's book is indeed interesting, well-written, and enjoyable. Indeed, its only real problems are that it occasionally restates conclusions that have been well-known to scholars for some time and that it tends to focus on marginalized groups as if they are representative. Nevertheless, despite these issues, I do think there is much to be gained from Thiessen's readings of often ignored texts and his innovative readings of at least one text.

The first section of the book surveys the Hebrew Bible, demonstrating that "conversion" was simply not possible in the biblical period. Thiessen focuses extensively on the story of the circumcision of Ishmael and Isaac, claiming that for the author of the story, only eighth-day circumcision is effective as a sign of the covenant. This explains why Isaac's seed is part of the eventual covenant with God, whereas Ishmael's is not. Thiessen also surveys other passages concerning circumcision in the Bible, noting that even when Gentiles are circumcised, this circumcision—because it is not performed on the eighth day—does not cause the Gentile to enter the Israelite covenant. This section is interesting and convincing but not particularly innovative. As Thiessen notes, Solomon Zeitlin said the same thing nearly eighty years ago, and Shaye Cohen has reiterated it more recently. Thiessen puzzlingly fails to address the fact that the Book of Ruth (and probably other biblical books as well) present permeable boundaries between Israelite men and non-Israelite women. Thiessen focuses so narrowly on circumcision that he neglects to discuss the possibility of women joining the covenant through marriage with Israelite men.

In the second section of the book Thiessen turns his attention to Second Temple groups. Here he frequently notes his disagreement with Shaye Cohen, who once wrote (in his essay, "Conversion to Judaism in Historial Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Post-biblical Judaism," published in *Conservative Judaism* 36:4 [Summer 1983], p. 42) that "by the time of the Maccabees, conversion, ritually defined as circumcision, is securely in place, not to be questioned until the Middle Ages." Thiessen identifies some groups who would not have agreed that circumcision could overcome the genealogical boundary

between Gentile and Jew. Most of these chapters deal with three pieces of evidence for such groups among Jews: the Book of Jubilees (and Jews who accepted the work as authoritative); the Jews who opposed the Herodian dynasty due to Herod's Idumean ancestry; and the "Animal Apocalypse," preserved in 1 Enoch 85–90. The evidence from Jubilees is solid, but here Thiessen merely confirms what Christine Hayes already wrote in her book on Gentile Impurity. (Hayes' book, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud,* was published in the U.S. by Oxford University Press in 2002.) The evidence of opposition to the Herodian dynasty is a bit murkier. And I'm not really sure how influential the "Animal Apocalypse" was in the Second Temple period. If this is the only evidence of opposition to conversion during the entire era, one might tend to agree with Cohen that by this period circumcision as a means to conversion was indeed quite securely in place.

The final chapter of the book is in my opinion far and away the most interesting. It presents an analysis of the attitude of the author of Luke-Acts towards circumcision and the question of the boundary between born-Jew and Gentile in the early church. In brief, Thiessen suggests that the Lukan author believed that circumcision remained incumbent upon Jews, even after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, but that not only was it not incumbent upon Gentiles, but that it would have been a pointless, even a meaningless, gesture. The relationship of the born-Jew with God, sealed through circumcision, remained in place. The new era, the one that amazed Peter in his vision of the pure and impure animals (Acts 10), was that the Holy Spirit could now rest on Gentile as well as Jew. The boundary between the two was not erased, as is commonly claimed by interpreters of early Christianity. Ethnicity and genealogy remained important markers for at least some early Christians. The only change was that God now communicated with Gentile, *as* Gentile—and not as converted Jew. For me, this was a completely new and innovative reading of early Christianity, one that will force me to reevaluate my own understanding of the emerging rabbinic Judaism.

Thiessen does not address rabbinic Judaism in any deep way, and indeed as a New Testament scholar, he is not really qualified to do so. But a serious scholar of rabbinic Judaism might be able to employ his analysis of this stream of early Christianity, as well as the way in which he shapes the terms and discussions of circumcision and conversion, and thereby come to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how conversion worked—and whether it was even desirable for Gentiles to convert in early rabbinic thought.

Joshua Kulp

REVIEWERS

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