

Books of Note: Michael S. Kogan (2008). Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity. NY: Oxford University Press. Available at Amazon.com for \$19.99 or Kindle version for \$16.47. Reviewed by M-J+

This is not a new book but it was new to me, and I wanted to know more about how Jewish scholars think about theology, including how they conceptualize their own faith tradition as well as Christianity. Dr. Kogan is an observant Jewish scholar who is a Professor of Religious Studies and Chairman of Philosophy and Religion at Montclair State University. He teaches both OT and NT courses, and is extremely knowledgeable and thoughtful. Dr. Kogan is actively involved in Jewish/Christian dialogue. He is well able to describe the common roots and understandings that Judaism and Christianity share, as well as where and how they part company, and the misunderstandings, biases, or oversimplifications about one another in both traditions. It becomes clear that, similar to the fact that there are two creation stories in Genesis, which in a sense are in dialogue with one another, Professor Kogan views Christian and Jewish interpretation of other scriptures as each providing a valid window where we will be enlarged in our awareness by considering both. Both Jewish and Christian concepts of "Messiah" are well delineated, including various versions within the NT Gospels and writings of Paul. At the time of Jesus, there was no single "orthodox" view of who or what the Messiah was to the Jewish people and Christians have seriously oversimplified this issue. The thinking of three Jewish theologians of Christianity is explored (Menachem Ha Me'iri [1249-1315], Moses Mendelssohn [1729-1786], Elijah Benamozegh [1823-1900]). Two contemporary theologians also enter the dialogue (Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Father John Pawlikowski).

The author believes that a Jewish thinker should strive to understand Christianity as well as possible in how it sees itself while remaining wholly Jewish. He concludes with a discussion of the Israelite faith seeking a balance between particularist and universalist themes. Judaism already includes elements of pluralism present since biblical times, and while it views itself as the true faith of the Jewish people, it does not insist that it is entirely universal or that everyone convert to Judaism. It views revelation in revealed religions as only partial, and if we give up our egocentricity, we can participate "...in the infinite life with all its ethical and spiritual blessings (Page 246)."

One paragraph particularly stood out for me. Dr. Kogan wrote: "The first observation of a Jewish theology of Christianity must be that these stories are so closely related that they represent two ways of expressing parallel redemptive concerns. We come to know a religion by learning its story and then witnessing how its followers act out their narrative in their liturgies and in their spiritual-ethical lives. While this is not a study of liturgical forms and practices, we must mention the obvious similarities between the liturgies of synagogue and church. Many of the words are identical or closely related articulations of the same thought. The ark containing the Word of God on the scrolls is paralleled by the tabernacle housing the Word made flesh. The ingestion of the Word in the elements of Communion is paralleled by the gesture of

Jewish worshipers as the Torah scroll is carried in procession through the congregation. As it passes, the faithful reach out, touch it, and carry their hands to touch their mouths, thus expressing their desire to take the Word of God into their mouths that they may speak it and, in a deeper sense, become incarnations of it. This, too, is holy communion. (Page 30)''

There are more thorough reviews available on line. See especially one by Angela Ilic at <http://www.metanexus.net/magazine/tabid/68/id/10217/Default.aspx> If others have read this book, we'd be interested in your take, or if you have recommendations for other readings as a follow-up, please share them with us.