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Steven Leonard Jacobs

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AN OVERVIEW OF *MAVEN IN BLUE JEANS* AND JEWISH-CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM AND OTHER DIALOGUES

Steven Leonard Jacobs
University of Alabama

As Editor of this Festschrift, after initially discussing this overall project in the context of “Festschriften” as a contribution to the academic project, this contribution examines and comments on Part 2 of *Maven in Blue Jeans*, “Jewish-Christian-Muslim and Other Dialogues,” by looking at my own essay as well as those of Eugene Fisher, Daniel Morris, and John T. Pawlikowski (pp. 105–144). Since September 11, 2001, the world of the dialogical enterprise has changed, not only in the academy but in the world outside the academy as well. What do these four essays tell us about the current and future states of dialogical and trialogical relations? Can they contribute to furthering this newer agenda? Where do we go from here?

1. INTRODUCTION

Though not universally accepted across the academic spectrum, the website Wikipedia defines a Festschrift as “a book honoring a respected academic and presented during his or her lifetime.” The anonymous (and not necessarily refereed) author or authors go on to state that it

contains original contributions by the honored academic’s close colleagues ... typically published on the occasion of the honoree’s retirement, sixtieth or sixty-fifth birthday, or other notable career anniversary ... [and] usually relate in some way to, or reflect upon, the honoree’s contributions to their scholarly field, but can include important original research by the authors.

I cite this source for two reasons: One, that the forty-two of us privileged to be included in *Maven in Blue Jeans*, and representing only a truly limited few who honor Zev, have beyond question met the criteria of significant academic contributions well reflecting Zev Garber’s own pre-eminent contributions to the intellectual life of the academy, and, in so doing, have celebrated both the man and his work. And, two, we have opened the door to a challenge: Let *Maven in Blue Jeans* not be the end of this story but the beginning: Who knows? There may very well be among those reading this review a second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, *or seventh* editor or editors who will corral additional sets of colleagues and issue additional *festschriften*; so vast

are all of the areas that Zev continues to address. After all, the “Garber Bibliography” included in *Maven in Blue Jeans* runs twenty-five pages!

I will not, however, rehash my comments in my Introduction to *Maven in Blue Jeans* other than to state the following: From the very beginning through to publication, this project was truly a labor of love and respect for a friend whom we cherish deeply, and I know beyond doubt that the colleagues with whom I worked so closely, including those at Purdue University Press, would say the very same thing, and, metaphorically, rise in universal appreciation and applause were they all here today.

2. “JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS: A DIALOGUE WITH ZEV GARBER,” EUGENE FISHER

Gene Fisher I think best expressed the sentiments of many who have engaged in dialogue with Zev when he stated at the outset, “I consider Garber to be one of the most thoughtful scholars on either ‘side’ of the contemporary and historic Jewish-Christian dialogue” (p. 105).¹ It is that very thoughtfulness which characterizes not only Zev’s particular work but the fruitful nature of the best dialogues between Jews and Christians, and must be continually embodied in the twin Hebraic insights of *makhlokot l’shem shamayim* and *elu v’elu divrei Elohim Hayyim*. The function of dialogue is *not* agreement, it is education, and only the carefully thought-out preparation and presentation on any issue of common interest can result in both partners and the communities they represent learning from each other. Thus, the goal of the dialogue is not, nor has it ever been, resolution of difference, but, rather, a healthy respect not only for the person presenting but the *weltanschauung* he or she reflects. As such, thoughtful partnership in dialogue mandates knowledge, doing one’s homework, and the sharing of both positive and negative aspects of one’s own sources, without fear of intimidation or reprisal.

One result from the bad history of non-dialogue dialogues between Jews and Roman Catholics, and later Jews and Protestants, has, as Fisher correctly notes, resulted in misunderstandings both major and minor between communities (p. 109). In essence, we Jews have, over the course of our long, troubled, and primarily Western trek, too often the victim rather than the partner, have misread the various Christianities, particularly the Catholic, and failed

¹ All page references are to S. L. Jacobs, ed., *Maven in Blue Jeans: A Festschrift in Honor of Zev Garber* (Shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies; West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2009).

to appreciate the translation of our own moral-ethical value system and ritual-ceremonial system and the outreach to the Gentile world reflected in these various reinterpretations. Christians, too often allied with the dominant power structures of Western civilization have re-read and contemporized a narrow self-serving New Testament history and let it serve as the goad by which to subjugate and worse Jewish communities within their midst. Recognition, then, of the damage done to the other becomes the first step towards framing such dialogical encounters.

Continuing in this vein and commenting further on something that Zev had written in 2003, Fisher goes on to argue that both communities must work “to eliminate all vestiges of the ancient teaching of contempt and collective guilt charge from Christian teaching at all levels” (p. 111).

Waxing somewhat theological, Fisher goes on to state “We proclaim a successful Messiah, but one whose work is not yet done, a Reign of God to come, which we, like the Jews, await and to which we, like the Jews, witness and are called by God to work toward” (p. 112).

Fisher then goes on to ask the provocative question, “How might such a dialogue [between Jews and Catholic Christians] go, should you be fortunate enough to be in one?” (p. 115), and posits four possible answers: (1) Catholics should listen to Jews; (2) Jews needs to appreciate Catholic advances; (3) Jews need to understand how Catholics and other Christians saw/experienced Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*; and (4) both Jews and Christians need to examine their social language, how they talk to each other (p. 115). These four foundational items for Jewish-Christian, specifically Jewish-Catholic, dialogue need to be widely disseminated as constant reminders to all who are willing to engage in such conversations.

3. “DEVELOPMENTS IN CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS,” JOHN T. PAWLIKOWSKI

Roman Catholic Servite Priest and Professor of Social Ethics at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois, Father John T. Pawlikowski has long been a presence both in national and international Jewish-Christian/Catholic dialogues as well as Jewish-Polish dialogues. In his own contribution to *Maven in Blue Jeans*, he addresses four challenges: (1) the Holocaust; (2) the theology of the Church’s relationship with Judaism in the light of new biblical research; (3) Jewish understandings of the land of Israel; and (4) joint social responsibility (p. 135).

With regard to the Holocaust/Shoah, Pawlikowski hones in on the important document (as he notes *not* a “formal papal encyclical”) *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* issued by the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews in 1998, seeing in this milestone both positives and negatives (p. 136). He reminds not only his Church but all of us as well that the institutions we create are humanly-made and humanly-crafted, subject to the most stringent of critiques as well as the highest of praise. Until a full disclosure based upon open full access to archival sources by competent scholars takes places, controversy surrounding Catholicism’s role in the Holocaust/Shoah and that of its Church, especially Pope Pius XII, will not go away.

With regard to a Catholic theological understanding of Jews and Judaism, he notes with evident sadness, “the last fifteen years have not seen any major new statements on Catholic-Jewish relations” (p. 138), nor does he spare Pope Benedict XVI and the speech he gave at St. Peter’s Square in Rome on March 15, 2006, commenting, “In all candor, I have to say that this sounds very close to a classical replacement theology of Judaism” (p. 139).

Taken together, the two arenas reflect a conservatizing trend within the present Catholic hierarchy, and we Jews are right to be concerned. One can only hope that John Pawlikowski’s voice is not that of Rivka crying out in the wilderness. This Church which has come further than any other in its relationship with the Jewish people now appears to be in somewhat of a retrenching mode, facing a world of lessening commitment, energized evangelical Protestantisms particularly in Latin America, and an Islam which from its perspective is growing at an alarming rate. One can also thus hope that these same conservative voices will not reject the forward steps of *Nostre Aetate* and take backward steps to either nullify or marginalize its accomplishments.

Jewish concerns with the primacy of Eretz Yisrael are equally Jewish concerns vis-à-vis the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, and Pawlikowski is correct to note that Jewish urgings of support for Israel “will likely cause some tensions in the dialogue” (p. 141), resulting in something of a “balancing act” on the part of the Church. Any dialogical encounter between Jews and Catholics specifically and Jews and Christians generally cannot avoid either the Holocaust/Shoah or Eretz and Medinat Yisrael. The full integrity of the Jewish people is at stake in both. The challenge for both communities then is how to enter into these conversations with respect but open to both praise *and* criticism.

The final issue that he succinctly addresses is the easiest, that of social justice collaboration. Both religious traditions have strong histories in addressing the human needs of their own communities and those same needs in others outside their communities. Such efforts already exist in many communities where people of all faiths work together for the betterment of all, and one joins with Pawlikowski in urging the continuation of such efforts.

He then closes his contribution by briefly suggesting two additional arenas worthy of consideration in Jewish-Catholic dialogue, namely (1) "dialogue beyond the parameters of Europe and the Americas to the African and Asian contexts," and (2) "the extent to which it should move to the inclusion of Islam" (p. 142).

4. CONCLUSION

Because of the brevity of this essay, I will only make one comment regarding my own contribution and that of Daniel Morris: With regard to my essay, "Who Owns the Truth?" I argue that anticipated demographic and occupational shifts coupled with the rise in militant Islam will result in perhaps the unintended consequence of post-denominationalism among the monotheisms as all three confront their own rising fundamentalisms. With regard to Morris's essay, "The Backwards Man and the Jewish Giant," while not strictly speaking a contribution within the range of inter-religious dialogue, Morris's contribution does indirectly point out the role that "traumatic memory" can play in any such encounter between representatives of various religious communities.

I conclude that these four contributions have thus opened any number of doors to continue the Jewish-Christian dialogical conversations.