

Book Review

***Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century.* Karin Hedner Zetterholm and Anders Runesson, eds. Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2023. xii+419pp. \$125.00 (hardback). ISBN: 9781978715066.**



Journal of Interreligious Studies
July 2024, Issue 42, 82-83
ISSN 2380-8187
www.irstudies.org

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to teach “Survey of the New Testament.” I suggested to those students that we could not fully appreciate and understand the Gospel texts, the Epistles, and Revelation without taking into consideration the *Judaic* contexts in which these texts were written. Had *Within Judaism? Interpretive Trajectories in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from the First to the Twenty-First Century*—an important collection of twenty-five essays—been available then, it would have become a required text for that course.¹ As editors Zetterholm and Runesson themselves note in their Preface, “many or most of the texts later canonized and included in the New Testament should be understood not as Christian texts, but as Jewish writings” (xi).²

In their Introduction, the editors make a number of substantive points that help frame the four sections that follow. For example, Judaism after the destruction of the Temple seems to have been as diverse as it was before, and Jewish self-identity fluid enough to have allowed for adherence to Jesus as an option within Judaism (1). Centuries passed before the rabbinic version of Judaism predominated and became the sole criterion by which Jewishness was defined and determined (1). In situating New Testament texts within Judaism, scholars distinguish between the origin of these texts within Judaism and their later reception within Christianity (1). As American Hebraist and historian Shaye Cohen puts it, “Judaism is a relativistic construct of human beings, and no variety of Judaism is any more ‘correct’ or ‘authentic’ than any other” (2).³

As to the four sections into which their book is organized, the editors summarize them as follows. The six essays in Part I, “The ‘Within Judaism’ Perspective: What’s at Stake,” explore why the “within Judaism” perspective matters and how it changes our perception both of individual texts and of first-century Judaism (3). The authors of the eight essays in Part II, “The First and Second Centuries: Reading New Testament Texts Within Judaism,” argue for the

¹ While I no longer teach that course, I regularly teach “Survey of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible” and might soon include *Within Judaism?* in that syllabus as a supplementary text.

² The book itself is dedicated to the late New Testament scholar at Duke University E. P. Sanders (1937-2022), whose writings on the intersection of post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity were part of my own doctoral studies.

³ Citing Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1987), 135.

location of Paul, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, Revelation, and the Epistle of James to be within Judaism based on the self-identity of the ancient authors, the features that these works share with other Jewish texts written during the same period, and the ways in which the identity of non-Jewish Jesus followers is negotiated in relation to Jews and Judaism, with careful attention also to the intended audiences (4). The seven essays in Part III, “From the Third Century through the Rise of Islam: New Boundaries Emerge,” trace the development from the third century when the boundaries of Judaism began to shift and belief in Jesus as the Messiah was no longer universally seen as an orientation within Judaism (5). Part IV, “Present-Day Judaism and Christianity,” provides four essays dealing with how current Jewish and Christian communities define their boundaries both in relation to one another and within themselves (5). Each of these twenty-five contributions is further enhanced by extensive endnotes and significant bibliographies.

Given my own textualist orientation—and without diminishing the vital contributions made by scholars in each section of this book—it seems to me that the heart of this necessary volume is Part II, which focuses on the texts themselves. Here the reader will find Paula Fredrikson on Paul; John Van Maaren on Mark; Matthias Konradt on Matthew; Joshua Paul Smith and Matthew Thiessen on Luke; Isaac W. Oliver on Acts; Wally V. Cirafesi on John; Ralph J. Korner on Revelation; and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr on James. Each of these essays is more than worthy of lengthy comment which, unfortunately, space does not permit here. Suffice it to say that they might very well serve as bases for seminar courses in advanced New Testament work or in Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁴

In sum, this volume is highly recommended for scholars who wish to further broaden their own thinking and understanding regarding Second Temple Judaism in its own diversity and what would later morph into nascent Christianity. It will be valuable to serious undergraduate students, graduate students, and other educated readers willing to invest the time and energy necessary to engage each of its twenty-five contributions with care.

Steven Leonard Jacobs
The University of Alabama



The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.

⁴ Part III might very well serve a similar purpose in seminars on Jewish-Christian-Muslim matters.