

# *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*

---

*Volume 3, Issue 1*

2008

*Article 10*

FEATURE TOPICS:  
THE LAND AND STATE OF ISRAEL  
PAUL AND CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

---

## Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible

Copyright ©2008 by the authors. All rights reserved. This work is licensed to the public under the Creative Commons Attribution License. *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress). <http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr>

**REVIEW**

Melody D. Knowles, Esther Menn, John Pawlikowski, and Timothy J. Sandoval, eds.

***Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible***

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 213 pp. + indices.

Reviewed by Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary

This stimulating volume, an outcome of a conference of the same name in Chicago in spring 2005, consists of essays ranging widely in style and emphasis. The introductory section, "Jews, Christians and the Bible," begins with a lengthy overview by the editors. They use the 2000 statement, *Dabru Emet* ("Speak Truth"), authored by four Jewish scholars and signed by many other scholars and rabbis, as a framework for presenting the various essays in the collection. (A copy of *Dabru Emet* may be found in the appendix.) While in some ways a bit odd, since most of the authors do not explicitly mention *Dabru Emet*, it nevertheless offers a heuristic for a notable and helpful introduction to the work as a whole. Also in this initial section is an essay on biblical authority by David Novak (one of the authors of *Dabru Emet*) and on promise and fulfillment by Ralph Klein. This latter essay should be required reading for every Christian student of Bible.

The second section, with essays by Barbara R. Rossing and Steven Weitzman, deals with early Jewish and Christian interpretation of texts of violence. Rossing focuses on a dual theme of victory in Revelation, the violent imperialism of conquering Rome in contrast to Jesus as the slain Lamb. "For all its holy war imagery, Revelation does not promote war," Rossing argues (74). Weitzman seeks to expose various ethical options in the Bible by studying reinterpretations of narratives typically used to justify martyrdom.

Section three deals at greater length with some of the tensions in Jewish-Christian interpretations. Barbara Bowe contributes a thoughtful piece on religious identity and the "other" via the lens of the New Testament. Jewish scholars Sarah J. Tanzer and Laurence L. Edwards follow with insightful perspectives on the "Jews" in the Fourth Gospel and the Pharisees in Luke, respectively. The fourth section, "Looking to the Present and the Future," examines similar issues on a wider horizon. Walter Brueggemann, in his usual poetic fashion, writes on the common vocation of Jews and Christians to maintain hope. Susan Thistlethwaite and David Sandmel offer concluding syntheses.

Each essay is well written and accessible to non-specialists. This reader, however, longed for more sustained development of ideas. Novak's essay on biblical authority functions as a commentary on the second proposition of *Dabru Emet* ("Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book—the Bible (what Jews call 'Tanakh' and Christians call the "Old Testament')") (34). He raises many issues about the diverse ways in which Jews and Christians consider Scripture to be authoritative; a companion

piece by a Christian on the same topic or as a response to Novak would have advanced the conversation. Instead, one moves on to Klein's thinking on promise and fulfillment, another essay deserving of response. Then to the essays on texts of violence and so on—in short, many issues introduced but not advanced by further analysis.

I believe readers who pick up this book will gain insight into some of the key issues in interpreting Scripture. Whether they will be able to draw clear conclusions about what both separates and divides Jews and Christians in reading Scripture is doubtful. For those considering using this text in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses, more attention needs to be given to probing the assumptions, methods and implications of each essay so that commonalities and differences are more sharply drawn. Perhaps the necessity of seeking to make such connections and probing more deeply will provide these readers with something of the intellectual liveliness that must have permeated the original conference on "Contesting Texts."