

Book Shelf

Radical Responsibility:
Celebrating the Thought
of Chief Rabbi Lord
Jonathan Sacks

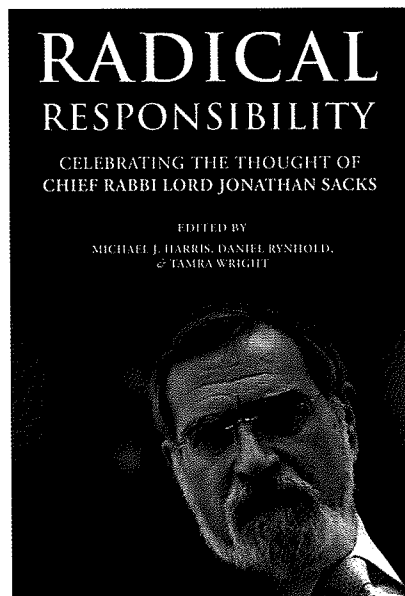
**Edited by Michael J. Harris, Daniel
Rynhold and Tamra Wright**

Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2012
HB, pp264 £22.95
ISBN: 978-1-59264-366-0

This collection of essays engages – both directly and indirectly – with Sacks’ intellectual legacy by continuing the conversation between Jewish tradition and ‘secular’ wisdom which he has called *torah vehokhma* (Torah and Wisdom). Following the Jewish philosophical tradition which is concerned with the question of the relation between Judaism and the world around it, the various contributions give witness to Sacks’ abiding interest in maintaining the tension between traditional faith in the face of various external challenges and how core Jewish teachings can address specific issues in the secular world itself.

The book is divided into four sections which represent broad categories of Sacks’ engagement: Jewish Ethics and Moral Philosophy, Justice, Religion and Contemporary Society, and Leadership. This volume not only makes a fitting tribute to the intellectual heritage of the Chief Rabbi, but also expands the scope and resonance of these topics in new ways. For example, in Part 2, Michael Walzer argues that justice is best served by distributing social goods according to their social meaning, while Moshe Halbertal’s essay asks to what extent Jewish tradition demands that one’s charity is given to satisfy the purely particular, subjective needs of others.

Charles Taylor’s provocative essay in Part Three is a commentary on Sacks’s observation in *The Dignity of Difference* that ‘those who are confident in their faith are not threatened but enlarged by the different faith of others,’ arguing that embracing what seems *prima facie* like a paradoxical claim can in reality be of benefit for one’s own religious journey. In Part Four, Avivah Zornberg’s powerfully resonant and nuanced essay on the conflict between Moses and Korah (Numbers 16) shows that the essence of the conflict not only revolves around issues of power and leadership but also around the very nature of language. Blending a rich reading of the relevant Talmudic texts with a finely tuned literary sensibility, Zornberg argues that Korah’s inability to accept his own incompleteness and the irreducible distance that is opened up between himself and the otherness or infinity of the Other is due to his insistence on pursuing a kind of self-enclosed omnipotence, and thus obscures the revelatory significance of worry, questioning, seeking and desire.



All of the contributions represent an admirable attempt to show how faiths such as Judaism can understand themselves on their own terms, but how those terms form part of a larger whole by focusing on issues such as ethics, justice, the role of religion in the contemporary milieu, and leadership. It will prove a valuable resource for both scholars and those who have general interest in these topics.

Sinnes

Preaching without Contempt:
Overcoming Unintended
Anti-Judaism

Marilyn J. Salmon

Fortress Resources for Preaching
2006 PB pp183 £11.99
ISBN 08006 38212

**Preaching the Gospels without
Blaming the Jews (2004)**

ISBN 9780 664227630 pp261

**Preaching the Letters without
Dismissing the Law (2006)**

ISBN 9780 664230012 pp268

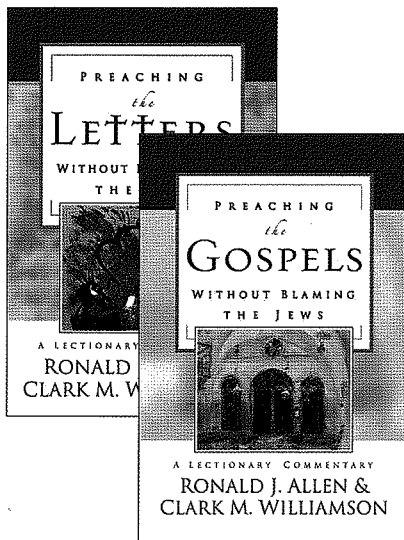
Ronald J Allen and Clark M Williamson

Westminster John Knox Press HB
£19.99 ea.

Speaking positively about Jews and Judaism has been called a sacred obligation for Christian teachers today. Resources which help preachers do this with integrity and in the light of the best scholarship are therefore to be prized, and these volumes offer exactly that. I recommend them wholeheartedly.

Salmon’s book, seven years old now, is a wonderful resource. She does not shy away from the difficulties presented by much traditional Christian teaching, and her book has chapters addressing

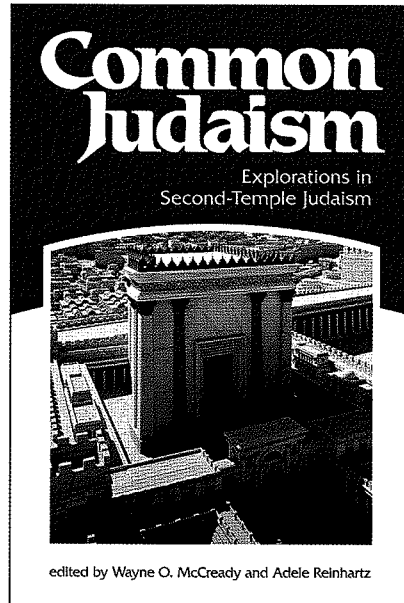
all the main areas of difficulty; the Gospels as Jewish literature, supersessionism, the Pharisees and the Law, the Gospel of John and the Passion narrative. In each area she shows how Christianity does not have to define itself over and against Judaism as so often in the past. As she says, 'The revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ does not depend on... an inadequate grasp of God's love in Judaism'. Extracts from actual sermons illustrate key points, and any preacher who has struggled with interpreting difficult passages is likely to find inspiration here.



Allen and Williamson's two Lectionary Commentaries follow the Gospel and Epistle readings, respectively, for Years A, B and C of the Revised Common Lectionary. For each reading there is a page of notes drawing attention to ways the theme of a passage is continuous with the theology, values and practice of Judaism or showing how it has been used to promote an anti-Jewish message and providing suggestions for handling it more faithfully. Both books will be valuable for the time-pressed preacher who seeks to bear true witness about Judaism.
FHulbert

Book Review: Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism
Edited by Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz

Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2011
HB p 306 £23.99
ISBN: 978-0-8006-9867-6



This fascinating and insightful collection of essays builds upon an earlier volume by E.P. Sanders entitled *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE – 66 CE* (1992). In that work, Sanders argues that, despite the well-known diversity of first-century Judaism, 'ordinary' Jews practiced a 'common Judaism' centred on temple, synagogue, and home. This collection of essays builds on Sanders's insights in order to explore both the consistency and the variety of first-century Judaism.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 considers common Judaism in its local settings. The second group of essays looks specifically at the intersection between the lived religion of the ordinary people and the major sects and parties. The final group focuses on the Hellenistic and Roman contexts of common Judaism, examining the impact of the broader social, political and cultural context on common Judaism.

There is much to commend in this volume, including several essays whose resonance extends beyond historical inquiry. In particular, Part 2 contains several essays with deeply resonant insights for modern day Jewish-Christian relations. For example, Albert Baumgarten's essay on reassessing the place of the Pharisees offers an important corrective to the view in which one's posture towards the Pharisees plays a large role in determining attitudes toward Jews and their religion as a whole, while Anders Runesson's fascinating study of the Matthean community shows how a misunderstanding of the immediate socio-historical context of the community, out of which the Gospel was written, has led to disastrous consequences in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. Also of interest is Anne Moore's essay on the common understanding of the concept of the Kingdom of God amongst Jewish writers and the historical Jesus, along with Ian Scott's important essay on the development of two diverse approaches to religious epistemology as different responses to the shared social conflict which confronted the Jewish communities of that time.

Overall, this is a fine collection that is a valuable resource for scholars, students, and especially those interested in delving deeper into the historical development of Jewish-Christian relations.

Sinnes