

<b>Author:</b>	Yoder, John Howard
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<b>Editor:</b>	Cartright, Michael G. and Ochs, Peter
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**Review:** *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* contains ten essays by the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder. They have been posthumously edited by the Methodist theologian and Dean for Ecumenical & Interfaith Programs at the University of Indianapolis, Michael G. Cartwright, and the Jewish philosopher and theologian Peter Ochs, Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia. Yoder's articles are predominantly based on lectures which he gave between 1970 and 1995 at conferences or universities in the United States. The pacifist theologian had already revised the partially unpublished texts to prepare their publication, and collected them in the "Shalom Desktop Packet" before he died unexpectedly on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1997.

In the edition presented here, these essays are embedded in introductions and notes by the editors with commentaries by Peter Ochs at the end of each article, an afterword by Michael G. Cartwright and two appendixes. One appendix is a sermon by Yoder while the other was written by Cartwright and gives some background information on Mennonite mission activities in the Near East. Using this framework the editors enable readers to recognise Yoder's reasoning in its historical and theological context. The respect and gratitude Ochs and Cartwright display toward Yoder does not prevent their remarks from dealing critically with his ideas. In his segment of the introduction Peter Ochs points out the significance of Yoder's teachings for Jewish scholars and practitioners, but in his comments he also considers carefully the wider implications of his thought. Michael G. Cartwright merely summarises the central issues of Yoder's thoughts in the introduction, but reflects on some of them quite critically in his afterword. Thus as a volume in the series "Radical Traditions. Theology in a postcritical key" Yoder's remarks share the "Community of dialogue in difference" which was presented two years earlier as a part of the same series in the volume *Textual Reasoning*. In the case of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* the interplay between introductions, commentaries, afterword and the two appendixes with the essays by Yoder opens up a dynamic conversation between scholars who are on the one hand active and committed members of their religions and on the other established in the academic world. Besides the author and the editors, Rabbi Steven S. Schwarzschild, to whom Yoder

dedicated his remarks, shares this 'community in difference' like a 'falcon in a novella' (cf. p. 12-19, and 35, 84, 95, 162 or 203).

Following the preface titled "What Needs to Change in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue and Why" Yoder's essays are divided into four chapters with likewise meaningful titles. These afford an appropriate overview of pivotal issues and theses which are discussed and argued in the current reasoning. Part I is titled "Tertium Datur" and includes "1. 'It Did Not Have to Be'", "2. Jesus the Jewish Pacifist" and "3. Paul the Judaizer". Under the title "The Free Church Vision and the Jewish Tradition" Part II contains "4. The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision", "5. The Forms of a Possible Obedience" and "6. The Restitution of the Church: An Alternative Perspective on Christian History". Part III "Refusing Mis-located Dualisms of Judaism" embraces "7. Judaism as a Non-non-Christian Religion", "8. Earthly Jerusalem and Heavenly Jerusalem: A Mis-located Dualism" and "9. On Not Being in Charge". Part IV "Christians and Jews Seeking the *Shalom* of the City" includes only one essay: "10. 'See How They Go with Their Face to the Sun'". To this last section one might add, however, Cartwright's afterword "'If Abraham is Our Father...' The Problem of Christian Supersessionism *after* Yoder", Appendix A "Salvation is of the Jews - A Sermon by John Howard Yoder" and his Appendix B "Mennonite Missions in Israel and the Peacemaking of Mennonite Central Committee Palestine (1949-2002): Two Contexts for Locating John Howard Yoder's Theological Dialogue with Judaism".

Yoder's notions are shaped by two leading paradigms: first, the essential Jewish character of Christianity from its beginning; and second, an ecclesiology which is based on the teachings of radical Protestants in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Yoder displays a Christian theological approach to contemporary Judaistic Studies, especially those of Jacob Neusner. As a result he describes Jewishness since the times of Jeremiah as characterised by its diaspora life and by the plurality of Jewish groups. Following Jonathan Z. Smith the crucial step for constituting Jewish lifestyle was the loss of the temple and its compensation by establishing a community around reading the Torah and around rituals performable in a family without any priesthood or hierarchy.

The Mennonite theologian prefers, along with Jacob Neusner, to speak of Jewish messianists as an appropriate description of Early Christians: "instead of thinking of 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' as systems, existing primordially in a 'normative' form, and instead of thinking of 'Christians' and 'Jews' in the early centuries as separate bodies existing over against each other, we must think of two initially largely overlapping circles. The circle 'Church' and the circle 'Jewry' overlapped for generations in the persons whom we may call either messianic Jews or Jewish Christians" (p. 69). These messianic Jews were part of the widespread Jewish plurality at that time. "There was no such thing as normative Judaism in the first century of our era" (p. 47). As a result of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the end of Bar Kochba in 135 CE, following Yoder, the situation changed "only gradually": "There were the messianists, later called Christians, and there were the rabbis. Both of these movements were Jewish. ... They differed from one another only about one very

Jewish but also very theological question, namely on whether the presence of the Messianic Age should be conceived of as future or also already as present.” (p. 48f)

Although Yoder accuses common theological and historical interpretations of reading historical events, in particular the history of early Christianity, from their institutionalized effect, and instead wants to look at the plurality of historical possibilities, his view is not as unbiased as he claims. Yoder just changes the vantage point and looks at the history of Christianity in opposition to the view of the established, state-compliant churches, from his free-church-perspective. The theological preference for the Jewishness and nonconformism of Christianity leads to an underestimation of the impact of Hellenism on the development of Jewish and Christian Religion.

In giving reasons for his ecclesiological framework, Yoder continues an old theological controversy on matters of grace, freewill, and the human ability after the fall of mankind to offer strict obedience to God's Commandments. This controversy became classical in the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius to which Yoder refers when he argues for the possibility of obedience: “Now I must walk a very narrow path”. Therefore confesses Yoder: “On one hand, I must continue to offend the Augustinians ... by seeming ‘Jewish’, in the apparent pride of thinking it possible to do the will of God. On the other hand I have to offend my Jewish friends, by describing a possibility which could only become real if in Jesus and Pentecost the messianic age in fact began” (p. 123.) Avoiding the allegation to use “an arbitrary scheme of my own” Yoder seeks protection in “a text from one of the radical reformation movements, the ‘fraternal union’ of Schleithem, February 1527, written largely by the former Benedictine Michael Sattler” (p. 123.) Cartwright is aware of these intrinsic limitations of Yoder's ecclesiological account as he points out in the afterword where he speaks of “the *neo-neo-supersessionism* of Yoder's project” (p. 229). “Christian Supersessionism” is explained to the readers in the helpful glossary included in the book as “the theological claim that the Church has replaced Israel as God's people for the salvation and blessing of the world” (p. 278.)

Countering the charge of being selective or eclectic Yoder delineates his hermeneutical approach by specifying six criteria which should guarantee a fairer handling of history: 1. “criteria of literary coherence”, 2. “criteria of socio-historical viability”, 3. “mystical, doxological criteria of coherence”, 4. “criteria of narrative and causative coherence”, 5. “criteria of connaturality, congruence” and 6. “modes of clarification through conflict and contrast” (cf. p. 115f) “These six modes of verification hardly exhaust what is available. They do illustrate, even ‘prove’, that we are not boxed into a dilemma between relativity, which permits no firm statements and prejudice, which is subject to no validation, or between ‘objectivity’ so defined as to be unattainable and ‘subjectivity’ which abandons truth claims” (p. 116).

Yoder considers the division between Christianity and Jewry as a process in which Christianity lost its Jewishness and Jewry lost its missionary openness: Jewry became Judaism and Christianity changed into Christendom. Therefore Yoder speaks about “Judaism as a Non-

non-Christian Religion” (subtitle of essay 7) and about Rabbinic Judaism as “a Post-Christian Phenomenon” (p. 152): “Whenever and why ever it happened, Judaism slowed down and stopped its missionary openness before the onset of serious persecution of Jews by Christians,... This abandonment of missionary perspective on the part of Judaism is an adjustment not to the Gentile world but to Christianity. Non-missionary Judaism is a part of, a product of, Christian history” (p. 153). At the same time Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and closed the door to Jewry by absorbing the state supporting philosophy: “What Christians borrowed from Plotin through Augustine, and from Cicero through Ambrose, nailed shut the door which Justin had begun to close” (p. 81). With the connection to Jewry and its horizon, which transcended the boundaries of the Roman Empire geographically and socially, Christians lost “some experimental base for the awareness of ‘otherness’ ... when they settled into provincial establishment”, explains Yoder “by becoming imperially provincial” (p. 81).

This process of diversion was complete, but not necessary (“It did not have to be”), in the fourth century after the conversion of Constantine, and one could add, following Yoder, that it is still not irreversible: the Jews would just have to revitalize their missionary openness and the Christians would just have to rediscover their Jewish roots. To initiate this seems to be one of the essential intentions of Yoder’s reasoning.

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