

BOOK REVIEWS

JEWISH HISTORY AND CULTURE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Paula Fredriksen. *Augustine and the Jews. A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. xxiii, 488 pp. Reissued with a new postscript, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. xxiii, 503 pp.
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In 2008, a few months before Paula Fredriksen published this ambitious study of Bishop Augustine of Hippo (died 430 CE), Pope Benedict XVI introduced a new prayer, “For the Jews,” into the Roman missal for the Good Friday service: that God “may enlighten their hearts, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Savior of all men . . . that all Israel may be saved. . . .”¹ This constitutes a notable change from the version introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1970, which asks only that the Jews “may continue to grow in the love of His name and in faithfulness to His covenant.”² While Pope Paul’s version reflects a post-Vatican II spirit of reform in its removal of traditional references to the “faithlessness,” “blindness,” and “darkness” of the Jews, Pope Benedict’s recent call to “enlighten their hearts” and his look ahead to their final conversion reintroduces echoes of these inveterate elements that had defined the prayer for fifteen centuries.

Although this paradoxical attention both to the Jews’ “blindness” and their “enlightenment,” both their *perfidia* and their final salvation, is as old as the New Testament, such a double focus came to acquire its most enduring form three centuries later in Augustine’s voluminous writing. In *Augustine and the Jews*, now reissued with a new postscript, Paula Fredriksen provides a comprehensive but coherent narrative of how Augustine came to develop this foundational paradigm, a paradox of both condemnation and exaltation that was to define ecclesiastical thinking about Jews for more than a millennium—indeed, that continues to guide it to this day, as Pope Benedict’s words remind us. While many scholars, from Bernard Blumenkranz to Jeremy Cohen, have traced the impact of Augustine’s teaching about Jews on later medieval writing, Fredriksen’s study is the first to consider with this level of thoroughness and sensitivity the development of Augustine’s ideas about Jews within the context of his overall intellectual and theological trajectory. Both for its scholarly rigor and its originality, Fredriksen’s study cannot be valued highly enough. It will undoubtedly serve as a standard reference for generations to come.

Yet perhaps the greatest surprise of this book, and surely one of its strongest merits, is that it is a story of more than just Augustine’s thinking about Jews. It is also a sweeping and lucid introduction to the intellectual and religious world of

1. “Note from the Secretary of State Concerning the New Dispositions by the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the Liturgical Celebrations of Good Friday, Vatican,” last modified February 4, 2008, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2008/documents/rc_seg-st_20080204_nota-missale-romanum_en.html.

2. *Missale Romanum* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970), 254.

late-antique Mediterranean civilization as well as a capacious study of the life and work of Augustine himself. Fredriksen begins with four contextual chapters, a group that constitutes the first of three parts of the text, called “The Legacy of Alexander.” Building upon her earlier work, notably *From Jesus to Christ* (1988), she addresses ancient religious pluralism, the culture of Hellenistic Judaism, and the rise of early Christian theology as a product of Greco-Roman *paideia*, which she calls “another late child of Alexander’s success” (40).

By presenting early Christian thought as internally conflicted over the meaning of Jewish traditions, Fredriksen sets the stage for Augustine’s own thinking, which achieved a complex and lasting harmonization of competing theological currents. The second group of four chapters—entitled “The Prodigal Son”—chronicles Augustine’s commitment to and later disenchantment with Manichaeism and the theological struggles that preoccupied him in the decade after his baptism in 387 CE. As Augustine came to reject Manichaean dualism, he was led also to insist on precisely what the Manichees denied: that the physical world was inherently good and that mundane history was a medium of God’s salvific plan; that the Hebrew Bible speaks of *real* events that literally, not merely allegorically, foretold Christian truths; and that Adam was literally the first man just as the Jews were literally God’s chosen people. This story could easily have degenerated, in less careful hands, into a chaotic litany of theological rejoinders or a tedious laundry list of Augustine’s references to Jews. Fredriksen’s study, however, rises above such pitfalls, taking on the contours of a profound drama: It sets a chaotic scene, choreographs a monumental conflict, and traces all struggles to a harmonious synthesis. Fredriksen shows how Augustine’s trials moved toward a climax in 396 CE in *To Simplicianus*, where he began to see God’s grace operating on all levels of human experience, from the events recounted in the Bible, to its commandments about ritual behavior, to the sins of his own lustful youth.

In this conceptual development within Augustine’s thought, which we can watch unfold “like viewing time-lapse photography” (xiii), Fredriksen situates Augustine’s writing between 396 and 401 CE as the culmination and final resolution of his theological crisis. In a feverish pitch of originality when Augustine penned some of his best-known works, including *On Christian Doctrine* (397 CE), *Confessions* (397–98 CE), and his anti-Manichaean *Against Faustus* (399–401 CE), he finally arrived at a solution to the problem not only of the meaning of the past or the role of grace in history. As a natural consequence of these insights, he also finally conceived of the meaning of Jews and Judaism, even the Judaism of his day, in Christian belief. Fredriksen dedicates most of the last four chapters—a final section called “God and Israel”—to elaborating how *Against Faustus* provided the breakthrough, repeated in later writing, that enabled his final stance on Jews as ongoing “theological witnesses” to Christian understanding of the Hebrew Bible. As Augustine remarks in section 16.21, “the unbelief of the Jews increases rather than lessens the authority of these books, for their blindness is itself foretold in them. They testify to the truth by their not understanding it” (277). The upshot of this view is epitomized in his later comments on Psalm 59:12, “Slay them not, lest my people forget.” The Jews must be “protected” in Christian society as ongoing witnesses to Christian truth.

By focusing so heavily on this movement of ideas between 396 and 401 CE, Fredriksen necessarily must cast the remaining decades of Augustine's life—years of tremendous activity that included the composition of his monumental *City of God*—as something of a postscript to his earlier development. This is probably unavoidable, given her story, but it forms part of one of the less developed aspects of her text: the connection between Augustine's *ideas* about Judaism and his later *dealings* with real Jews in his bishopric. This lack has drawn enough notice from readers that in 2009 Fredriksen clarified her argument in a response in *Augustinian Studies* (40.2) and in her new postscript to the 2010 edition. Recapitulating her earlier epilogue, she argues that because of Augustine's own concept of history as both literally true and a prophetic prefiguration of the future, one cannot distinguish between "real" and "hermeneutical" Jews in his experience (372). Augustine's ideas about Jews were "real" to him, even if they were not realistic.

The theological construct engendered in the later Christian imagination by Augustine's paradoxical synthesis is essentially a vision not of Judaism but of Christianity, one that sees "Jews," in the wry words of Abraham Mani in Abraham Yehoshua's novel *Mr. Mani*, "not as creatures of flesh and blood but as purely literary heroes who had stepped out of the pages of the Old Testament and would step back into those of the New at the Last Judgment, and who meanwhile must be kept from entering another story by mistake."³ It is only with the most "charitable" of interpretations (as Augustine himself might say) that this Christian belief in the value of Judaism as a key player in its own supersession can ever be equated to "a defense of Jews and Judaism" (as Fredriksen deems it). Nevertheless, it is certain that Augustine's original paradigm provided a perdurable lens through which centuries of Christians, even Pope Benedict himself, would continue to project the Jews as they imagined them, for good and for ill, onto the larger screen of Christian history.

Ryan Szpiech
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan



Thomas Kazen. *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series 38). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010. x, 402 pp.

Thomas Kazen. *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism* (Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series 45). Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010. viii, 201 pp.
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Thomas Kazen's thorough study—*Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?*—is explicitly rooted in the quest for the historical

3. A. B. Yehoshua, *Mr. Mani* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 325–26.