

After the Evil – Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the
Holocaust by Richard Harries. OUP 2003.

The palpable sincerity with which Richard Harries has embraced inter-faith dialogue, epitomised by his recent chairmanship of the Council of Christians and Jews and his long-standing membership of the Manor House group, shines out of every page of his latest book.

The title is slightly misleading, in that it suggests that the book is an analysis of the way in which Christianity and Judaism have come to terms with the Holocaust: After the Evil is, however, much more than this.

Richard Harries sets out, in as fine and sensitive a way as might be wished for, a clear summary of the achievements of Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as an honest assessment of those areas where difficulties still – and will probably always – remain.

The first four chapters could be said to be concerned with issues relating to the Holocaust and its practical and theological challenges to Judaism and Christianity separately and collectively. Harries adduces all the contributors that might be expected – such as Elie Wiesel and Eliezer Berkovits – and a few less predictable such as my colleague Jonathan Wittenberg. The chapter entitled After the Evil – What? is especially fine, and an excellent prelude to the broader assessment of Jewish and Christian responses to Suffering.

Chapters five to ten focus on long standing issues of tension and difficulty between Jews and Christians, including the Church's mission to convert, the State of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, Jewish attitudes to Christianity, and the dichotomy between the Jewish Jesus and the Christian Christ.

Here again it must be stated that Richard Harries' total commitment to inter-faith dialogue is palpable, but the challenges which his Christian faith poses to this are sometimes readily apparent, and if, as a reviewer, I felt my hackles rise to sometimes dangerously combative levels in this section, I forced myself to put this down to the fact that Harries was trying desperately to square an impossible circle. That he was aware of this difficulty was clear in the section where he addresses the contribution to dialogue of Paul Van Buren and John Pawlikovski: following his attempt – which I find wholly unconvincing – to assert that there are more affinities with the concept of the Trinity in Judaism 'than is sometimes allowed', he states that Christianity

holds out to Judaism the possibility 'that faithfulness to the Torah is also participation in the life of God' (p.114). That such assertions, even by a known friend of another faith, might be considered patronising at best and offensive at worst, even more so the view that Christ is in every human being, Christian or not, is borne out by the way Harries nobly quotes his castigation on these points by Sister Margaret Shepherd, director of the Council of Christians and Jews.

The final two chapters, considering our shared hope and the unfinished agenda in Jewish-Christian dialogue, set out several areas for future work and the very clear idea that if Jews and Christians, in spite of their differences and troubled history can make dialogue work then there is some hope for our sorely troubled world.

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