

Still, Erzen's portrait of gay Christian men coping with the paradox at the core of their lives is original, insightful, and moving. Scholars, graduate students, and undergraduates alike will appreciate this important and timely book.

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Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen. By **Jeremy Cohen.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. xii + 320 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Throughout his distinguished scholarly career, Jeremy Cohen has explored the perplexing and painful relationship between Jews and Christians in antiquity and the Middle Ages. In his latest work, Cohen unpacks the claim that the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ. According to Cohen, over the last two millennia the Christ-killer myth has been essential to the development of anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, Christianity, and western culture. In fact, "Christianity needed the Jews to serve as the killers of Christ and repeatedly cast them in that role" (3).

Cohen traces the origins and interpretation of biblical texts through history, especially the Passion and crucifixion accounts of the New Testament. He contends that no accurate historical records exist to identify those actually responsible for the death of Jesus of Nazareth. The canonical Gospels reflect the complexities of Jewish-Christian relations decades after the crucifixion. Drawing on John Dominic Crossan's claim that the Gospels are not properly historical but "prophecy historicized," Cohen identifies narratives and motifs from the Old Testament, which the evangelists borrowed to construct their versions of the life and death of Christ. The Gospels offer a myth in the guise of history—"a story that expresses the ultimate truths and values of a community" (16)—and narratives that portray the Jews of Jesus' day as guilty of his death. The tendency of Christians past and present to read the New Testament accounts as historical has often spurred the development of the Christ-killer myth. Early Christians built on this biblical and prophetic base, asserting that the Jewish people lost their temple, holy city, and homeland as just recompense for the murder of the Christian savior. St. Augustine, however, laid down the essential foundation for a viable Jewish presence in Christendom. In his view, they were indeed responsible for the death of Christ but did not recognize his true identity as messiah and God. Rather, the Jewish people continue to serve as an ongoing witness

to the ancient truth of Christianity through their preservation and embodiment of the Old Testament faith and heritage.

The status of the Jews shifted during the Middle Ages. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, prominent theologians overturned Augustine's view, asserting that the Jews truly did know of Christ's divinity. Moreover, Dominican and Franciscan friars came to contend that the Talmudic Judaism of their day was unfaithful to Hebrew scripture, thus undercutting the basis for tolerance of Jewish communities as faithful witnesses to the old covenant. Meanwhile, crusaders agitated by the Christ-killer myth massacred European Jews en route to the Holy Land. European rulers in turn expelled the Jews from many kingdoms and territories. Ideological and political developments paralleled heightened religious devotion centered on the Passion, including emphasis on the doctrine of transubstantiation, the humanity of Christ, and intensive meditation on the Passion itself. In this context, the Jews were charged with the crimes of ritual murder, host desecration, and ritual cannibalism, spurious charges that continued to surface even in the modern period. The Christ-killer accusation continued to find life in the Dreyfus affair and the twentieth-century forgeries *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In contrast, the Vatican II declaration *Nostra Aetate* reveals both concerted Christian efforts to eliminate or soften the charge of Christ killer and the objections of traditionalists, who sought to maintain long-held views of the Jews.

Not surprisingly, the Christ-killer myth appears dramatically in western religious art. Medieval paintings often demonize Jewish characters and in some cases even replace Roman soldiers with Jews as the executioners of Christ. The Oberammergau Passion Play and films such as *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, *The Gospel of John*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Jesus of Montreal*, and *The Passion of the Christ* attest to the tenacity of the Christ-killer motif or reveal a tendency to strip Jesus of his Jewish identity altogether.

Jeremy Cohen's *Christ Killers* is an intriguing and succinct introduction to the tragic and sobering history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism from its beginnings to the present. This book offers a lively and accessible account, fascinating to a general audience and highly useful to specialists. In fact, Cohen shows convincingly that long-standing interpretations of the Passion narratives have always been at the heart of Christian hostility toward Judaism. The chronological range of the book, the variety of textual and visual media Cohen explores, and his ability to describe and summarize in clear and concise detail is most impressive. Indeed, where one might expect him to lapse understandably into a reprimand of Christian atrocities, Cohen keeps the tragedy of Jewish suffering in view while writing about both Judaism and Christianity with insight, sensitivity, and aesthetic appreciation.

Equally impressive is Cohen's vivid and subtle approach to the interdependence of Jewish and Christian traditions. Although Christian borrowing from Judaism is well-known, Cohen also shows how Jewish authors and artists appropriated and modified Christian symbols and themes, most notably the crucifixion narrative, to portray and decry Jewish suffering at the hands of Christians.

There is an openly and deeply personal quality to this book. Yet Cohen's voice enhances his careful scholarship and compelling presentation. Despite his thorough research and well-crafted argument about biblical literature and interpretation, it still seems unlikely at present that most Christians would jettison a historical reading of the Gospels and the Passion. In fact, taking into account a late-first-century context for composition does not require one to read the Gospels as primarily prophetic imaginings and mythological truth telling. The imprint of historical events and voices is also likely present. More important, Cohen reminds the reader throughout his book of other ways to read Christian texts, of biblical, theological, and historical approaches that ultimately clear the Jewish people of the Christ-killer accusation. This multitude of voices, made audible by Cohen, is one great contribution of his work.

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Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent. By **Bryan D. Spinks.**

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Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices. By **Bryan D. Spinks.** Liturgy,

Worship, and Society Series. Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006. xii + 257 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Bryan Spinks provides here an extremely well-written and carefully documented history and theology of Christian initiation rites from their beginnings all the way through the great diversity of modern liturgical practice. Spinks's erudite grasp of such a multiplicity of traditions and rites is impressive. It is no small feat to wade through so carefully and authoritatively the varieties of baptismal rites and interpretations, not only in