

eyes; in this case, the glaciers of the northern hemisphere, rapidly receding due to human-induced climate change. One of the most transformative experiences I've had in the last five years involved a week-long course in southern Ohio, where we walked among what is left of our native forests. I was awestruck, and I fell in love with trees. Kim appeals to this dynamic herself in the latter pages of the book—the Spirit as the presence of erotic beauty charged with life and energy. Is it our longing for beauty and our capacity for awe that will ultimately penetrate our colonial practices bent on destroying beauty? Maybe this book is best read in a place that you find stunningly beautiful—a place that, if it were lost, would cause you great sorrow.

I also think that I, as a reader, would have benefited from a metaphor that functioned as an antidote to *han*. The word provides such a helpful way of speaking about the colonial legacy in which we live—but is there an equally dense metaphor for how to heal *han*? The best suggestion I have come across is approaching our current crisis as a collective addiction, calling on society to undergo an ecological twelve-step process toward a path of recovery: My name is Joel, my name is Columbus, Ohio, my name is the United States, and I'm addicted to gasoline and overconsumption, dependent on violence to sustain my way of life. Step 1: We admit that we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable.

I'm grateful for Kim's voice and contribution to this vital conversation. For the sake of future generations and this beautiful planet, I hope it works.

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Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton University Press, Library of Jewish Ideas, Princeton, New Jersey, 2012. 244 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 9780691155692.

Simply put, Jon D. Levenson is one of those rare scholars whose every word repays careful reading. *Inheriting Abraham* is no exception. In this beautifully written book, Levenson examines how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam depict the figure of Abraham, concluding that “Abraham has functioned much more as a point of differentiation among the three religious communities than as a node of commonality” (9). To be sure, each religious tradition emphasizes the centrality of Abraham. Such broad agreement, though, papers over some very real differences. For instance, both Judaism and Islam stress Abraham's monotheistic turn in ways that Christianity does not. On the other hand, Christianity and Islam have historically detached Abraham from his natural descendants, the Jewish people. Finally, Islam differs from both Judaism and Christianity in the fact that it does not hold the Abraham narrative of Genesis to be authoritative. And, even though Christianity and Judaism share the same foundational story about Abraham, they differ consid-

erably in how they portray Abraham's significance. As Levenson provocatively puts it, "although both Christianity and Islam came to see themselves as the restoration of Abrahamic religion after a long interruption, neither of them represents the pattern of religious practice of the figure of Genesis. And neither does Judaism" (140).

The first four chapters of Levenson's book examine aspects of the Abraham narrative of Genesis 12–26: Abram's call and commission (Gen. 12), the frustrations and fulfillments of God's promises to Abram, particularly as they relate to descendants (Gen. 13–21), God's testing of Abraham in the Aqedah (Gen. 22), and Abram's discovery of the one, true God (Gen. 12). In these chapters, Levenson's discussion centers on both Genesis and Jewish interpretations of Genesis in second-temple and rabbinic literature. There is a wealth of information here on the different ways in which Jews, and to a lesser degree Christians and Muslims, used and developed Genesis's depiction of Abraham to address their own contemporary concerns.

The fifth chapter, "Torah or Gospel?," provides a brief, but excellent, comparison of the Jewish portrayal of Abraham as a fully Torah-observant Jew to Paul's treatment of Abraham. Levenson demonstrates that many Jews understood the claim that Abraham obeyed all of God's commandments, statutes, and laws (Gen. 26:5) to signify that even though Abraham lived before Sinai, he kept the entirety of the Mosaic law (cf. *Mishnah Qiddushin* 14.4; Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 28b). Such a depiction of Abraham appears to fly in the face of Paul's emphasis upon Abraham's Torah-free faith (Rom. 4:9–10; Gal. 3:17–18). Paul's treatment of the Jewish law is a notoriously difficult question—one that continues to generate an almost unreadable amount of scholarly literature. And yet, Levenson rightly claims that this question is no mere scholarly pursuit: "In the whole history of New Testament interpretation, there is perhaps nothing that has been more misunderstood than the intertwined topics of Paul's relationship to the Torah and his understanding of the promise to Abraham, and the consequences of these misunderstandings for Jewish-Christian relations have been catastrophic" (153). Central to Levenson's reading of Paul, and contrary to the New Perspective on Paul fashionable today, is the realization that Paul is no universalist opposed to the particularism of Judaism. Levenson rightly highlights the fact that Paul believed it essential to his gospel that Gentiles become related to Abraham—they need to become both sons and seed of Abraham and do so in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:7, 3:29). Against the apologetically driven concerns of New Perspective proponents, Levenson concludes: "Were Paul truly intent on transcending the difference between Jews and Gentiles, would he have so stressed the man known as the father of the Jewish people? And would he have advanced the claim that those who have faith in Jesus had, by that very act, become nothing short of descendants of Abraham?" (157). This reading of Paul goes a long way in correcting some of the damage done in using a supposedly ex-

clusivistic Judaism as a foil for a supposedly universalistic Christianity.²

In the final chapter, Levenson provides a trenchant critique of three recent efforts to use Abraham as unifying figure for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: the statements of the Abraham Path; Bruce Feiler's *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*, a *New York Times* best seller; and the ecumenical work of the German Catholic theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel. The Abraham Path, for instance, bases its call to unity on the following fact: "Three and a half billion people—over half the human family—trace their history or faith back to Abraham, considered the father of monotheism" (173). Similarly, Feiler asserts that all three religious traditions should focus on the fact that Abraham functions as the first person to understand monotheism. Levenson argues that such assertions ignore very real differences between the three faiths, prioritizing one faith's claims about itself over the others. For instance, no one disputes that Judaism and Islam are monotheistic religions. In contrast, both Jewish and Islamic thinkers almost universally reject Christianity's claim that it is monotheistic. Consequently, to claim that Christianity is monotheistic is to privilege Christianity's claims about itself, while disagreeing with Jewish and Islamic understandings of Trinitarian thinking. In fact, the Qur'an itself denies Jesus' divine sonship (e.g., 4.171; 5.116; 19.35; 112.3).

Further, while each faith believes Abraham to be its father, those claims are naturally contested. For Jews, Abraham is their genealogical father—Jews descend naturally from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. For Christians, Abraham is the father of all Jews and Christians who share in his faith (cf. Rom. 4 and Gal. 3). For Muslims, Abraham is the father of all who share his monotheistic religion. Are such claims mutually exclusive, as most proponents of these religions believe? For that matter, both Jews and Christians stress Abraham's election, and the subsequent election of Israel and the church, respectively. As Levenson states, "to deploy, as the focus of a vision of universality, a figure who in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament represents election is unwise at best" (203–4).

Such criticisms rightly highlight the difficulty involved in ecumenical work. How can practitioners of these three faiths find commonalities with each other without privileging one particular faith over the others? In other words, how can those interested in ecumenism guard against the danger of turning dialogue into monologue? The thrust of Levenson's work, I would suggest, is that honest and sympathetic disagreement might bring us much closer to peaceful coexistence than paper-thin claims about shared beliefs ever will.

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1 Here Levenson depends upon the superb work of Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).