

Among Jews, Gentiles
and Christians
in Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Studies in Honour of
Professor Oskar Skarsaune on his 65th Birthday

Edited by
REIDAR HVALVIK AND JOHN KAUFMAN

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PROFESSOR DR. THEOL. OSKAR SKARSAUNE, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS 65TH BIRTHDAY

Oskar Skarsaune was born in Trondheim on the 2nd of July 1946. He graduated from high school (science and mathematics, Trondheim Katedralskole) in 1965, and was awarded King Olav V's honorary prize for being the best pupil. He then began as a student of theology at MF Norwegian School of Theology, and graduated in 1972. He was a research scholar in church history at MF 1973–1976, and received a scholarship from The Research Council of Norway 1976–1978. He received the degree Doctor of Theology at the University of Oslo in 1982.

In 1980 he was employed as assistant professor at MF, became associate professor in 1982 and professor in church history in 1990. He had a research period at the Caspari Center in Jerusalem in 1983 and was guest Professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong 1990–1991. He was dean at MF 1993–1995.

Skarsaune served as editorial secretary of the Norwegian scholarly journal *Tidskrift for Teologi og Kirke* (“Journal of Theology and Church”) 1982–1984, became a co-editor in 1992, and was chief editor 1995–2001. He has been co-editor of *European Journal of Theology* from 1992, and was co-editor of the church journal *Luthersk Kirketidende* 1985–1993. This is the background for his many comments on burning questions in church and society, in addition to more scholarly articles in a popular wrapping in the latter journal.

Skarsaune was the Norwegian representative in the committee for the Nordic Patristic Project from 1981, and was on the steering committee for three Nordic research seminars (1983–1985). He was also co-editor of the publications “Judaism and Christianity during the First Centuries” (*Judendom och kristendom under de första århundradena I-II*, 1986). His main publications are in this field (see further the article “Church Historian, Biblical Scholar and Apologist: The Scholarly Profile of Oskar Skarsaune” in this volume).

Skarsaune has been guest lecturer at numerous universities: Åbo Akademi 1984, Department of theology, University of Uppsala 1989, Department of theology, University of Lund 1992; New College, University in Edinburgh 1996, Christian-Albrechts Universität, Kiel 1997, Shandong University, Jinan, China 2008. He has also served as a member of examination committees for the theological and philosophical doctor's degree in Lund, Cambridge, Bergen and Oslo, and on selection committees for academic positions at the universities in Århus, Lund, Tromsø, and Oslo.

Skarsaune has been a member of the Theological Commission of The Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel from 1977, and served for many years as its chairman. He was also member and vice-chair of the Theological Commission under the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, 1995–1999.

Skarsaune is a member of several learned societies: Kirkehistorisk Samfunn (Church Historical Society) from 1981, Association internationale d'études patristiques from 1983, The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (Det norske Vitenskaps-Akademi) from 1995, Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie from 1995, and The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters (Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab) from 1998.

The present volume is a *Festschrift* to an internationally renowned scholar and a highly esteemed teacher in church history. Patristics has been his main field, though his scholarly interests also include biblical studies. Those who were invited to contribute to this volume are primarily biblical and patristic scholars who are reckoned among Professor Skarsaune's friends and colleagues in Biblical, Early Christian, Patristic and Medieval studies; many have also worked together with him in various contexts. Other scholars were also invited to contribute, but were prevented due to pressing circumstances. Nevertheless, the editors of the volume hope that the various contributions reflect both the centre and the breadth in Skarsaune's scholarly work. They are expressions of gratitude to him as a respected scholar, an inspiring teacher, a good friend and colleague. We wish him many years of good health, a blessed life, and fruitful work also in his retirement!

Reidar Hvalvik

John Kaufman

A note on the cover of the book:

The two pictures on the front cover of the book are from a mosaic (c. AD 425) in the church S. Sabina in Rome. The two women symbolize the Church of the Jews (*ec[c]lesia ex circumcissione* – “the church of the circumcision”) and the Church of the Gentiles (*ec[c]lesia ex gentibus*).

CHURCH HISTORIAN, BIBLICAL SCHOLAR AND APOLOGIST

The Scholarly Profile of Oskar Skarsaune

REIDAR HVALVIK

When Oskar Skarsaune publicly defended his dissertation at the University of Oslo the 8th of May 1982, Professor Torben Christensen from Copenhagen was his first examiner or “opponent” as it is called in Norway.¹ He had a thorough examination of the dissertation, and expressed both criticism and praise. He had critical remarks e.g., about the disposition of the dissertation and its condensed form and language, and he questioned several details. None the less, he regarded Skarsaune’s work as “very ambitious,” and was impressed by Skarsaune’s knowledge of all relevant sources (he actually said so!) and his familiarity with the secondary literature – in a very broad field. He admitted that the reader of the dissertation several times gets the impression that the writer is an Old Testament exegete. And he continued: “That Sk[arsaune] seems at home both in the Old Testament and the intertestamental literature need hardly be stressed! At other times, he speaks and argues as a well versed New Testament exegete. And further, of course, he appears as a competent patristic scholar, familiar first and foremost with the ancient Christian literature of the second century.”²

With such a broad competence and a very long bibliography,³ it may be difficult to get an idea of Skarsaune as a scholar. For that reason, I will try to paint a picture of Skarsaune’s scholarly profile – focusing on his foci – for there is more than one. Further, I will give the reader an idea of the impact of his research and the reception

1 The second opponent was Professor William H. C. Frend. The third external member of the examination committee was the New Testament scholar Professor Niels Hyldahl.

2 Torben Christensen, “Justin og *testimonia*-traditionen: Oskar Skarsaunes doktorafhandling: *The Proof from Prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr’s Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile*,” *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 84 (1983): 39–62, 43 (my translation).

3 See pages 211–230 below.

of his main publications. And finally: Even if Skarsaune has published extensively in English, a considerable part of his works are still in Norwegian; consequently, this survey will hopefully give English speaking readers a better understanding of the scope of his authorship.

1. Church Historian and Patristic Scholar

1.1 Justin Martyr

Skarsaune's dissertation, submitted in 1981 to the University of Oslo, publically defended in 1982, and published in 1987 has the title *The Proof from Prophecy*. By this important study he soon acquired a name as a patristic scholar and as a specialist in Justin Martyr. In his review of the book, Robert M. Grant commented that "this is one of the most thorough and intelligent studies of Justin ever produced" and claimed that the work "is highly important for the study of second-century theology . . ." ⁴ In another review, William R. Schoedel concluded: "Skarsaune's study has established a number of points of fundamental importance in this area of investigation, and it may well open up new horizons in the study of the reception of the Bible and of gospel material in the early church."⁵ Schoedel's words have proven to be prophetic.

In a recent overview of "Justin Scholarship," Michael Slusser summarizes major trends and trajectories in the last half century:

During the past fifty years, two scholars have redirected Justin scholarship in fresh directions and to a great extent set the agenda for the rest of us. The first of them opened the period of what I would like to call the "Justin of the *Apologies*": the second gave rise to the period of the "Justin of the *Dialogue*." The first of these major influences was, of course, Carl Andresen, first in his long 1952 article on Justin and Middle Platonism, then in his book *Logos und Nomos*. . . .

I see the second trend, "Justin of the *Dialogue with Trypho*," as fully launched with the publication in 1987 of Oskar Skarsaune's *The Proof from Prophecy*. Granted, it examines Justin's use of prophecy in both the *Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho*. Skarsaune went much deeper than his predecessors in uncovering the traditions upon which Justin drew in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, particularly his use of Old Testament Texts.⁶

⁴ *Church History* 57 (1988): 216–217.

⁵ *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 1989, 344–346. For other reviews of *Proof from Prophecy*, see P. DeLeeuw, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988): 627–628; J. C. M. van Winden, *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989): 300–302; J. N. Birdsall, *Evangelical Quarterly* (1989): 165–167; J. S. Siker, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 365–366; Anders Ekenberg, *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* (1994): 186.

⁶ Michael Slusser, "Justin Scholarship: Trends and Trajectories," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 13–21; quotation from pp. 15 and 16.

The importance of Skarsaune's work is also noted in the introduction to the book on Justin where Slusser's article is a part. The editors of the collection of articles, coming out of a conference in Edinburgh in July 2006, write as follows: "It will be noted that Skarsaune's fundamentally important work, which stimulated a whole new generation of work on Justin's sources, has provided the impetus for a number of chapters in the present volume, whether or not they agree with him on all points!"⁷

Seen in retrospective, there can thus be little doubt that Skarsaune has had a lasting influence on Justin scholarship,⁸ on the discussion of the *testimonia* in the early Church,⁹ and on early Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in general.¹⁰ And he has continued to write on Justin, as seen, e.g., by the article on Justin in the voluminous German reference work *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (vol. 17, 1988), the article "Judaism and Hellenism in Justin Martyr, Elucidated from His Portrait of Socrates" in the *Festschrift* for Martin Hengel,¹¹ and most recently "Justin and His Bible" in the abovementioned book on Justin¹² and "Justin and the Apologists" in *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*.¹³

1.2 Early Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament

Skarsaune's study of Justin is in many ways an investigation of early Christian interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures. Into this broader subject he has given several scholarly and more popular contributions. Among the scholarly works we find an overview of "Biblical Interpretation" in a volume on *The Early Christian World*¹⁴ and an article on

7 Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, "Justin Martyr and His Worlds: Introduction," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, 1–10, quotation from p. 2.

8 See, e.g., David Rokeah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* (Jewish and Christian perspectives series 5; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 26ff; Denis Minns and Paul Parvis (eds.), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford early Christian texts; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); cf. also Charles E. Hill's statement: "Skarsaune, one of the premier living authorities on Justin's writings . . ." in Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131.

9 See, e.g., Martin C. Albl, "And Scripture Cannot Be Broken": *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (NovTSup 96; Leiden: Brill, 1999); idem, *Pseudo-Gregory of Nyssa: Testimonies against the Jews* (Society of Biblical Literature writings from the Greco-Roman world 8; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

10 See, e.g., Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 33–44.

11 *Frühes Christentum* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger; vol. 3 of *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Peter Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 585–611.

12 *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, 53–76, 179–187.

13 *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought* (ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham; Routledge Companions; London: Routledge, 2010), 121–136.

14 *The Early Christian World* (2 vols.; ed. Philip F. Esler; London: Routledge, 2000) 1:660–689.

“The Development of Scriptural Interpretation in the Second and Third Centuries – Except Clement and Origen.”¹⁵

The early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is also the subject of a popular book written by Skarsaune in Norwegian in 1987 (“When the Scriptures Were Opened: The Early Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament”).¹⁶ In this little book the author makes the fruits of his research on Justin and other early Christian writers available for a broader public. In the preface, Skarsaune reminds the readers of an obvious but often forgotten fact: Jews and Christians have a large part of the Bible in common, though they do not agree on its interpretation. In order to equip them for constructive conversations with Jews on the interpretation of the Scriptures, Skarsaune wishes to inform the readers of the heritage from the early Church. He thinks it is important for modern Christians to know that much of the biblical interpretation of the early Church – which modern readers sometimes find peculiar – is in fact based on Jewish interpretation of Scripture. Here there is common ground for Jews and Christians.

Another most valuable contribution to early Christian interpretation of Scripture is Skarsaune’s translation of Melito’s *Peri pascha* into Norwegian.¹⁷ In the first part of the book, he gives an extensive introduction to Melito and typological interpretation of Scripture. Even if the book is aimed at a broader audience, it is furnished with notes and a comprehensive bibliography – which makes it a treasure trove for e.g., theological students.

Another early Christian writing that has caught the interest of Skarsaune is the *Epistle of Barnabas*. Among Skarsaune’s early works, there is an article on this letter – with a focus that is typical for his interest: “Baptismal Typology in ‘Barnabas’ 8 and the Jewish Background.”¹⁸ He has also written on the theology of baptism in Barnabas,¹⁹ and was responsible for the translation of this letter in the Norwegian edition of the Apostolic Fathers.²⁰

15 In *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, Part 1 Antiquity; 3 vols. in 5 (ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 1:373–442.

16 *Da Skriften ble åpnet: Den første kristne tolkning av Det gamle testamente* (Sjalombøkene 19; Oslo: Den Norske Israelsmisjon/Nye Luther, 1987).

17 Meliton av Sardes, *Om påsken: Den eldste kristne påskepreken*. Oversatt og kommentert av Oskar Skarsaune (Kristne klassikere; Oslo: Luther, 1997).

18 Published in *The Second Century, Tertullian to Nicaea in the West, Clement and Origen, Cappadocian Fathers*. Vol. 3 of *Papers of the 1983 Oxford Patristic Conference* (ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Studia Patristica 18.3; Leuven: Peeters Press, 1989), 221–228.

19 “Tidlig kristen dåpsteologi i Barnabas’ brev,” *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 47 (1976): 81–105.

20 “Barnabas’ brev,” in *De apostoliske fedre* (ed. Ernst Baasland and Reidar Hvalvik; Teologi i dag; Oslo: Luther, 1984), 160–191.

1.3 Early Christology and the Creeds

Skarsaune's interests in and contributions to patristic scholarship, are, however, much broader than Justin, Melito, and Barnabas. One of his first published scholarly articles is on "Tertullian's Christology in *Against Praxeas*" (in Norwegian, 1969).²¹ Christology was a key topic in his dissertation (cf. the chapter on "The Christological Testimonies"), and it has continued to be one of Skarsaune's key areas of study. He has written on the political and theological aspect of the Christological formula from the council in Nicaea (in Norwegian, 1982),²² but his main focus has been on the Old Testament and the Jewish background of the Christology of the early Church.²³

As a result of eight lectures on this topic which Skarsaune delivered to the Lutheran School of Theology in Aarhus in January 1986, a book was published in Denmark (with a Danish title, but text in Norwegian). A revised edition appeared in Norway in 1988,²⁴ and an English translation in 1991: *Incarnation – Myth or Fact*.²⁵ In the introduction to this book, Skarsaune observes that both Trypho, a second century Jew, and Pinchas Lapide (1922–1997), a modern Jewish scholar, presuppose that a confession of Jesus as the Logos was an impossibility in a Jewish environment, but was self-evident in the Hellenistic world.²⁶ Skarsaune challenges this contention, noting that the doctrine of the incarnation was a stumbling block for Jews and Greeks alike. In order to understand the New Testament teaching on the incarnation, Skarsaune looks into the preaching of Jesus and the apostolic testimony about him, viewed against the background of the Jewish Wisdom tradition. In the Wisdom writings, especially texts from the Greek Old Testament such as Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon, we find the closest parallels to some of the New Testaments statements about Jesus (e.g., John 1:1–14).²⁷

Unfortunately, this book received little attention in the scholarly world. It was met with positive reviews by people with links to the Lutheran publisher in the USA (Concordia Publishing House),²⁸ but elsewhere the publication seems unnoticed.²⁹

21 "Tertullians kristologi i skriftet mot Praxeas," *Ung Teologi* 2, no. 2 (1969): 11–21.

22 "Nikeamøtets kristologiske formel: Politikk og teologi," in *Föreläsningar hållna vid Nordiska patristikermötet i Lund 25–28 augusti 1981* (Patristica Nordica 1; Religio 5; Lund: Teologiska institutionen, 1982), 66–84.

23 Cf. his German article "Altkirchliche Christologie – jüdisch/unjüdisch," *Evangelische Theologie* 59 (1999): 267–285.

24 *Inkarnasjonen – Myte eller faktum?* (Oslo: Lunde, 1988).

25 *Incarnation – Myth or Fact?* (trans. Trygve R. Skarsten; Concordia Scholarship Today; St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1991).

26 *Incarnation*, 13–15.

27 This topic is also treated in "Ordspråkene 8,22–31 som kristologisk tekst" ["Proverbs 8:22–31 as a Christological Text"], *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 72 (2001): 113–129.

28 See the following reviews: Quentin F. Wesselschmidt in *Concordia Journal* 17 (1991): 483–484; John T. Pless in *Lutheran Quarterly* (ns) 6 no 4 (1992): 440–441; and Carl F. H. Henry in *European Journal of Theology* 1 (1992): 83–87. The most extensive review was written by William C. Weinrich in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (56) 1992: 60–63; he had some critical remarks on details but concluded that the book was "highly recommended" (p. 63).

29 It occurs, however, in the bibliography to the entry "Incarnation" in Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (5 vols.; trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999–2008), 2:679.

Skarsaune has, however, published the insights from this book in the more recent *In the Shadow of the Temple*.³⁰ In a review of the latter book, the editor in chief of *Christianity Today*, David Neff, conveniently summarizes some basic insights from Skarsaune's treatment of Christology in the early Church:

Readers with a theological bent will be especially interested in Skarsaune's analysis of the differences between how the Old Roman creed and the Nicene Creed describe Christian belief in the Messiah. Skarsaune's summary: "While the Old Roman creed portrays Jesus as the Messiah doing the task predicted by the prophets, the eastern creed portrays him as a divine being becoming incarnate, as the mediator of creation who himself became man, suffered for his own creatures, and was then exalted." The first is narrative and horizontal; the second, theological and vertical.

This theology, with its emphasis on the Incarnation, is another place at which scholars wrongly assert a Hellenizing influence. That is easily dismissed, given Hellenic attitudes toward the material world. But Skarsaune goes further. He shows that the theology of the Nicene Creed is a mirror of the way the Rabbis wrote about Wisdom and Torah. Simply put, the Rabbis took what Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon said about Wisdom's being God's firstborn, a participant in creation, and the "radiance" of God's glory, and they applied it to the Torah. The apostles took the same material and applied it to Jesus. And the Nicene Fathers simply appropriated that very Jewish mode of thought from the New Testament.³¹

Christology was one of the crucial questions in the theological debate in the early Church, a debate that resulted in the formulation of specific creeds. This larger context is thoroughly treated by Skarsaune in his Norwegian monograph, *Troens ord: De tre oldkirkelige bekjennelsene* ("The Words of Faith: The Three Ecumenical Creeds").³² In this book, he thoroughly discusses the content and background of the creeds.

In the introduction to the book, Skarsaune connects his research to the fundamental work done by Carl Paul Caspari (1814–1891). There are obvious reasons for mentioning this scholar in a history of research, though he is of special interest for Skarsaune: Caspari was a German Jew who became a Christian and ended up as Professor of the Old Testament at the University of Oslo. As a young man, he studied Hebrew and Arabic at the University of Leipzig, producing an Arabic grammar book which for many years was the standard work in its field. He came to Christiania (Oslo) in

30 On this book, see further below.

31 "Editor's Bookshelf: The Church's Hidden Jewishness. Hebrew thinking in a Greek world," in *Christianity Today*, published online 1st of October 2003: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/october/29.106.html>; a shorter version (without the quotations above) appeared in the printed version of *Christianity Today*, October 2003, 105–106.

32 Oslo: Luther, 1997; 274 pp. The interest in the creeds is also seen in some of his more recent articles: "The Making of the Creeds," *Mishkan* no. 34 (2001): 20–35 and "The Most Recent Debate on the Origin of the Apostles' Creed," *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 80 (2009): 294–307.

1847. Although he lectured in the Old Testament, he became internationally known for his extensive research on the ecumenical creeds.³³

As his book on the creeds makes clear, Skarsaune has had a common interest with Caspari. There is also another similarity between the two: they have both done scholarly work outside their own special field. The fact that Caspari was a Jewish believer has also naturally increased Skarsaune's interest in him: he has written several shorter biographical portraits of Caspari³⁴ and has collected his correspondence found e.g., in the National Library of Norway.³⁵ These letters are meant as a resource for future research. In fact, Skarsaune has already made use of them in an unfinished biography on Caspari from 1990. In his files, he has a manuscript of some 190 pages, with the title "A Scholar by the Grace of God?: Carl Paul Caspari: A Biography."³⁶

Within this context of creeds and confessions, one must also mention Skarsaune's articles "A Neglected Detail in the Creed of Nicaea (325)"³⁷ and "Is Christianity Monotheistic? Patristic Perspectives on a Jewish/Christian Debate."³⁸ The latter goes back to a lecture held in Oxford at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies, 21 – 26 August 1995. These conferences, arranged every fourth year, assemble patristic scholars from around the world. At these and similar conferences, many lectures and short papers are delivered in parallel sessions. In the evening, however, there is a common lecture in the famous Sheldonian Theatre. Needless to say, it is a great honour to be asked to speak at such an event. In 1995, Skarsaune was invited to do so, and he held a lecture on the abovementioned topic, "Is Christianity Monotheistic?" Chair that evening was the grand old man of patristic studies in North America, Professor emeritus Robert M. Grant, who years earlier had written a most enthusiastic review of Skarsaune's dissertation. Skarsaune opened his lecture with the following words:

33 See Carl Paul Caspari, *Ungedruckte, unbeachtete und wenig beachtete Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und er Glaubensregel I–III* (Christiania, 1866/1869/1875) and *Alte und neue Quellen zur Geschichte des Taufsymbols und der Glaubensregel* (Christiania, 1879). For further details, see Skarsaune, *Troens ord*, 13–23.

34 Oskar Skarsaune, "From Jewish Enlightenment to Lutheran Pietism: the Spiritual Odyssey of Carl Paul Caspari," in *Israel and Yesbua: Festschrift Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies* (ed. Torleif Elgvin; Jerusalem: Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 1993), 57–74; "Carl Paul Caspari: Jøden som ble luthersk professor" ["Carl Paul Caspari: The Jew Who Became a Lutheran Professor"], *Ung Teologi* 29, no. 2 (1996): 5–14; "Caspari, Carl Paul," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (ed. Gerald H. Anderson; New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 119–120; "Caspari, Carl Paul," in *Metzler Lexikon christlicher Denker* (ed. Markus Vinzent; Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 159–160; "Caspari, Carl Paul," in *Norsk biografisk Leksikon* (10 vols.; ed. Jon Gunnar Arntzen; Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget, 2000), 2:153–154.

35 *70 brev til og fra Carl Paul Caspari kronologisk ordnet* (Oslo, 2003; unpublished compendium; 147 pp.). See also the article "Fra 'mit norske Ararat' til 'den kogende norske Gryde': Det moderne omsving sett med Carl Paul Casparis øyne," in *Kirkens skole – statens kirke. Festschrift til professor dr. philos. Brynjar Haraldso på 70-årsdagen 29. september 1995* (ed. Vidar L. Haanes, Bernt T. Oftestad, and Dagfinn Rian; Relieff 36; Trondheim: Tapir, 1995), 61–79.

36 "En lærd af Guds Naade": Carl Paul Caspari – en biografi," 1990.

37 *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987): 34–54.

38 In *Historica, Theologica et Philosophica, Critica et Philologica. Papers Presented to the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995* (ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Studia Patristica 29; Leuven: Peeters Press, 1997), 340–363.

Being a historian, not a philosopher, I have no intention of answering the question in the title. This title is rather meant as a short description of the theme of a Jewish/Christian debate that I am going to follow through two main epochs: in the Middle Ages and in Antiquity. The theme may be put somewhat more precisely like this: Is the doctrine of a Triune God compatible with Biblical monotheism?

At the very end of the lecture, Skarsaune referred to Tertullian, quoting *De Carne Christi* (6.4): “The Son of God was crucified. I am not ashamed of it, because it seems shameful. And the Son of God dies, it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible.” Skarsaune continued, referring to an interview with the Jewish writer Pinchas Lapidé on Norwegian television. Pinchas said that he used to think that becoming incarnate was impossible to God. “But recently I have come to the conclusion that it is unjewish to say that this is something the God of the Bible cannot do, that he cannot come that close. I have had second thoughts about the incarnation”³⁹

Being among the audience, I noticed that the lecture was very well received. Afterwards, the organizer of the conference for decades, the legendary Miss E. A. Livingstone, wrote a letter to Skarsaune, saying: “Reports reached me from every side that you had given the best of the evening lectures at this year’s Patristic Conference – indeed some said the best in living memory.”⁴⁰

Within the field of Christology and early Christian theology, Skarsaune, in 2001, published a book containing collected articles (somewhat revised): *Og Ordet ble kjød: Studier i oldkirkens teologi* (“And the Word became Flesh: Studies in the Theology of the Early Church”).⁴¹ This is a most convenient collection for Norwegian (and Scandinavian) students interested in Skarsaune’s contribution on central theological issues.

39 Ibid., 363.

40 Letter from Dr. Livingstone, 31. August 1995. Thanks to Professor Skarsaune for providing this and other valuable information used in this essay.

41 Oslo: Luther, 2001. In addition to articles mentioned in this section, there are also some other important contributions, e.g., “Gudsbildet i oldkirkens teologi” [“The Image of God in the Theology of the Early Church”] *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 48 (1977): 179–192; “Åpenbaring utenfor åpenbaringen? Antikk religion, gresk filosofi og kristen tro ifølge Justin Martyr” [“Revelation outside Revelation? Ancient Religion, Greek Philosophy and Christian Faith according to Justin Martyr”], *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 49 (1978): 261–282 and “Hvilket lys kaster NT’s kanonhistorie over teologihistorien i det 1. århundre?” [“What Light Does the History of the New Testament Canon Throw Upon the History of Theology in the First Century?”], in *Föreläsningar hållne vid det andra Nordiska patristikermötet i Lund 19–22 augusti 1986* (Patristica Nordica 2; Religio 25; Lund: Teologiska institutionen, 1987), 63–83.

1.4 Jews and Christians and Jewish Christians

The subtitle of the 1995 Oxford lecture (“Patristic Perspectives on a Jewish/Christian Debate”) indicates another field to which Skarsaune has contributed immensely; in fact, a majority of his scholarly publications are probably in some way linked to the relationship between Jews and Christians. This was, of course, central in the treatment of Justin and his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. But it came even more in the foreground when Skarsaune (together with the present writer) started the history project on Jewish believers in Jesus. The first, and so far the only, volume involved 16 scholars from Scandinavia, Great Britain, Germany and North America, and was published – after years of delay – in 2007: *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*.⁴²

A look at the table of contents reveals that a substantial part of the book (7 out of 23 chapters) was written by the chief editor; his broad knowledge of the subject was essential for the whole project. As is stated in a review, “There are not many scholars like Skarsaune, who manage to have scholarly knowledge on such different themes. That was the reason for the present reviewers to write this review as a joint venture.”⁴³ The volume tried to cover the time span from New Testament times until around 500 CE, looking for possible evidence for Jewish believers in Jesus who continued to maintain a Jewish way of life.

The book had a mixed reception. Many, in fact the majority, of the critics were positive. David P. Efroymson concluded his review thus: “This is a collection to inform us of what we do not know, to expand what we do know, and to correct what we think we know. Every library should acquire it.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Winrich Löhr

42 Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007).

43 Elisabeth Boddens Hosang and Bart J. Koet, in *Review of Biblical Literature* 07/2008 (online at: http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5985_6372.pdf). This is one of the longest reviews of the book; it does, however, discuss only a few articles in detail. Much space is used to write generally about the topic of the book – and much of that is in fact dealt with by various contributors in the book itself. The reviewers ask for some topics not dealt with in the book (e.g., a broader treatment of New Testament writings) and they have critical remarks to the term “Jewish believers in Jesus” – especially when the term is used in opposition to “non-believing Jews.” Of course, they stress, the latter also believed – in God. The editors thought that this was self-evident, but Boddens Hosang and Koet have a point when they say that the term *pistevō* (“believe”) should have been defined. Generally they state: “There is a lot to learn, and New Testament as well as patristics scholars will find a lot of material to inspire new studies.”

44 In *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 681–682. Among the other positive reviews are the following: Eckhard J. Schnabel in *Trinity Journal* 30 (2009): 141–144: “Readers who look for information on the role of Jewish Christians in the early church need to look no further—this volume provides a comprehensive scholarly, but eminently readable, account of the history of Jewish Christianity in the first five centuries” (p. 141); Gregory Goswell in *Reformed Theological Review* 67 (2008): 42–43; Cristoph Stenschke in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 35 (2009): 283–286; J. Radermakers in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 131 (2009): 430–431; Wayne Brouwer in *Calvin Theological Review* 44 (2009): 415–418; Jaques Doukhan in *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 48 (2010): 146–150; R. Sanz Valdivieso in *Carthaginensia: Revista de Estudios e Investigación* (Instituto Teológico de Murcia, OFM, Universidad de Murcia) 26, no. 49 (2010) 204–206 (concluding with the following words: “Es una gran contribución que merecería la pena se tradujese al español”). Jonathan Armstrong (in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 [2009]: 306–307) was also basically positive, though he was critical of Skarsaune’s arguments for viewing some early Christian writers as Jews. Also several shorter reviews/book notices appeared which generally recommended the book – though without really going into any detailed evaluation of its content.

wrote: “The comprehensiveness and generally high quality of the individual chapters will ensure that for the foreseeable future this volume will be a work of reference for all those who are seriously interested in ancient Jewish Christianity.”⁴⁵ For the rest, Löhr used much of his review to focus on the problem connected with the modern concept of “ethnicity” over against “theology,” i.e., focusing on Jewish *believers* instead of Jewish *Christianity*. The problem can be seen in the fact that the book is primarily related to Jews who believed in Jesus, “and at the same time continued a wholly Jewish way of life.” What, then, about the Jewish believers who were totally assimilated to the predominantly Gentile church? Even if Skarsaune in his introduction wishes to include them, he admits that they are not “theologically interesting.”⁴⁶ Thus, Löhr argues, there is still a focus on “theology,” not only “ethnicity.” He acknowledges that the chief editor is aware of the problem, but it is not solved.

To write and edit the volume about Jewish believers in Jesus was not without problems. During the writing of the book and its long production period, we witnessed a change in the scholarly comprehension of the period with which we worked. In 1992, James D. G. Dunn edited a book called *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*.⁴⁷ A decade later there appeared a new book with a similar title, though with a totally different approach: *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.⁴⁸ These titles illustrate the change of attitude toward the question dealt with in the book on Jewish believers in Jesus. Skarsaune was very much aware of the change; his own research had in many ways gone in the same direction. But the book project was initiated already in 1995 and the contributions were written before the paradigm shift became evident and commonly accepted in the scholarly world. Thus, at the time Skarsaune wrote the preface – some months before publication in 2007 – the world had changed,⁴⁹ and the editors could very much have wished that this was the time for starting the project, not finishing it. Since this was not the case, they had to live with a publication with some weaknesses.

Some of these defects were seen by reviewers. One of the critics, the Jewish scholar Burton L. Visotzky (quoted in the preface of *Jewish Believers in Jesus*), was leaning towards the conclusion that the book should not have been published: “Such a comprehensive overview might have been served better by waiting until a new consensus

45 In *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60 (2009): 750–752, 751.

46 Skarsaune in the introduction to *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, 7.

47 James D. G. Dunn (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135: The Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, Durham, September, 1989* (WUNT 66; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992).

48 Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

49 This is clearly realized in Skarsaune’s preface, pp. xii–xiii. See also “Jødedom og kristendom i antikken: Behov for et nytt paradigme?” [“Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity: In Need of a New Paradigm?”], *Lære og Liv* 35, no. 1 (2008): 12–17.

emerges.”⁵⁰ (One wonders, however, if such a consensus will ever come.) Another reviewer (and co-editor of the book *The Ways That Never Parted*) went far beyond normal scholarly fairness, claiming that the book was totally out-dated.⁵¹

Another problem related to this volume was the very subject of the book. Jewish believers in Jesus have traditionally been regarded with suspicion from both Jews and Christians. According to many Jews, a Jew confessing faith in Jesus is an apostate. Even if some contemporary Jews, even rabbis, have nuanced this understanding,⁵² it still prevails. Besides, the existence of Jewish Christians is often connected with Christian mission to the Jews, a much debated subject, especially in Europe and North America since the Second World War and the horrible experience of holocaust. Some reviewers of the book saw connections between *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* and Christian mission (because the project was initiated by the Caspari Center in Jerusalem), and were therefore critical to the approach of the book in general.⁵³ The connection between the Caspari Centre and the book project is clearly stated in the preface to the book; this is no secret. The contributors were not, however, chosen due to specific opinions on mission to the Jews; they were invited on a scholarly basis. The only expectation to them was that they had empathy with the subject of the book, not antagonism.

In retrospect, Skarsaune has said that writing about Jewish believers in Jesus was like stirring up a hornet's nest. It touches people belonging to two related but still different faiths. And it reminds us that scholarly work is never purely academic. It may have an impact on people and relations between people. This was clearly seen by Professor Wolfhart Pannenberg, who generously wrote a blurb on the book jacket of *Jewish Believers in Jesus*:

For a long time, the accepted view on the early Jewish Christian community has been that after the Jewish war against the Romans that ended in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish Christian community became a marginal phenomenon and soon disappeared in the Gentile Christian church. The contributions to the present book on Jewish believers in Jesus result in a fundamental revision of this picture. It shows that more or less close relations between Jewish believers in Jesus Christ and Judaism continued at least into the Constantinian period (4th century) in spite of the endeavors of leaders on both sides to get their view of a fundamental opposition between Judaism and Christianity generally accepted. I consider the accumulated evidence for the revision of this picture very persuasive.

50 Burton L. Visotzky, in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 427–428. Visotzky also argued that the book did not sufficiently make the distinction between rhetoric and reality, and some of the authors were criticized for anachronism in their use of rabbinic sources.

51 Adam H. Becker in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39 (2009): 45–47, 47.

52 Cf. Carol Harris-Saphiro, *Messianic Judaism, a Rabbi's Journey through Religious Change in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London/New York: Continuum, 2000).

53 See Adam H. Becker in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39 (2009): 45–47. Sabrina Inowlocki-Meister, in *Revue des études juives* 168 (2009): 291–293, also questioned the ideological basis of the project; nevertheless, she admitted that the authors had given an important contribution to the recent debate about Jewish and Christian identity.

It amounts to a strong suggestion that for a long period the disagreements concerning the person of Jesus did not prevent a continuing awareness of the fact that Jewish believer in Jesus and even Christians from the Gentiles could feel they believe in the same God as he Jews did. This view of the relationship should also have an impact on contemporary Jewish Christian dialogue.⁵⁴

1.5 Anti-Semitism, Dialogue, and Philo-Semitism

A scholar having Jews and Christians as his main focus will inevitable have to deal with the difficult history of Christian anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism. Skarsaune has written about this subject in a Norwegian context (see below), and more generally about its origin (“How Did Christian Anti-Judaism Arise?”).⁵⁵ Having Justin’s dialogue with the Jew Trypho as a central object in his research, it is no surprise that Skarsaune has also written about the dialogue between Jews and Christians more generally, both in antiquity and in modern times (all contributions in Norwegian).⁵⁶

In the public debate in Norway, he has several times warned against all forms of anti-Semitism, and he has been engaged in regular conversations with Norwegian Jews as a member of the group for contact between the Mosaic Religious Community and the Church of Norway, being appointed by Church of Norway Council of Ecumenical and International Relations, and serving in this function since 1997.⁵⁷

When The Mosaic Religious Community in Norway celebrated its centennial in 1992, church leaders took the initiative to gather a “Jubilee gift to the Jews in Norway.” Skarsaune was chairman of the steering committee for this enterprise. In 1994, he received the “Ester and Herman Kahans Dialogue Prize,” awarded by The Mosaic Religious Community, after a proposal from the legacy giver.⁵⁸ For Skarsaune, dialogue has thus been more than an academic exercise.

In connection with the jubilee for the Mosaic Religious Community in Norway, Skarsaune also co-edited a booklet called “Our elder Brother: Fragments of Judaism and Jewish Life in Norway.”⁵⁹ His own contributions in the little book were chapters

54 I quote this long statement for prospective church historians – realizing that in the future there will probably only exist copies of the book without a dust jacket!

55 “Hvordan oppstod den kristne antijudaismen?” *Ung Teologi* 38, no. 2 (2005): 5–13.

56 “Trek fra dialogen mellom jødedom og kristendom i gammel og ny tid” [“Features from the Dialogue between Judaism and Christianity in Ancient and Modern Times”], *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 56 (1985): 51–64; “Jødisk-kristen dialog på ekumenisk område: en orientering” [“Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Ecumenical Context: An Orientation”] in *Judendom och kristendom under de första århundradena: nordiskt patristikerprosjekt, 1982–1985* (2 vols.; Stavanger: Universitetsforlaget, 1986), 1:37–51.

57 Kontaktgruppen mellom Det Mosaiske Trossamfunn og Den norske kirke.

58 Skarsaune was informed of the award by a letter from the Mosaic Religious Community 17th of June, 1994, signed by its chairman Robert Katz: “Det er en ære og en glede å kunne meddele at styret i Det Mosaiske Trossamfund i Oslo har besluttet at Ester og Herman Kahans Dialogpris for 1994 skal tildeles Dekanus Oskar Skarsaune. Dette er i samsvar med forslag fra legat givene.”

59 Oskar Skarsaune and Inger Margrethe Gaarder (eds.), *Vår eldre bror: Fragmenter av jødedom og jødisk liv i Norge* (Oslo: Credo, 1992).