

Review of Dauermann, *Converging Destinies*

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Dauermann S 2017. *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians, and the Mission of God*. Eugene: Cascade Books.

1. Background of the Author

Anyone familiar with the development of modern Messianic Judaism will be acquainted with the name of Stuart Dauermann. Founder of the Hashivenu think tank and early pioneer of Messianic Jewish worship, Dauermann is among small group of leaders who charted an unknown landscape—the theology and praxis of Jews who believe Jesus (or Yeshua, his Hebrew name, as Dauermann naturally calls him). Dauermann holds a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary and has authored several books from a Messianic Jewish perspective.²

¹ The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

² Readers of this journal may not be aware of the distinction between Jewish Christians and Messianic Jews. Jewish Christians group comprise Jews who essentially convert to Christianity and adopt Christian tradition and identity in favour of Jewish tradition and identity. Messianic Jews are Jews who live out the Jewish life as a matter of covenantal faithfulness, whilst trusting completely and only in Jesus for salvation.

2. Purpose and Approach

The author sets out to call Jewish and Christian communities (with Messianic Jews among them) to help one-another serve their respective calling in the mission of God, who will eventually bring their destinies to convergence. Dauermann's thesis is that God's love for the people of Israel (the Jewish people, not another 'Israel') is everlasting. After spelling this out clearly in the first chapter, he reviews historical developments, first in Western Christian theology and then in Judaism, to establish 'how we got here.' This continues into an exploration of 'where we are going,' building on both Protestant and Catholic progress plus models of Jewish and Christian destinies, to propose a new model. The author then explores his model's missiological implications and concerns, and situates his proposal in relation to a bilateral ecclesiology. Finally, he provides advice and cautions for Messianic Jews working towards the convergence of Jewish and Christian destinies.

3. Structure

3.1. Prologue

The Prologue begins with Dauermann's conviction that each Jewish and Christian community has elements which God would affirm and others which he would rebuke. Therefore, the author promotes a relationship between these communities 'characterized by a proleptic openness to divine reassurance and rebuke'; despite historical conflict, they should be willing to serve together toward an eschatological vision of reconciliation and renewal (p. 1).

Dauermann presents himself as one who dwells in the margins; as a believer, he is somewhat unacceptable to his own Jewish community; as

a Messianic Jew who upholds Torah, he is frowned upon by many in the Christian tradition. Yet his ministry (and professional work) entails bringing Jews and Christians together for dialogue in an atmosphere of humility and vulnerability, each aware of his premise that God has both affirmation and correction to issue it. The Prologue also considers the critical subject of social location and groups—what makes you one of ‘us’ and others ‘not us’ but ‘other.’ Can Israel and the church each emerge from what ‘the other’ considers to be in the margins, especially concerning God’s ultimate mission, such that they can discover and serve it together?

The Prologue continues to speak of the historical ‘Hebrew Christian paradigm’ and the more recent ‘Jews for Jesus paradigm’ before discussing various Messianic Jewish paradigms and that held by Hashivenu, the author’s own brainchild.

3.2. Part one: What is our starting point?

Part One comprises just one chapter, which provides the foundation for the theological development to follow. The name of the chapter answers the question above: ‘God’s everlasting love for Israel.’ Dauermann writes briefly on election, covenant and supersessionism, borrowing from Douglas Harink to contradict N.T. Wright on these topics.

3.3. Part two: Where have we been?

Part Two begins with an objection, in chapter two, against the tradition of ‘Western Christian Theologizing,’ which the author regards as ‘skewed’. Christian tradition presents ‘another Jesus,’ ‘another *ekklesia*’ and ‘another consummation’ to what he sees in scripture. The Bible, rather, presents a *Jewish* Jesus—the Son of David; a *bilateral ekklesia* (comprising God’s people of Israel and the nations); and an eschatology

marked by the hope of a *new creation* in which national distinctions are preserved (along the lines of Craig Blasing's outlook). In the next chapter (three), Dauermann provides readers several Jewish perspectives on their own mission (as part of God's mission) and on Christians (who are, for Jews, 'the other').

3.4. Part three: Where are we going?

In his fourth chapter, Dauermann sketches Protestant developments over the past century, primarily reflected in the World Council of Churches and in the Lausanne Movement, with special focus on their theology of the Jewish people as part of the *missio dei* (mission of God)—a theology constrained by supersessionist assumptions. Next is the author's treatment of Roman Catholic mission in relation to that of Israel. By contrast with Protestantism, Catholic theology on the Jewish people has proceeded significantly since the publication of *Nostra Aetate* (a product of Vatican II). However, it is still a work in progress. The same chapter (five) ends with four questions that frame the remainder of the volume.

With this background in place, Dauermann then outlines, in chapter six, a variety of models used by Jews and Christians to describe both their own role in the *missio dei* and the other's role. Dauermann then builds on the sixth (one put forward in Soulen's seminal *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* [1996]) to produce a model in which Jewish and Christian communities converge (hence, 'Converging Destinies'). This model is the author's concise and optimistic answer to the question, 'Where are we going?'

The subject of chapter seven refocuses on mission: What gospel should believers commend to 'all Israel?' This presents an appeal to Christians to reconsider biblical hope for the Jewish people, some problems with

the way the Gospel is often presented to them—as *bad* news insofar as Israel’s election is concerned—and the obstacles caused by supersessionism, antinomianism, and spiritualised eschatology. Here, the author’s Messianic Jewish perspective is quite apparent, as also in chapter eight, where he critiques Kinzer’s bilateral ecclesiology as lacking a missiological dimension. Dauermann then offers what he believes is a ‘robust postsupersessionist missiology.’

In the ninth and final chapter of Part Three, the author addresses his fellow Messianic Jews and, particularly, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (UMJC). He calls them to a narrow way of covenant obedience so that they may fulfil God’s purpose for them as a remnant of their people. Two ‘seeds’ are essential to this task: firstly, living proleptically as a sign, demonstration and catalyst of the (good) future in the present, and secondly, remembrance of Israel’s ‘holy past’ to catalyse critically important elements of their covenant community. Four noxious ‘weeds’ are also described, after which the author discusses the role of the Messianic Jewish remnant, especially *vis-à-vis* its Jewish kin.

An epilogue serves to call Jewish and Christian communities to serve together in the mission of God, helping one-another to reach their destinies which, Dauermann believes, will ultimately converge.

4. Evaluation

4.1. Achievement

Dauermann is partially successful in his presentation of *Converging Destinies*. I anticipate that the concept will gather a large following as I believe it to be sound, but it will take time since the target audience is

so diverse—from Jewish to Protestant, Catholic and Messianic Jewish. The persuasion of the author’s approach is somewhat compromised and his model of convergence lacks detail, but the call he makes is clear. Personally, I appreciate this new trig beacon in the literary landscape of Messianic Jewish theology and I commend the publisher for adding it to its growing offerings in postsupersessionist literature.³ The remainder of this section combines praise with criticism.

4.2. General comments

Dauermann is ambitious in the range of his target audience but it was excellent to get a perspective on all of their theologies (especially their perceptions of one-another) from a single vantage point. It is a foregone conclusion that some of the author’s presuppositions may not be accepted by all his readers, so consensus is evasive. Also, while the historical events and developments are hardly likely to be disputed, Christian readers may need further persuasion that they lead to the starting point for Dauermann’s discussion. His summary of key literature on Israel’s election may surprise Evangelical readers if they have not been primed by these writings.⁴ In any case, he does well to challenge the church to remember God’s everlasting love for Israel and that Israel ‘is destined to be her [the church’s] senior partner in the consummation of the mission of God’ (p. 26). Dauermann can be blunt but his claims warrant careful inquiry.

In his presentation of various eschatological models regarding the destinies of Jews and Christians, I was relieved that Dauermann did not dismiss Soulen’s ‘complementarian’ model but instead built on it.

³ Interested readers should refer to the *New Testament After Supersessionism* series: <https://wipfandstock.com/catalog/series/view/id/57/>.

⁴ See, for example, Michael Wyschogrod’s writings collected in Soulen 2006.

Likewise, despite criticism that Kinzer's bilateral ecclesiology has an underdeveloped missiology, Dauermann strives to complete that which is lacking rather than starting over. Unfortunately, scriptural support for theological positions taken is limited (though, in my view, correct). Dauermann provides some proof texts but tends to lean on the work of others whom he cites and frequently quotes at some length. Chapter one, for example, presents a long summary of Douglas Harink's refutation of the supersessionist stance taken by N.T. Wright. I found this representation of others' writings helpful but some readers, looking for more original content, may be critical of it.

The most striking statement in my reading of *Converging Destinies* is made repeatedly, starting on page one: 'whenever God speaks to his people, his word is always a mixture of ... reassurance and rebuke.' (Dauermann is speaking of both Jews and Christians as 'God's people'.) One only has to think of the prophets of Israel, or of the Christ's letters to the seven churches (Rev 2–3), to validate Dauermann's claim; it has increased my tolerance for a wider variety of religious traditions, both Jewish and Christian. I was looking for a way to do that but I was stuck on biblical texts that caused me to be offended by them. Dauermann's point has helped me greatly to understand that the divine perspective on every tradition, whether global or local in scale, is generally 'both-and' rather than 'either-or': the Lord has both affirmation and criticism for them all.

Dauermann's own critique of others varies in nature. At one point, he faults the UMJC for being too accepting of member congregations that fail to uphold its Definitional Statement, but he acknowledges that he was chairman of the UMJC's theological committee at the time. Thus, in issuing criticism, he humbly includes himself among those criticised. At other points, the author's critique of others seems unduly rough. My

particular concern was his treatment of Mark Kinzer's *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism* (2005) which has shaped a lot of my own thinking. While Dauermann acknowledges Kinzer's contribution as valid and beneficial, at other points he overemphasizes Kinzer's failure to articulate, prioritise and incorporate a missiological dimension. From my perspective, these two theologians have different foci and different strengths; it would have been better for Dauermann simply to state that he wishes to contribute what he views as vital to the foundation that Kinzer already laid. It is unrealistic to expect one person to have laid a complete foundation.

I found the history, from the World Missions Conference of 1910 to developments in the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Movement, tremendously helpful in understanding how these latter groups view and act toward the children of Israel. It would have been valuable to relate John Stott's theology of Israel to that of the Lausanne Movement (in which Stott had a major influence). Dauermann also misses some key developments in the Evangelical, ecumenical and Roman Catholic camps—but I only discovered them thanks to the book's stimulation.⁵ Many readers will benefit from Dauermann's summary of Protestant and Catholic mission in relation to Israel, both within their own tradition and in the other's.

⁵ For further investigation, consider the World Evangelical Alliance's position in the 1989 *Willowbank Declaration* and the 2008 *Berlin Declaration*; the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelism's statements in *The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (Lausanne Occasional Paper 2, 1978) and *Christian Witness to the Jewish People* (Lausanne Occasional Paper 7, 1980); the 2016 World Council of Churches' *Statement on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process*; and the brief but important article of Pope John XXIII, *Our eyes have been cloaked* (1963).

4.3. SATS

How does *Converging Destinies* align with the focus of SATS (the publisher of this journal)? SATS readers might well ask: Is it Bible-based, Christ-centred, and Spirit-led? I would argue that it is, and the chapter (four) that focuses on Protestant mission should be prescribed reading for our students. This does not mean it will (or should) be digested easily. As far as Israel's election is concerned, Dauermann writes in opposition to Christopher Wright, highly regarded among SATS faculty as a leading Evangelical scholar and contributor to the Cape Town Commitment. Dauermann also takes on other scholars popular among Evangelical readers, most notably the late John Stott and NT Wright (both for their supersessionism). On the other hand, Charles van Engen, a missiologist with SATS affiliation, has previously endorsed Dauermann's theological contributions in the same vein. Even though Dauermann comes from quite a different perspective from SATS' Evangelical Christian tradition, his book may be a useful resource for missiologists at SATS and other evangelical schools. In fact, the foreword is written by Calvin L. Smith, Principal of Kings Evangelical Divinity School in the UK.

4.4. Structure

One weakness was particularly notable to me: structural arrangement is unbalanced, with some chapters or sections being very long and others truncated. Several chapters could be published on their own; the subtitle could have been extended with to say, 'Essays on Jews, Christians and the Mission of God.' Much of the chapters on Protestant and Catholic developments would seem to fit better under Part Two (Where have we been?) than Part Three (Where are we going?) Chapter three ends with 'some conclusions' which I was not persuaded had been reached; rather, they seemed a summary of the author's model of

converging destinies yet to follow. I also found the progression confusing in places, e.g. chapter five, on Catholic theology, ends with four questions to orientate the reader for what lies ahead, but then proceeds to partially answer the questions—each one progressively more, ultimately presenting some discussion of Messianic Jewish theology.

Most surprisingly, the model of converging destinies of Jews and Christians only fills three pages. Chapter six (near the middle of the book), which the book's title suggests should be the climax, is disproportionately short. I had expected the topic of converging destinies to be fully fleshed out, and was left wondering, Is that all? There is more, here and there, but not enough for me to feel well-informed. Instead of the model's introduction leading to a chapter's discussion on it, the next chapter changes abruptly to a revised conference presentation on evangelism to Israel. I also felt the book needs a proper concluding chapter to review and wrap everything up. Instead, the epilogue brings in new data which cannot fully be discussed there.

4.5. Writing style

Dauermann does not attempt to present his missiology objectively, as though he has developed it as a merely rational exercise. He freely tells of his personal involvement and experiences on his journey of faith, and how these shaped his beliefs. I believe this is good—faith cannot be merely propositional—and certainly no-one can question the author's deep, personal investment in the work. In this regard, the Prologue, a 'missiological biography,' will surely become an important historical record in some future reconstruction of Messianic Jewish history.

Dauermann often writes in metaphors, uses imagery, and leaves the reader to fill in some blanks. This style suits his purpose—he is not

simply providing facts, but calling his readers to action. However, at times I was uncomfortable with informal writing (from blog posts) which seemed too casual for the purpose. The author also coins new terms (notably *synerjoy*, *cryptosupersessionist* / *cryptosupersessionism* and *inreach*) which may work for some readers but not all. Regardless, I found the definition he provides for cryptosupersessionism as helpful as the identification of it. Indeed, Christian theology often bears ‘an unconscious cluster of presuppositions assuming the expiration, setting aside, or suspension of that status and those status markers formerly attached to the Jewish people’ (p. 161).

Apart from structural issues, the book needs a careful eye to weed out minor errors and oversights which detract slightly from the overall impression.

5. Final Comments

Converging Destinies is a stimulating read and a valuable addition to several fields, including missiology, Jewish-Christian relations, postsupersessionism and Messianic Judaism. Dauermann prompts theological thought and praxis in his own idiosyncratic way, and he deserves to be read by the Evangelical audience targeted by this journal. Though the book has its flaws, they do not detract from the validity of the message itself—the convergence of Jews and Christians in the mission of God. May it come speedily and soon, and in our day!

Reference List

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Soulen RK 1996. *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*.
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