

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, *From Enemy to Friend:
Jewish Wisdom and the Pursuit of Peace.*

Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,
2014. Pp. 273, \$17.75.

Giovanna Czander
Dominican College

Is peace possible when conflicts are deeply rooted in individual's and groups' histories and identities? Rabbi Amy Eilberg continues her vanguard approach to this question while drawing from centuries-old Jewish traditions to search for answers applicable to today's conflicts. Rabbi Eilberg, the first woman ordained a Conservative rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, has extensive experience in spiritual direction, hospice care, peace building, and interfaith dialogue. She is one of the founders of the Jewish Healing Movement. Currently, Rabbi Eilberg teaches at the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in St. Paul, Minnesota, and directs interfaith dialogue programs for the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning.

Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 2015)
109–110 © 2015

From Enemy to Friend reflects a passionate commitment to pursuing peace. Eilberg's approach to conflict begins with the individual. Before addressing the dynamics of interpersonal conflict at the intracommunal, intergroup, or international levels, Eilberg explores the dynamics of conflicts experienced by the individual. She draws on the findings of neuroscience and conflict resolution theory to help identify human responses to what is perceived as the "other," the "different," and even "the enemy," and highlights that "fear" is at the root of conflicts at all levels. This analysis can be useful for understanding different types of conflicts, at both the interpersonal and the communal levels.

While the book's main goal is to promote peace building in conflicts both within current American Jewry and between Israelis and Palestinians, Eilberg's research into Jewish wisdom is applicable to a variety of circumstances and to individuals of any religious (or nonreligious) convictions. For example, genuine dialogue, in the Jewish tradition explored in the book, is rooted in love for the other. "The Hasidic movement . . . teaches that the true meaning of love of one's neighbor is not that it is a command from God which we are to fulfill, but that through it and in it we meet God."¹ This wisdom of the Jewish tradition is addressed to everyone, as everyone experiences conflicts and everyone can make the conscious decision to cultivate and practice spiritual virtues such as awareness, kindness, compassion, and generosity toward the self and other human beings. The author summarizes this point in the following way:

1. Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 212, cit. at 46.

Peacebuilding, as I understand it, is not the exclusive purview of diplomats, elected officials, or conflict specialists. It is not only for people who live in international conflict zones or violent neighborhoods or work in mediation centers. It is for all people who take seriously the biblical call to “see peace and pursue it.” It is a way of being in the world, a way of bringing peace, of being peace in everyday encounters, in personal and professional relationships, in the communities of which we are a part, and in our life as a nation. . . . Living out a commitment to peace is a full-time job, something we may do everywhere we interact with people in our lives. It is for all of us, and it is a life’s work. (222)

One has to be impressed by the way this book combines in a masterful way intellectual knowledge and lived experience, wisdom and readability. It is in itself a resource for thinking about peace and peace building for all individuals. But it can also be a powerful peace-making tool for groups and congregations whose individual members are open to exploring their own inner conflicts and to bringing their newly found inner peace to bear on broader conflicts.