

Susan TALVE and Carla Mae STREETER, *Avoiding the Sin of Certitude: A Rabbi and a Theologian in Feminine Interfaith Conversations from Disputation to Dialogue*. St. Louis MI, Central Reform Congregation and Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2020, 14 × 20 cm, xv-172 p., ISBN 978-0-57880-788-1

Louis Roy, o.p.

Volume 75, Number 3, September–December 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1102517ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1102517ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

ISSN

0316-5345 (print)

2562-9905 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Roy, L. (2023). Review of [Susan TALVE and Carla Mae STREETER, *Avoiding the Sin of Certitude: A Rabbi and a Theologian in Feminine Interfaith Conversations from Disputation to Dialogue*. St. Louis MI, Central Reform Congregation and Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2020, 14 × 20 cm, xv-172 p., ISBN 978-0-57880-788-1]. *Science et Esprit*, 75(3), 466–468. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1102517ar>

averroïste que saint Thomas accepte tout en le remaniant en fonction de ses positions théologiques. Enfin, la troisième partie synthétise les résultats des deux premières parties – ce qu'elle fait en trois temps: le rôle de l'âme et la transformation du corps à la résurrection, la béatitude parfaite tant du corps que de l'âme, et les qualités et opérations des corps glorieux.

Nous avons trois réserves à l'égard de ce livre.

Premièrement, qu'on nous permette de déplorer l'absence de référence à l'important article de Louis-B. Geiger, o.p., intitulé « Saint Thomas d'Aquin et le composé humain », publié dans le numéro 35 de *Recherches et Débats*, chez Arthème Fayard en 1961. Cette absence est étonnante, étant donné que le frère Geiger enseigna à l'Université de Fribourg, c'est-à-dire à l'université même où le frère Emery, l'auteur de la Préface, enseigne depuis de nombreuses années, et étant donné que le frère Frezzato était étudiant en théologie à cette même université en 2021, au moment où son livre parut.

Deuxièmement, il importe, à notre avis, de ne pas considérer la position de saint Thomas sur la résurrection comme finale en théologie catholique. Dans sa note au bas de la p. 21, l'auteur écrit: « Notons que l'élaboration *philosophique* (anthropologie philosophique) de saint Thomas concernant la résurrection vaut aussi bien pour les damnés que pour les bienheureux. » (L'italisation est de l'auteur) Or cette affirmation est exacte pour saint Jean (qui parle de la résurrection et des bienheureux et des damnés), mais pas pour saint Paul (qui parle de la résurrection des bienheureux seulement).

Troisièmement, la conception thomasienne inclut uniquement la résurrection du corps, pas celle de l'âme; aussi, pourquoi ne pas envisager la résurrection comme celle du corps *et de l'âme*, donc de toute la personne humaine, en suivant saint Paul à cet égard?

Il reste que Frezzato, qui connaît bien tout le corpus thomasien, nous donne dans son livre une analyse adéquate des nuances de la pensée de Thomas d'Aquin sur la personne humaine ressuscitée. Il s'agit donc d'une belle contribution à cet aspect de la pensée du docteur angélique.

Louis ROY, o.p.

Faculté de théologie

Collège universitaire dominicain, Ottawa

Susan TALVE and Carla Mae STREETER, **Avoiding the Sin of Certitude: A Rabbi and a Theologian in Feminine Interfaith Conversations from Disputation to Dialogue**. St. Louis MI, Central Reform Congregation and Aquinas Institute of Theology, 2020, 14 × 20 cm, xv-172 p., ISBN 978-0-57880-788-1.

This book is the dialogue between its two authors, who both live in St. Louis, Missouri; one of them is a rabbi and the other one is a Catholic theologian. It is the outcome of twenty-eight years of conversations between them. The Introduction opens with several provocative questions, the first one being, "How does one disagree and not just 'agree to disagree'?" (p. ix). The answer comes a bit later: "It is at this

soul level that we truly dialogue? [...] At this level we may not agree but we can hear and understand.” (p. 7-8)

The book enunciates sound principles of interreligious dialogue and spells out the authors' living context: the reciprocal hospitality that they enjoyed at each other's homes during their exchanges; the feminine consciousness – both are women – marked by a social agenda whose standard, they claim, is still male; the set of meanings and values, termed “the garment,” which each of the partners has received from her tradition; beneath the garment, the body (the laws, rituals and stories), which are relative to varying perspectives; in the body, the soul (the essence of the beliefs that animate persons); and the Soul of the soul (the greater whole thanks to which all humans are connected, namely the Mystery).

While the garment and the body are visible, the soul and the Soul of the soul are invisible. Consequently the sacred texts that refer to the garment and the body are not meant to be taken literally. The difference between the visible and the invisible throughout every tradition helps people recognize *similar* degrees of importance in various religious streams; as the rabbi correctly asserts, at the level of the Soul of the soul “we are One in the Mystery. We are not completely ‘other’.” (p. 8).

The writers insist on the centrality of listening to one another and to God, rather than engaging in confrontations whereby one would endeavour to consolidate one's home turf. Listening in humility ensures that all are learning from each other and, as a result, that they enrich the understanding of their own tradition. The volume provides the readers with many instances of gaining knowledge about the other's faith. To traditional narratives, its authors add some of their own, which fittingly update the traditional ones. Furthermore, they discuss quite a few other topics, such as suffering, salvation, proselytism or evangelization, sexuality, racism, and women in ministry.

A caveat: I am not sure that the title *Avoiding the Sin of Certitude* is adequate. Regrettably the authors' construal of certitude is *always* negative, although I agree that certitude is *at times* a distortion of faith, which amounts to an idolatry in those who absolutize their religious opinions. For example, Streeter rightly states: “If we ever think we know it all we are in danger of falling into unwarranted certitude. Certitude is stopping too soon with too little.” (p. 105) And Talve rightly declares: “If our beliefs and our doctrines become so absolute, so certain, they do not leave space for the listening.” (p. 111) However, these two assertions are ambiguous. In this respect, to my mind the four steps taken from Lonergan (described on p. 101) apply to science and to common sense, but *not* to divine revelation, which is not the mere outcome of human experience, thinking and judging, according to the traditional Roman Catholic view and to the view of many Jews.

In my reading, what is missing in Talve's and Streeter's account is the distinction between truth and meaning. Insofar as *truth* is concerned, it is revealed by God and received by believers on the *third* level of human intentionality (faith's assent); insofar as *meaning* is concerned, it consists in an appropriation of a tradition, which is ever moving forward on the *second* level of intentionality (theology). Moreover, adhesion to a revealed message requires a religious love, which Lonergan places on the *fourth* level of intentionality (the heart's consent). Such a differentiation of various levels allows us to realize that we need a *positive* construal of certitude.

For Catholics and Jews who want to receive truth from God – truth that is dear to them –, is such truth negotiable? And are Talve and Streeter prepared to give up the several cases of convictions on which they have strongly agreed? So, doesn't sincere and fruitful dialogue require a number of certainties (*truths*) that enable the partners to be flexible regarding the numerous *meanings* of those certainties? In other words, aren't truths absolute, hence non-negotiable, and aren't meanings relative, hence susceptible of being improved?

Despite this weakness about the partners' exchanges, I would say that readers will find much wisdom in this book, with the advantage that most of it is an easy read. Entire sections are so helpful that they are worth pondering again. It is refreshing to hear each of these two voices – Jewish and Catholic – reinterpret her own tradition in the light of both the Scriptures and the contemporary need to overcome cultural, social and political biases. By doing so, they practise *tikkun olam*, that is, they repair our planet, which is in poor shape. I believe Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* (mentioned on p. 171 of Talve's and Streeter's book) amount to the Catholic version of this great challenge.

Louis ROY, O.P.

Faculty of Theology
Dominican University College, Ottawa