

ANTHONY J. SALDARINI (1941–2001):
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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How did an Italian-Irish Catholic from Boston become an academic authority on early Judaism and rabbinic literature? The short answer is that God blessed Tony Saldarini with intelligence and curiosity, love for study, and literary and religious sensitivity. The long answer emerges from the course of a rich and productive life lived just a few days short of sixty years that yielded an impressive record of teaching accomplishments and scholarly publications.

Born in Boston on September 18, 1941, Tony attended St. Kevin's Grammar School in Dorchester. Tony's father was a teacher in the Boston public school system. Tony attended Boston College High School from which he graduated in 1959. He received his A.B. and M.A. degrees from Boston College 1965 and 1966, respectively. Thus according to a sociological category known mainly to those who live in the Boston area, Tony was a "Triple Eagle" (the "eagle" being the symbol of the teams at Boston College). He eventually taught at Boston College for over twenty-five years (1975–2001).

Having entered the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1959, Tony completed the equivalent of a double major in Greek and Latin classical literature and in philosophy at Boston College while also beginning the study of Hebrew. He quickly became fascinated by the Jewish world in which early Christianity took shape and that developed into the later Rabbinic movement.

With a solid philological training but no real exposure to Rabbinics, Tony began his doctoral program in 1966 in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at Yale University. Tony also spent a year (1968–1969) studying Rabbinics at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His doctoral dissertation (1971) under the direction of Professor Judah Goldin was a translation of and commentary on Version B of *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan*)—a complement to Goldin's own work on Version A.

After further Catholic theological study at the Weston Jesuit School

of Theology in Cambridge, MA, Tony taught in the department of religious studies at Loyola University of New Orleans from 1972 to 1975. From 1975 to his death in 2001 he taught in the Department of Theology at Boston College, where he served as assistant professor (1975–1978), associate professor (1978–1990), and full professor (1990–2001). At Boston College he taught basic courses designed for undergraduates and more advanced material to graduate students. He covered both Testaments (and large parts of the Western intellectual tradition) and also found opportunities to teach courses on apocalyptic literature, Judaism and the New Testament, and Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation.

Tony left the Society of Jesus in 1978 and married Maureen Cusack shortly thereafter. She also is a teacher, in the Lexington public school system. They have two sons, Daniel and Brian. They had a wonderful marriage and loved each other very much.

Tony was a gifted teacher—articulate, logical, and challenging. He delighted in helping students grow in the critical analysis of texts and ideas and in expressing themselves in a clear and logical manner. He loved Boston College and its students, and he was perfectly suited for teaching there. Its Catholic and Jesuit atmosphere was his intellectual and spiritual home. At the same Tony brought to this milieu an interest in the serious academic study of Judaism, which eventually bore fruit in the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College directed by Philip Cunningham.

Through most of his life Tony had health problems (some inherited from his parents), but he managed to live always in a positive and productive manner. His chronic leukemia (which he had for over ten years) turned into lymphoma in early 2000, and he was not able to continue teaching after March, 2000. He underwent a bone-marrow transplant in September of that year. Throughout this difficult period and until his death, Maureen cared for Tony with an admirable solicitude. He died at home in Newtonville, MA, on September 16, 2001, a few days before his sixtieth birthday.

As a specialist in early Judaism and rabbinic literature Tony served as a bridge between Jews and Christians. He came to know and appreciate Judaism on its own terms, not merely as “background” to the New Testament. He wrote important scholarly books on *’Abot deRabbi Nathan* and related Rabbinic treatises, the Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes), and Matthew as a Christian-Jewish Gospel, along with many other scholarly and popular works (see his full bibliog-

raphy, which follows). He participated in various forms of Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Tony approached the study of Judaism and early Christianity with both passion and objectivity. Jewish scholars respected his work, and Christians relied on his learning and judgment about ancient Jewish texts and current scholarship on them. These volumes produced by Jewish and Christian scholars on the texts and topics that Tony loved is a fitting tribute to his memory. He was a fine scholar and a good friend, and we miss him.