

*Ezer Ke-negdo:*  
Toward a Theology of Jewish-Christian  
Partnership

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***Ezer Ke-negdo: Toward a Theology of Jewish-Christian Partnership***  
by  
**Michael Lotker**

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Abraham's Troubled Offspring**

These days it is often fashionable to stress the close relationship among that Judaism, Christianity and Islam since their adherents all worship "the God of Abraham." Indeed it is true that Jews and Christians trace our people and covenant to Abraham through the line of his second son Isaac while Muslims trace their people back through his first son, Ishmael. The fact that all of these religious traditions (whose members make up about one half of the world's population) have had so much enmity for one another surprises some observers who would focus on the commonalities among the traditions and confirms the "sibling rivalry" expectations of others.

Regardless of one's theories and expectations concerning family dynamics, there can be no doubt that the relationships among these three great monotheistic religions have been troubled. Focusing on Christianity (for purposes of this thesis), tensions appear between it and Judaism from the former's inception. Chapter 2 presents an overview of this history of mutual intolerance. This 1900 year history of enmity reached its climax in the events of World War II; the Nazi Holocaust or *Shoah*.<sup>1</sup>

While Nazism was not Christianity, scholars agree that the *Shoah* could not have taken place without the background of Christian anti-Jewish teaching. As a Christian scholar, Christopher M. Leighton put it: "The passivity, if not the active complicity, of

Christianity in the face of the Nazi genocidal assault on the Jews has called into question the spiritual and moral credibility of the Christian tradition.”<sup>2</sup> Leighton also presents the task for Christianity: “the task of neutralizing supersessionist patterns entails nothing less than the reenvisioning of the Christian narrative – from beginning to end.”<sup>3</sup> The *Shoah* shocked the Christian world into understanding that such mass murder was a logical result of several important elements of Christian theology. In its aftermath, most (but not all) Christian denominations have rejected:

- Antisemitism
- Historical myths such as the accusation that Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus
- The theology of Christian supersessionism: that the Christian covenant replaces an obsolete Jewish covenant.
- The idea that Jews should convert to Christianity to be “saved.”

Chapter 3 presents some detail on the ways that Christianity has revised its theology to include a much more accepting view of Judaism. In a very real way, this revision and understanding has been “purchased” by the deaths of six million Jews.

The subject of this thesis is the Jewish response to these developments. While Judaism has always tolerated Christianity and other religions, Jews have, until very recently, largely ignored the issue of a genuine theology of pluralism. Although there have been historical seeds of Jewish thought on the positive role of Christianity (and Islam), these elements have not constituted the mainstream of Jewish opinion. I have presented an

overview of such thinking in Chapter 4 to show that the perspective of this paper is not completely novel or without precedent.

In my study of this matter, I am inspired by Shay J. D. Cohen who observed: "The fundamental issue, I think, can be reduced to a single phrase: to work out a theology of the other. It is not enough simply to believe in tolerance, not enough simply to allow the other's existence. Rather, what we need is a theology on each side to validate the other's existence."<sup>4</sup> He concluded his discussion with a question: "Now I pose to Jews the same question that I posed ... to Catholics: Why are there Christians in the world? Moreover, why are there so many Christians in the world? An even more powerful question is why there are so many gentiles in the world, Christian and non-Christian"<sup>5</sup>

David Novak adds that such questions must be addressed if only to continue a meaningful dialogue. "True dialogue requires the adherents of each tradition to find justification for the other tradition from within his or her own tradition."<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, I mean to join those Jewish thinkers (detailed in Chapter 4) who are taking up this challenge. In doing so, I am continually mindful of avoiding the simultaneous temptations to naïve optimism and paralyzing despair. Jews before me have been too quick to declare an end to Christian antisemitism.<sup>7</sup> Consider this proclamation by an Ausburg rabbinic synod in 1871: "A new, highly important turning point in history is now at hand. The spirit of true knowledge of God and pure ethics fills more and more the consciousness of humanity in government, art and science. Judaism cheerfully recognizes in this the approach of its ideas which have illuminated its historical march."<sup>8</sup> While there is danger

in naiveté, there is, I believe, equal danger in accepting the inevitability of continuing the tragic mistakes of the past.

It is important to stress that a Jewish theology of Christianity does not mean that Jews should become Christians or that Judaism should accept Christian faith claims as true. As pointed out by Novak "The wrong worship of the right God is called 'strange service' (*avodah zarah*)" in our tradition. "In fact, Judaism requires Jews to die as martyrs rather than exchange Judaism for anything else, even something as similar to Judaism as Christianity."<sup>9</sup>

It is the thesis of this paper that:

- Judaism does not hold a monopoly on understanding the nature of God or religious truth.
- Since Judaism does not require or even encourage non-Jews to convert to Judaism but does look toward a messianic goal of the entire world coming to know God, there must be a valid role (dare I say a *kosher* role?) for non-Jewish religions that recognize a deity consistent with the God of Abraham (these would of course include Christianity and Islam, but could include other traditions).
- Christianity can be seen as playing a valid role from a Jewish perspective in the service of God just as Judaism is increasingly seen as doing so from a Christian perspective.
- Judaism and Christianity have much to teach each other and much to learn from each other. Each can understand the other as an *Ezer Ke-negdo* in the literal

Hebrew meaning of the term as being a helper (In the highest sense of the word since God is described as such in Ps. 121:1-2 and in other places; see discussion in chapter 5) in tension or opposition to the other.

Such a mutual understanding of the role of the other in the divine plan for creation is, I believe, necessary if we are to truly move beyond the horrors of the past 1900 years toward a time when Jews and Christians (and by extension, members of other faith traditions) can overcome their differences in pursuit of our mission *letaken olam bemalkhut Shaddai* – to repair the world under the rule of God. It is our cooperative role in this partnership, as an *Ezer Ke-negdo* to one another that, I believe, should guide interfaith relations in the future.

This thesis is intended to offer perspectives from a Jewish point of view on the nature of Jewish-Christian partnership. Ultimately, Judaism and Christianity will have to work out a true theology of the other. I hope that this analysis and my future work will contribute to the development of a Jewish theology of Christianity.



## **Chapter 2: Our History of Mutual Intolerance**

In the chapters that follow this, I present my understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism as one that has historical seeds of pluralism and is hopefully growing towards an even stronger partnership, one I call *Ezer Ke-negdo*. Read in isolation, these chapters might give the reader the mistaken impression that the history of the relationship between the two religions has been generally positive; nothing could be further from the truth. The recent developments leading toward a better relationship between Judaism and Christianity are remarkable precisely because they represent such a dramatic change from history. This chapter provides a brief overview of this history of mutual intolerance.

### **Christian Intolerance of Judaism**

Theologically, understanding Christian antipathy towards Judaism seems straightforward. Jesus was a Jew whose message was directed to other Jews. Those Jews who didn't become Christian rejected this teaching. As a result, Jews in the early days of Christianity, and in every age since, represent a challenge to the doctrine that the Hebrew Bible clearly and unambiguously points to Jesus as Messiah and God incarnate. We Jews read the same Hebrew scripture as do Christians, hold these same words to be holy and yet come to very different conclusions regarding their meaning. The situation was further complicated by the Church's need for the continuing witness of the Jews supporting the validity of the Hebrew Scriptures. As Saint Augustine put it: "They (the Jews) were dispersed all over the world – for indeed there is no part of the earth where they are not to

be found – and thus by evidence of their own Scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

Tensions between the two religions are further exacerbated by several especially troubling elements in the Christian Scripture. Such elements are understandable when we consider that the New Testament was written during the period of maximum competition between Jews and Christians. Indeed, this period may be understood as a period of intra-Jewish dispute since the early Christians were themselves a Jewish sect. For Christianity to be correct, Judaism (or at least the Pharisees) had to be discredited. Thus Matthew seems to depict the Jews as taking the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus. And not only the Jews of that time, but the Jews of all time share the guilt. “Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on our heads and the heads of our children” (*Matthew* 27:25). Perhaps the early Christians were also trying to minimize the role of Pontius Pilate and Rome in the execution of Jesus so as to court favor with their Roman governors during this critical period.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, this verse created the seed for the idea that the Jew, no matter when he lives, is a “Christ-killer.” John planted a second recurring theme in this vein, that of Jews’ identification with the forces of evil: “Ye are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (*John* 8:44).

These elements were seized upon and amplified by the early leaders of the Church. In the words of Saint John Chrysostom of Antioch, Archbishop of Constantinople, a fourth century Church father:

"Their synagogue or school is to be set on fire ... Second, their houses are to be torn down and destroyed in the same way ... Third, they are to have all their prayerbooks and Talmudics taken from them ... Fourth, there are to be forbidden henceforth to teach ...and praise God, to thank (God), to pray (to God), to teach (of God) among us and ours ... Fifth, the Jews are to be deprived totally of walkway and streets ... Are they not 'inveterate murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil' ... God hates the Jews and always hated the Jews ... It is the duty of Christians to hate the Jews."<sup>12</sup>

A good example of the hostility that official Christianity held for Judaism were the numbers of disputations that were held. In these, a Jewish scholar was required to participate in a "debate" with Christians about matters of faith. A famous example was the disputation of 1263 in Barcelona between Moses ben Nahman (or Nahmanides, 1195?-1270) and Fra Pablo Crista, a convert to Christianity from Judaism. The principal issue for the debate, held before King James I of Aragon, was whether Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah. Nahmanides was convinced that he had won the debate and published an account of it which was subsequently subjected to strong church censure. He was, in the end, forced to leave Spain and lived the remainder of his life in Palestine.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of history, Jews were expelled from most Christian societies in which they constituted a major community. They were expelled from England in 1290, France in 1306, invited back and then expelled again in 1394, Hungary between 1349 and 1360,

Austria in 1421, various cities in Germany between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuania in 1445 and 1495, Spain in 1492, Portugal in 1497 and Bohemia and Moravia in 1744-1745. Beyond this, their settlement was restricted in Russia to the Pale of Settlement after permission was granted for entry in 1772, having been banned in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

In his early writings, Martin Luther, a founder of Protestant Christianity, spoke favorably of the Jews, believing that the excesses of the Catholic Church were a barrier to mass Jewish conversion to Christianity. In "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew," written in 1523, he hopes:

"Perhaps I will attract some of the Jews to the Christian faith. For our fools – the popes, bishops, sophists, and monks – the coarse blockheads! have until this time so treated the Jews that to be a good Christian one would have to become a Jew ... I would advise and beg everybody to deal kindly with the Jews and to instruct them in the Scriptures; in such a case we could expect them to come over to us."<sup>15</sup>

Now read what Luther writes just twenty years later, reacting to the fact that Jews have preferred not to become Christian and note how much he takes from Saint John Chrysostom. In a piece entitled "Concerning the Jews and their Lies," he writes:

"What then shall we Christians do with the damned, rejected race of Jews? ... First, their synagogues or churches should be set on fire ... And this ought to be done for the honor of God and Christianity in order that God may see that we are Christians, and that we have not

wittingly tolerated or approved of such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of His Son and His Christians. Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed ... Thirdly, they should be deprived of their prayer-books and Talmuds in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught. Fourthly, their rabbis must be forbidden under threat of death to teach any more ... Fifthly, passport and traveling privileges should be absolutely forbidden to the Jews ... Sixthly ... all their cash and valuables of silver and gold ought to be taken from them ... If, however, we are afraid that they might harm us personally, ... then let us apply the same cleverness (expulsion) as the other nations, such as France, Spain, Bohemia, etc. ... For, as has been said, God's rage is so great against them that they only become worse and worse through mild mercy, and not much better through severe mercy. Therefore away with them ... and we may be free of this insufferable devilish burden – the Jews.”<sup>16</sup>

Although the stated purpose of the Crusades of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries was to capture and free the holy land from the Muslims, at times, when the Crusaders encountered Jews during their travels, they offered the Jews the choice of conversion or death. Although some local bishops tried to protect them, entire Jewish communities were massacred with only a few accepting baptism. The Crusades caused many Jews to flee to Eastern Europe (especially to Russia and Poland) where future centuries of persecution would await.

Also prominent in the story of Christian antisemitism from the Middle Ages to the present time are three classic libels leveled against Jews, once believed by many Christians in spite of the popes' repeated condemnation of the charges:

1. Ritual Murder: The lie, spread first in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was that Jews required the blood of Christians, especially in connection with the Passover holiday. The idea was that Jews were trying to recreate the murder of Jesus. This libel has resulted in both individual Jews and entire Jewish communities being put on trial and executed, in spite of the fact that Jewish law specifically prohibits the consumption of *any* blood from *any* animal.
2. Plots to Poison Christians: The culmination of this libel was the accusation that Jews were responsible for the Black Death which killed one third of Europe's population in 1348-9. The verdict of one Swiss court held all Jews over the age of seven responsible for the Plague and subject to execution. Children under seven were baptized and raised as Christians.<sup>17</sup> Needless to say, the murder of anyone, Jew, Christian or otherwise is prohibited by Jewish law in the strongest possible terms. It is the only crime for which capital punishment is specified in every book of the Torah.
3. Desecration of the Host: In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, transubstantiation, the miraculous transformation of the communion wafer into the actual body of Jesus, became Church dogma. Soon thereafter, Jews were accused of stealing and torturing these wafers, leading to the torture and murder of thousands. To cite but a few examples: in 1243, all of Berlitz's Jews were burned alive for this crime. In Prague in 1389, 3,000 Jews were murdered while in Berlin in 1510, 26 Jews were burned and two beheaded. Of

course, no Jew would have believed that such a wafer was anything other than a wafer.

Lest we think that the kinds of things described above can be consigned to the dustbins of history, reflect that most observers agree that while Nazism was not Christian (indeed it was anti-Christian), the *Shoah* could not have taken place without the history of almost two millennia of antisemitism. Speaking about the historic document, "We Remember: A Reflection on the *Shoah*," Cardinal John O'Connor stated: "While recognizing that the roots of Nazi anti-semitism grew outside the Church, it ["We Remember..."] also addresses unambiguously and directly the erroneous and unjust application of church teaching on the part of many, which led, at least in part, to a climate which made it easier for the Nazis to carry out their Holocaust."<sup>18</sup> These Church teachings include the idea of supercessionism, the concept that the New Testament or New Covenant of Christ came to supercede and replace the Old Testament/Covenant with the Jews. In addition, there is a clear relationship between ancient Church Law and what came to be Nazi laws concerning Jews as illustrated in Attachment 2-1.

### **Jewish Intolerance of Christianity**

Judaism has always understood that the its people, the Jews, were a nation in a special and unique relationship with God. Consider the following from the Bible:

- "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5-6)

- “I, the Lord, am your God; I have separated you from the peoples ... You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.” (Lev. 20:24, 26)

Commenting on the statement in Exodus that the Sabbath is a sign between me (God) and the people Israel, the *Mekhilta* (Ki Tissa) quotes God as specifying “It (the Sabbath) is a sign between me and you, that is not between me and the other nations of the world.”

Robert Goldenberg presents an excellent overview of the intolerance of pre-Christian era Jews for worshipers of other gods.<sup>19</sup> After reviewing the hostility toward pagan worship presented in the Bible, he summarizes: “Jewish literature from the Hellenistic and early Roman periods is largely hostile to the religious conceptions and practices of other nations. The Jews’ ability to get along with their neighbors might vary, but on the whole, the resistant attitude of Judaism in the face of other religions remained a continuing characteristic of that relationship.”<sup>20</sup> He adds that “Rabbinic literature has nothing good to say about gentile paganism, indeed rabbinic literature goes out of its way to speak ill of pagan deities. *B. ‘Abod. Zar.* 46a contains a series of very concrete illustrations of how to turn the name of a pagan deity into an obscenity, and at *b. Meg.* 25b (= *Sanh.* 63b) numerous authorities seek to demonstrate that while nasty speech should generally be avoided it is perfectly acceptable when directed at idols.”<sup>21</sup>

Broadly speaking, Judaism has understood Christianity as being based on a misunderstanding and improper interpretation of Jewish scripture. Because of the power of the Church once the Roman Empire assumed Christianity as the state religion in the 4<sup>th</sup>



century CE, Jewish critiques of Christian doctrine have had to be hidden (under the guise of criticisms of Edom or Esau, for example, as Rome had once been described) or be subject to censorship. Herford details how Jesus and Christianity are ridiculed by use of understood code names for Jesus and other key Christian figures in the Talmud and Midrash.<sup>22</sup> Many scholars believe that the *birkat minim* in the *Amidah* was directed at the early Jewish Christians who continued to worship in synagogues. An early Palestinian text of the Eighteen Benedictions from the Cairo Genizah reads: "For the apostates may there be no hope unless they return to your Torah. As for the Christians and the *minim*, may they perish immediately. Speedily may they be erased from the book of Life and may they not be registered among the righteous. Blessed are You, O Lord, Who subdue the wicked."<sup>23</sup>

One of the earliest bitter critiques of Christianity was the *Toledot Yeshu*, written in the sixth or seventh century by members of the Karaite sect of Jews. In this work, virtually all key elements of Christianity (including the historicity of the Gospels, the virgin birth, the New Testament miracles, and the resurrection and messiahship of Jesus) were attacked and mocked. Its tone is indicative of the strength of the animosity between the two religions at that time.<sup>24</sup> Saadia Gaon, the leader of the Babylonian Jewish community in the 10<sup>th</sup> century also rejected the central element of Christian belief. In the following century, Judah Halevi wrote the *Kuzari* in which he "proved" the superiority of Judaism to both Christianity and Islam.

In a 14<sup>th</sup> century polemic, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, Hasdai Crescas presented an overview of the areas of commonality and difference between the two religions. He strongly disputes the concept of Trinity and virgin birth.<sup>25</sup> Joseph Albo, who was forced into a disputation before Pope Benedict IX in 1413, wrote the *Ikkarim*, which both provided a clear statement of the principles of Judaism and a refutation of the elements of Christianity including the virgin birth, Trinity and Davidic descent of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> Other medieval anti-Christian polemics were written by Joseph Kimhi (1105-1170)<sup>27</sup> and Isaac ben Abraham of Troki, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Karaite scholar.<sup>28</sup>

Even the post World War II modern age has not been one of unqualified openness by Jews to interfaith discussion with Christians. Responding to a question concerning attendance at a meeting with Christians, Moshe Feinstein issued a responsum in 1967 to the effect that even though the matters to be discussed "will be non-theological in nature, it is clear and simple that such participation constitutes a grave violation of the prohibition against appurtenances to idolatry. For a plague has now broken out in many locales on account of the initiative of the new pope,<sup>29</sup> whose only intent is to cause all the Jews to abandon their pure and holy faith so that they will accept Christianity... Consequently, all contact and discussion with them, even on worldly matters is forbidden."<sup>30</sup> Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik was less harsh in his views of interfaith dialogue. In a 1964 article<sup>31</sup>, he endorsed communication and cooperation between the faiths on matters of common social and political interest but would not endorse any discussion regarding theological matters.

One could easily add citation after citation detailing the animosity among Judaism and Christianity throughout the ages. Clearly, Jewish-Christian relations over the last 2000 years have not been characterized by a spirit of pluralism or even mutual tolerance. This history underlines the significance of the change in attitudes among the religions that is addressed in the following two chapters.

## ATTACHMENT 2-1<sup>1</sup>

### CHURCH LAW

Jews and Christians not permitted to eat together, Synod of Elvira, 306.

Jews not allowed to hold public office, Synod of Clermont, 535.

Jews not allowed to show themselves in the street during Passion Week, Third Synod of Orleans, 538.

Burning of the Talmud and other Jewish books, 12<sup>th</sup> Synod of Toledo, 681.

Christians not permitted to patronize Jewish doctors, Trulanic Synod, 692.

Jews obliged to pay taxes for the support of the Church to the same extent as Christians, Synod of Gerona, 1078.

The marking of Jewish clothes with a badge, Fourth Laterane Council, Canon 68.

Christians not permitted to attend Jewish ceremonies, Synod of Vienna, 1267.

Jews not permitted to dispute with simple Christian people about the tenets of the Catholic religion, Synod of Vienna, 1267.

Compulsory ghettos, Synod of Breslau, 1267

Christians not permitted to sell or rent real estate to Jews, Synod of Ofen, 1279.

Jews not permitted to obtain academic degrees, council of Basel Session XIX

### NAZI LAW

Jews barred from dining cars (Transport Minister to Interior Minister), Dec. 30, 1939.

Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service, April 7, 1933.

Decree authorizing local authorities to bar Jews from the street on certain Nazi holidays, Dec. 3, 1938

Book burnings in Nazi Germany.

Decree of July 25, 1938.

A law which provided that Jews pay a special income tax in lieu of donation for party purposes imposed on Nazis, Dec. 24, 1940.

Decree of Sept. 1, 1941, authorizing that Jews are required to wear yellow star.

Friendly relations with Jews prohibited, Oct. 24, 1941.

Order by Heydrich for ghettoization of Jews, Sept. 21, 1939.

Decree provided for compulsory sale of Jewish real estate, Dec. 3, 1938.

Law against Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities, April 25, 1933.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Raul Hillberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, New York, Quadrangel, 1961, pp. 4-6.

### Chapter 3: The Evolving Christian Theology of Judaism

The picture of mutual intolerance described in the preceding chapter was changed dramatically by the Shoah, the Nazi destruction of European Jewry. Although the murder of anyone was not consonant with Christian teachings and the Nazi ideology was clearly not Christian theology, most scholars, including Christian scholars, would agree that without the background of Christian anti-Judaism, the Shoah would not have been possible. It seems clear that the Shoah literally shocked the Christian world (although it took decades for the shock to register), its leaders and theologians, into re-examining the thinking that made this genocide possible. The result has been nothing less than a sea change in Christian theology in many Christian movements, largely reversing the 1900 year old Christian understanding of Judaism.

The decades since World War II have seen a virtual explosion of Christian-Jewish dialogue taking place at individual churches and synagogues, schools, as well as in more academic venues. As a case example, consider the opportunities that this Jew has had over the last few years:

- Since making it known that I am interested in speaking to Christian groups several years ago, I have been invited to literally scores of churches, Christian Bible study groups, Christian college courses, etc. to speak about Judaism.
- I have written a book, *What Every Christian Should Know About Judaism*, accepted for publication next year by the Paulist Press, one of the world's largest Christian publishers. The book will be published in connection with the

publisher's Stimulus Foundation series which deals with topics of vital interest to the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

- In each year of my studies at Hebrew Union College – Los Angeles, I have participated in a 24 hour intensive dialogue program called Intersem. This program, sponsored by the National Conference for Community and Justice (the NCCJ – formerly the National Council of Christians and Jews), invites seminary students from Los Angeles area Jewish, Protestant and Catholic seminaries for an in-depth worship and study experience.
- Over the last few years, I have been invited to teach in local area Catholic Schools in connection with the "Catholic-Jewish Educational Enrichment Program," a joint project of the American Jewish Committee and the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese.
- In June of 2001 and 2002, I attended three day seminars sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. This seminar also brought together seminary students with noted theologians in the Christian-Jewish dialogue.
- Most recently, in October, 2002, I attended a week long program at the Center for Dialogue and Prayer in Oswiecim, Poland (a city better known by its German name, Auschwitz). This amazing week was spent talking, touring and praying with American, Polish, and German students and theologians.

I can't help but reflect that not one of these opportunities would have been possible before the Second World War.

In this chapter, we examine both official church statements on Judaism as well as comments by respected theologians.

**The Catholic Church:** In many ways, the Catholic Church has led the reexamination of Christian views of Judaism in the post war world. In October, 1965, in a statement called *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council declared:

"Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. ... God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues. ... Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecution, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."<sup>32</sup>

*Nostra Aetate* was followed by another Vatican document called *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, Nostra Aetate, No. 4*. This document was intended "to give ideas (on) how to start on a local level... the movement of the universal church in dialogue with Judaism."<sup>33</sup> Consider its comment on dialogue:

"To tell the truth, such relations as there have been between Jew and Christian have scarcely ever risen above the level of monologue. From now on, real dialogue must be established. Dialogue pre-supposes that each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge

and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all respect for his faith and his religious convictions."<sup>34</sup>

The next major Vatican document on this subject is the *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (June 24, 1985). Among other things, this document acknowledged that the New Testament and its Gospels:

"are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work ... Hence it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish communities. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus."<sup>35</sup>

Beyond official Vatican statements, there are the important personal statements of the current Pope. Pope John Paul II speaking at his historic visit to the Rome synagogue in 1986 declared:

"The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers, and in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers. ... it is not lawful to say that the Jews are 'repudiated or cursed,' as if this were taught or could be deduced from the sacred Scriptures of the Old or the New Testament."<sup>36</sup>



Significantly, only three decades before this visit, Catholics were not allowed to even visit a synagogue, much less pray in one! At the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1993, the Pope declared:

“As Christians and Jews following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the world. This is a common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us Christians and Jews to be first a blessing to each other.”<sup>37</sup>

In March, 1998, the Vatican issued a statement, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. Although it did not, in the eyes of many Jewish observers, go far enough in acknowledging the role of the Church during the war, it was an important step.

“At the end of this millennium, the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuva*), since, as members of the church, we are linked to the sins as well as to the merits of all her children.... We pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people has suffered in our century will lead to a new relationship with the Jewish people. We wish to turn awareness of past sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect, as befits those who adore the one Creator and Lord and have a common father in faith, Abraham.”<sup>38</sup>

In the year 2000, this same Pope inserted the following words, from a special penitential service at St. Peter's Basilica (March 12, 2000) on a note which he inserted into a crack in the *Kotel* or Western Wall in Jerusalem:

"God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your name to the nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who, in the course of history, have caused this children of yours to suffer. In asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."<sup>39</sup>

**Other Christian Statements:** The statements of the Pope and the Second Vatican Council are equaled by other Christian bodies, including the **World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the United Church of Christ, the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church and the Anglican Communion.**<sup>40</sup> For example, in 1987, the General Synod of the **United Church of Christ** adopted a statement affirming that "Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity," and that "God has not rejected the Jewish people." The declaration included the following words:

"The Christian Church has throughout much of its history denied God's continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people ... This denial has led to outright rejection of the Jewish people ... and intolerable violence ... Faced with this history from which we as Christians cannot, and must not, disassociate ourselves, we ask for God's forgiveness.... **FURTHER**, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ expresses its determination to seek out and

to affirm the consequences of this understanding of the continuing divine covenant with the Jewish people in the Church's theological statements, its liturgical practices, its hymnody, its educational work, and its witness before the world."<sup>41</sup>

The Church Council of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** on April 18, 1994, adopted the following language in its statement on Lutheran-Jewish relations:

"In the spirit of truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also (Martin) Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews. As did many of Luther's own contemporaries in the sixteenth century, we reject his violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our day. ... we pray for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community."<sup>42</sup>

In 1999, Canada's largest Protestant denomination, the **United Church of Canada**, called upon its members to stop attempting to convert Jews to Christianity and to recognize that Christianity is neither superior to nor a replacement for Judaism. In part, the statement said:

**"The United Church of Canada**

**a) *acknowledges and does not disassociate itself from responsibility for:***

- a history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism within Christianity as a whole;
- a history of interpretation of New Testament texts which has often failed to appreciate the context within Judaism from which these texts emerged, resulting in deeply-rooted anti-Judaic misinterpretation;
- difficulty in understanding the significance for Judaism of being, at once, a religion, a people, a nation, and a covenant;
- misunderstanding and insensitivity with respect to the importance of Shoah (i.e. Holocaust) and land for Jews;
- recognition of antisemitism as an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ;

**b) *rejects and repudiates:***

- all teaching of a theology of contempt toward Judaism;
- belief in the displacement or replacement of the covenant of God with Israel;
- supersessionist understandings of God's action in Christ and in the Church;
- belief that Judaism, either historically or currently, can be understood from knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures alone;
- all mission and proselytism seeking to convert Jews to Christianity;

**c) *affirms:***

- belief that the covenant of God with Israel is irrevocable;
- the uniqueness for Christianity of the relationship with Judaism;

- belief that both Judaism and Christianity, as living faiths, have developed significantly from a common rootage;
- belief that the establishment of a truly respectful Jewish-Christian relationship will illuminate relationships of respect and cooperation with all other world faiths;
- the great opportunity and potential for growth in Christian self-understanding that now exists through closer dialogue, openness and respect for Judaism;
- commitment to work together with Jewish groups in advocacy of social justice, peace, reconciliation and human rights, and integrity of creation, in mutual respect, shared hope, and cooperation.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, the following language was adopted by the 1996 General Conference of the **United Methodist Church (USA)**:

"Christians and Jews are bound to God through biblical covenants that are eternally valid. As Christians, we stand firm in our belief that Jesus was sent by God as the Christ to redeem all people, and that in Christ the biblical covenant has been made radically new. While church tradition has taught that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity as the "new Israel," we do not believe that earlier covenantal relationships have been invalidated or that God has abandoned Jewish partners in covenant. We believe that just as God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant in Jesus Christ, likewise God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant with the Jewish people... Both Jews and Christians are bound to God in covenant, with no covenantal relationship invalidated by any other.

Though Christians and Jews have different understandings of the covenant of faith, we are mysteriously bound to one another through our covenantal relationships with the one God and creator of us all... It is our belief that Jews and Christians are co-workers and companion pilgrims who have made the God of Israel known throughout the world. Through common service and action, we jointly proclaim the God we know."<sup>44</sup>

The year 2000 General Conference of the **United Methodist Church**, in its call for Yom HaShoah observance, declared:

"Therefore, be it resolved that the 2000 General Conference calls The United Methodist Church to contrition and repentance of its complicity in the long history of persecution of the Jewish people..."<sup>45</sup>

Responding to the publication of *Dabru Emet* (see Appendix 4-1, below), the Committee on Christian Unity of the **American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.** stated in part:

"We recognize the generosity and hope required for these (Jewish) scholars to declare that Christian faith is a valid way for gentiles to know and serve the God of Israel. To our shame, over history our Jewish neighbors have had good reason to see the primary agenda for dialogue in simple questions of Jewish survival and safety in societies dominated by Christians. With the authors of *Dabru Emet*, we wish to believe that a new day of broader conversation and mutual religious appreciation has begun."<sup>46</sup>

Beyond this, the following statement was issued at Strasbourg on 22 April 2001 by the  
**Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops'**

**Conferences:**

"We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. Our faith teaches us that our Jewish sisters and brothers 'are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11.28-29). And 'to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah' (Rom 9.4-5). We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation."<sup>47</sup>

This list of statements by the various Christian Churches does not, of course reflect the view of each and every movement. For example the **Southern Baptist Convention** in 1996 declared:

"BE IT RESOLVED, That we, the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 11-13, 1996, reaffirm that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we recommit ourselves to prayer, especially for the salvation of the Jewish people as well as for the salvation of "every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9); and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That we direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people."<sup>48</sup>

It must be noted, however that the trend in Christian attitude toward Judaism is clear. As John Pawlikowski (a Catholic theologian) observes, the following are areas of common agreement of most recent Christian theologians:

1. "that the Christ Event did not invalidate the Jewish faith perspective;
2. that Christianity is not superior to Judaism, nor is it the fulfillment of Judaism as previously maintained;
3. that the Sinai covenant is in principle as crucial to Christian faith expression as the covenant in Christ; and
4. that Christianity needs to reincorporate dimensions from its original Jewish context."<sup>49</sup>

Pawlikowski's position has been substantially amplified by a statement recently issued by the Christian Scholar Group on Christian-Jewish Relations. The statement, called "A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People" (included as Attachment 3-1) presents 10 key points of agreement.

1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever.



2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.
3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.
4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.
5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.
6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.
7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.
8. Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God.
9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.
10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.

It is important to underline how truly revolutionary this "post supersessionist" change in Christian theology is. As rabbi Irving Greenberg put it: "Any religion that can self-critique so powerfully shows incredible vitality."<sup>50</sup> He compares the Christian churches' ability to comment on its history to the Hebrew prophets' denunciation of Biblical Israel.

I believe the facts cited above hold important implications for Judaism. As we have seen, the Christian re-evaluation of Judaism begins at least in part with biblical criticism – that is trying to determine the intent of the writers of the New Testament (as well as Church fathers' statements) in the context of their own times. We Jews also need to address some of our grievous anti-Christian teachings cited in chapter 2 as arising from their own particular historical contexts. The *Vatican Notes* say "The permanence of Israel (while so

many ancient peoples have disappeared without a trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design." Perhaps the continuity of Christianity and Islam should be so interpreted by Jews.

## **A Sacred Obligation**

### **Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People**

**A Statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations**

September 1, 2002

Since its inception in 1969, the Christian Scholars Group has been seeking to develop more adequate Christian theologies of the church's relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. Pursuing this work for over three decades under varied sponsorship, members of our association of Protestant and Roman Catholic biblical scholars, historians, and theologians have published many volumes on Christian-Jewish relations.

Our work has a historical context. For most of the past two thousand years, Christians have erroneously portrayed Jews as unfaithful, holding them collectively responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore accursed by God. In agreement with many official Christian declarations, we reject this accusation as historically false and theologically invalid. It suggests that God can be unfaithful to the eternal covenant with the Jewish people. We acknowledge with shame the suffering this distorted portrayal has brought upon the Jewish people. We repent of this teaching of contempt. Our repentance requires us to build a new teaching of respect. This task is important at any time, but the deadly crisis in the Middle East and the frightening resurgence of antisemitism worldwide give it particular urgency.

We believe that revising Christian teaching about Judaism and the Jewish people is a central and indispensable obligation of theology in our time. It is essential that Christianity both understand and represent Judaism accurately, not only as a matter of justice for the Jewish people, but also for the integrity of Christian faith, which we cannot proclaim without reference to Judaism. Moreover, since there is a unique bond between Christianity and Judaism, revitalizing our appreciation of Jewish religious life will deepen our Christian faith. We base these convictions on ongoing scholarly research and the official statements of many Christian denominations over the past fifty years.

We are grateful for the willingness of many Jews to engage in dialogue and study with us. We welcomed it when, on September 10, 2000, Jewish scholars sponsored by the Institute of Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore issued a historic declaration, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*. This document, affirmed by notable rabbis and Jewish scholars, called on Jews to re-examine their understanding of Christianity.

Encouraged by the work of both Jewish and Christian colleagues, we offer the following ten statements for the consideration of our fellow Christians. We urge all Christians to reflect on their faith in light of these statements. For us, this is a sacred obligation.

**1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever.**

For centuries Christians claimed that their covenant with God replaced or superseded the Jewish covenant. We renounce this claim. We believe that God does not revoke divine promises. We affirm that God is in covenant with both Jews and Christians. Tragically, the entrenched theology of supersessionism continues to influence Christian faith, worship, and practice, even though it has been repudiated by many Christian denominations and many Christians no longer accept it. Our recognition of the abiding validity of Judaism has implications for all aspects of Christian life.

**2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.**

Christians worship the God of Israel in and through Jesus Christ. Supersessionism, however, prompted Christians over the centuries to speak of Jesus as an opponent of Judaism. This is historically incorrect. Jewish worship, ethics, and practice shaped Jesus's life and teachings. The scriptures of his people inspired and nurtured him. Christian preaching and teaching today must describe Jesus's earthly life as engaged in the ongoing Jewish quest to live out God's covenant in everyday life.

**3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.**

Although today we know Christianity and Judaism as separate religions, what became the church was a movement within the Jewish community for many decades after the ministry and resurrection of Jesus. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Roman armies in the year 70 of the first century caused a crisis among the Jewish people. Various groups, including Christianity and early rabbinic Judaism, competed for leadership in the Jewish community by claiming that they were the true heirs of biblical Israel. The gospels reflect this rivalry in which the disputants exchanged various accusations. Christian charges of hypocrisy and legalism misrepresent Judaism and constitute an unworthy foundation for Christian self-understanding.

**4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.**

Many Christians mistakenly equate Judaism with biblical Israel. However, Judaism, like Christianity, developed new modes of belief and practice in the centuries after the destruction of the Temple. The rabbinic tradition gave new emphasis and understanding to existing practices, such as communal prayer, study of Torah, and deeds of loving-kindness. Thus Jews could live out the covenant in a world without the Temple. Over time they developed an extensive body of interpretive literature that continues to enrich Jewish life, faith, and self-understanding. Christians cannot fully understand Judaism apart from its post-biblical development, which can also enrich and enhance Christian faith.

**5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.**

Some Jews and Christians today, in the process of studying the Bible together, are discovering new ways of reading that provide a deeper appreciation of both traditions. While the two communities draw from the same biblical texts of ancient Israel, they have developed different traditions of interpretation. Christians view these texts through the lens of the New Testament, while Jews understand these scriptures through the traditions of rabbinic commentary.

Referring to the first part of the Christian Bible as the "Old Testament" can wrongly suggest that these texts are obsolete. Alternative expressions - "Hebrew Bible," "First Testament," or "Shared Testament" - although also problematic, may better express the church's renewed appreciation of the ongoing power of these scriptures for both Jews and Christians.

**6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.**

Christians meet God's saving power in the person of Jesus Christ and believe that this power is available to all people in him. Christians have therefore taught for centuries that salvation is available only through Jesus Christ. With their recent realization that God's covenant with the Jewish people is eternal, Christians can now recognize in the Jewish tradition the redemptive power of God at work. If Jews, who do not share our faith in Christ, are in a saving covenant with God, then Christians need new ways of understanding the universal significance of Christ.

**7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.**

In view of our conviction that Jews are in an eternal covenant with God, we renounce missionary efforts directed at converting Jews. At the same time, we welcome opportunities for Jews and Christians to bear witness to their respective experiences of God's saving ways. Neither can properly claim to possess knowledge of God entirely or exclusively.

**8. Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God.**

The New Testament contains passages that have frequently generated negative attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. The use of these texts in the context of worship increases the likelihood of hostility toward Jews. Christian anti-Jewish theology has also shaped worship in ways that denigrate Judaism and foster contempt for Jews. We urge church leaders to examine scripture readings, prayers, the structure of the lectionaries, preaching and hymns to remove distorted images of Judaism. A reformed Christian liturgical life would express a new relationship with Jews and thus honor God.

**9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.**

The land of Israel has always been of central significance to the Jewish people. However, Christian theology charged that the Jews had condemned themselves to homelessness by rejecting God's Messiah. Such supersessionism precluded any possibility for Christian understanding of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. Christian theologians can no longer avoid this crucial issue, especially in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land. Recognizing that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own, we call for efforts that contribute to a just peace among all the peoples in the region.

**10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.**

For almost a century, Jews and Christians in the United States have worked together on important social issues, such as the rights of workers and civil rights. As violence and terrorism intensify in our time, we must strengthen our common efforts in the work of justice and peace to which both

the prophets of Israel and Jesus summon us. These common efforts by Jews and Christians offer a vision of human solidarity and provide models of collaboration with people of other faith traditions.

Source: The Christians Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, *A Sacred Obligation* [cited Feb. 18, 2003]. Available from  
[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/research/cjl/Christian\\_Scholars\\_Group/Sacred\\_Obligation.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/research/cjl/Christian_Scholars_Group/Sacred_Obligation.htm)

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## Chapter 4: Jewish Historical Tolerance of Christianity and Other Religions

It is my thesis that it is possible for Judaism to hold a positive view of other religious traditions, a view that goes beyond mere tolerance. Yet, as we have seen in chapter 2, Jewish history is replete with both Jewish intolerance and lack of acceptance of Christianity and other religions as well as other religions' intolerance and hostility toward us. The purpose of this chapter is to explore biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern Jewish perspectives on the subject of true pluralism and acceptance of other religious traditions as being valid paths to God. I do not hope to prove that such a pluralistic approach is the *only* valid Jewish perspective but that it is *a* valid Jewish perspective with support from our religious texts and thinkers through the ages.

### 1. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Hebrew Bible or *Tanach* may be better described as a library of disparate canonized texts than as a single unified book with a unified theological perspective. One only need contemplate the wide range of moods and theologies represented in the Book of Job, the Song of Songs and *Kohelet* to appreciate the fact that our scripture does not have any single central theology. It is therefore no surprise that this anthology of texts presents many perspectives on religious tolerance and pluralism. In this section, we examine a wide variety of biblical texts to appreciate that there is indeed textual support for Jewish pluralism and acceptance of other religious traditions. It is important, however, not to overstate the case; these texts can and have been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. A text that I would suggest may be read to support a pluralistic view of interfaith relations may not have been originally written with such an intent in mind. Indeed, in some cases,



the original intent of the biblical author may have been to support more exclusivist views of Israel. The thesis here would stress that there are other, reasonable ways to view the text in our current age.

**a. The Covenant with Noah:** In the eighth and ninth chapters of Genesis, God enters into a number of covenants with Noah. In 8:21, God promises "never again will I doom the earth because of man ... nor will I ever again destroy every living being." In 9:9-17, the covenant is made even more explicit and called a *brit* in the Hebrew. This concept will lead the rabbis to develop the concept of the Noahide laws (discussed below) as descriptive of the responsibilities of non-Jews in this covenant. It is noteworthy that this pre-Abrahamic, pre-Jewish covenant is never revoked by God. As Greenberg points out,<sup>51</sup> we have to avoid our own supercessionist theology about our covenant revoking God's larger covenant with humankind.

**b. Abraham's Calling:** In Gen. 12, God takes a different strategy. Although the universal covenant enacted with Noah is neither abrogated nor superceded, a narrower covenant is created with Abraham (then Abram) and his family. The objective of God's blessing Abraham with this covenant is made clear from the very beginning: "... all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." (Gen. 12:3). As Greenberg observes, God seems to be pursuing a strategy of covenantal diversification. "Particular group covenants are needed because the emergence of a universal *brit* (covenant) brings with it a great risk implicit in the exercise of human power and freedom. Unified or centralized human power can inflict evil unchecked... Smaller group covenants also open up the

possibility of experimental, varied pathways toward perfection. Local successes can be spread around or imitated by other groups; failures or dangerous tendencies can be contained within the limits of the community or locale."<sup>52</sup> That God's and Abraham's concerns are far broader than just the latter's family is made clear in the Abraham's pleading for the residents of the citizens of Sodom (Gen. 18:23-32). In these verses, Abraham reminds God that God is bound by divine law saying "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25). That justice must be applied to citizens of other cities not included in the immediate *brit* with Abraham, and even with those very great sins, is indicative of the universality of God's concerns.

**c. The Covenant with Ishmael:** Although we are told that God's covenant with Abraham will be maintained through the line of Isaac (Gen. 17:21), we are also told that Abraham's first son, Ishmael, is blessed and will be the father of twelve chieftains and of a great nation (Gen. 17:20). Ishmael's mother, Hagar, is told that her offspring will be "too many to count," (Gen. 16:10) and that God "will make a great nation of him" (Gen. 21:18). Although the text does not call this relationship a covenant, it does have many of the elements of the Abrahamic covenant. Of course Muslims trace their tradition back to Abraham through his first son and believe Abraham to be the first monotheist and the first Muslim, rather than the first Jew. Once again, we do not find anywhere in the Bible that this special promise to Ishmael or his offspring has been abrogated.

**d. Messianic Eschatology:** The prophetic visions of the goal of Judaism in the end of days generally speak of all people coming to worship God without specifying that all

people will observe the *hukim* and *mishpatim*, i.e., that all people will come to adopt the religion of Abraham. Examination of a few of these citations from Isaiah is instructive:

- **Isaiah 2:2-4:** "And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And the many peoples shall go and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and that we will walk in His paths... thus He will judge among the nations and decide for the many peoples...' Note that the text does not suggest that all peoples will join the Israelite nation or people. The prophet seems to say that they will remain distinct nations/peoples. It must be noted that here, as elsewhere in these texts, the God of Israel and the Israelite people are given a special status.
- **Isaiah 19:24-25:** "On that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing in the midst of the earth; for the Lord of Hosts will bless them, saying, 'Blessed by My people Egypt, My handiwork, Assyria, and My inheritance Israel.'" – Note that Egypt, the prototypical enemy of the past and Assyria, the archenemy of Isaiah's present, are presented as being blessed in the end of days, with the special status of Israel intact.
- **Isaiah 49:6:** "And He has said: 'It is too little that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will also give you as a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth.'" Here the role and goal of the Jewish people is made explicit. We must be more than just observant of the laws of living; we must serve as an example to the other nations.

**e. Jonah:** This book of the Bible holds out the possibility that even the worst of nations (Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the archenemy of the Israelites) can experience God's forgiveness with appropriate actions. Clearly, this book brings the perspective that God is concerned with the non-Jewish world. The willingness of the Ninevites to repent is all the more dramatic when compared with the typical reluctance of the Israelites to repent and change their ways when confronted by the prophets.

The biblical concern for the other peoples and nations of the world is especially telling when one considers that the Bible is not shy about condemning religious practices of which it does not approve.

## **2. RABBINIC LITERATURE**

If the caveat made above concerning the lack of a single point of view or theology in the Bible is appropriate, it must be considered even more strongly as we approach rabbinic literature. Chapter 2 discussed some of the anti-Christian polemic in the Talmud and other sources; I do not mean this section to imply that the opposite is true. Once again, the point of this discussion is just to stress that there is a spectrum of rabbinic thoughts on tolerance and that a theology that truly embraces other religious traditions is not inconsistent with rabbinic Judaism in some fundamental way.

**a. Hillel and Shammai:** The Mishna discusses dozens of controversies between the schools of Hillel and Shammai debating everything from which order to light Chanukah

lights to how to hang the mezuzah on the door, to marital obligations of a husband for his wife. Although these were serious controversies, the tradition stresses that the two schools did not excommunicate one another and, indeed, allowed for "intermarriage" between the two groups. The Mishna (*Pirkei Avot* 5:20) reads: "Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, shall in the end be of lasting worth; but that which is not for the sake of Heaven, shall not in the end be of lasting worth. Which dispute was for the sake of heaven? That of Hillel and Shammai." Here we find that the Mishna does not object to disputes per se. In fact, as the Gemarra later concludes (*Eruvin* 13b), both houses speak the words of the living God. Elsewhere (4:14), the *Pirke Avot* confirms this same idea in almost the same language: "Every assembly (*kenesiyah*) which is for the sake of Heaven, will in the end endure; but that which is not for the sake of Heaven, will not in the end endure." Kehati comments that an assembly for the sake of Heaven is one "whose members concern themselves with the needs of the public and apply themselves to the solution of problems genuinely and without regard to their own personal interests."<sup>53</sup>

**b. Mishnaic and Talmudic Citations:** There are a wide variety of rabbinic citations that could be brought to bear both in favor of and in opposition to pluralism. In the spirit of the introduction to this chapter, I cite some of the former:

- An idol worshiper who is occupied with Torah is likened to the High Priest (*Bava Kama* 38a)
- "Hatred of other people drives a man out of this world." (*Pirke Avot* 2:16)
- "A wise man is one who learns from all men" (*Pirke Avot* 4:1)

- One must be like Hillel, be affable and humble and teach opinions opposed to one's own, citing them first. (*Eruvin* 13b)
- A favorite saying of the Rabbis of Yavneh was: "I am God's creature and my fellow (i.e., the *am ha'aretz*, or non-student) is God's creature. My work is in the town and his work is in the country. I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work. Just as he does not presume to do my work, so I do not presume to do his work. Will you say, I do much (in the way of Torah) and he does little? We have learnt (*Men.* 110a) One may do much or one may do little; it is all one, provided he directs his heart to heaven." (*Berachot* 17a)
- God makes no distinction between Israel and the nations on the Day of Judgment (*Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashanah* 1:3)
- "When one sees a crowd of people, one is to say, 'Blessed is the Master of mysteries,' for just as their faces are not alike, so are their thoughts not alike." (*Berachot* 58a). Here the rabbinic tradition is endorsing the idea that not everyone needs to think alike.

Elliot Dorff observes that "... according to the rabbis, God intentionally reveals only a part of his truth in the Torah and the rest must come from study and debate (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 22a; *Midrash Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, *Devoir*, 1a; *numbers Rabbah* 19:6). Even with study there is a limit to human knowledge, for as the medieval Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo said, 'If I knew Him, I would be He.'" (Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikharim*, part II, Christianity. 30, tr. Isaac Husik, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946, vol. II. p. 206).<sup>54</sup>

c. **The Noahide Laws:** The clearest expression of the role and acceptance of non-Jews in the Talmud is presented in the Noahide Laws and presented in *Sanhedrin* 56a as follows: "Our Rabbis taught: seven precepts were the sons of Noah commanded: social laws; to refrain from blasphemy, idolatry; adultery; bloodshed; robbery; and eating flesh cut from a living animal." Thus a descendant of Noah (meaning all the world) who obeys these laws is considered to be a *ger toshav* or resident stranger who dwells in the midst of the people or even a semi-convert. David Novak speculates that "It could very well be that only Christians fit this description" (that of the Noahides) according to Maimonides discussion (see below).<sup>55</sup> Thus the rabbis may have been leaving room for Christians in this theology.

d. **Midrash:** Ben Zion Bokser notes that "the rabbis suggested that the Torah was given while the Israelites sojourned in the desert of Sinai, a no-man's land, to indicate that it was not meant to be the sole possession of the Jewish people but was to be offered to all who cared to live by it (*Mekilta* on Ex. 19:2).<sup>56</sup> One rabbi stated that, 'every utterance from the Holy One, praised be He, (at Sinai) was divided in to seventy languages [TB *Shabbat* 88b]. Another rabbinic source (*Genesis Rabbah* 49,2) suggests that 'Moses expounded the Torah in seventy languages.' The term seventy languages is used in the Talmud to designate all the nations of the world. These pronouncement, therefore, means that the Torah was seen as directed not only to Israel but to all mankind."<sup>57</sup> *Seder Eliahu Rabba* stresses that it is one's deeds rather than one's religious affiliation that is important: "I call heaven and earth to witness that whether one be gentile or Jew, man or woman, male or female slave, in accordance with the merits of one's deeds does the Holy

Spirit rest on him,"<sup>58</sup> Another example of this is from *Yalkut Shimoni* on Is. 26:4:

Commenting on Psalm 132:9 "Let your priests be robed in righteousness." "This refers to the righteous among the nations who are priests of the Holy One, praised be He, in this world."<sup>59</sup>

### 3. MEDIEVAL AND PRE-MODERN THOUGHT

For the most part, medieval and pre-modern Jewish thinkers did not concern themselves (at least publicly) with Christianity. The following are interesting exceptions who do address the issue. It is, of course, important to read these individuals in their historical contexts; for example the *Rambam* lived in a Muslim world where Christianity was treated with disdain.

a. **Saadia ben Joseph Gaon (892-942)** in his *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, denies that God has any favorite people. "All Creatures are His creation and His handiwork and we may not say that He takes to Himself one to the exclusion of another, or to a greater degree than another."<sup>60</sup>

b. **Rabbenu Gershom b. Judah of Mainz (c 960-1028)**: In a 10<sup>th</sup> century responsum, he ruled that "...we may rely on the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan [T.B. *Hullin* 13b] that Gentiles outside the Land of Israel are not really idolaters but following the customs of their ancestors."<sup>61</sup>



c. **The Tosafists (12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century)** The Tosafists clearly state that “we are certain that the Christians do not worship idols,” (Tos. to B *Avodah Zarah* 2a, s.v. *asur*) but, as Elliot Dorff observes: “due to their trinitarianism they do not see them as full monotheists and classify them instead as Noahides who are not enjoined against trinitarian belief (Tos. to B. *Sanhedrin* 63b, s.v. *asur*; Tos. to B. *Berkhorot* 2b, s.v. *Shema*).”<sup>62</sup>

d. **Moses ben Maimon known as *Maimonides* or the *Rambam* (1135-1204)** made a number of important contributions to Jewish perspectives regarding Christianity:

- On one hand, he held (in his *Commentary on the Mishnah, Avodah Zarah* 1:3; and in his *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kokhavim* 9:4) Christians to be in the talmudic category of worshipers of idols due to Christian doctrines.
- On the other hand, he assigned a valid divine mission to Jesus and Christianity. In a passage of the *Mishneh Torah* (Law of Kings XI.4) that was censored in all of its premodern editions, the *Rambam* first criticizes Jesus and his followers as misleading and harming generations of Jews. He then goes on to suggest that even this may be part of the divine plan: “But the thoughts of the Creator of the Universe are not like those of humans; for our ways are not His ways, and our thoughts are not His thoughts. All these things relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite [Mohammed] who came after him, only served to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world to worship God together.”<sup>63</sup>
- Yet, *Maimonides* made it clear that one did not have to be Jewish to receive the benefits of the world to come. In his well-known letter to Rabbi Hisdai Halevi he states: “You inquired about the status of the nations of the world. You should

know that the Almighty requires only a compassionate heart. The intent of the heart is crucial. Accordingly, our sages declared 'The pious of the nations of the world will inherit a portion in the hereafter' (*Tosefta*, San. 13), provided they apprehend what is possible to apprehend of the knowledge of the Creator and that they perfected their souls by means of ethical excellence. There is no doubt that one who perfects his soul in the pursuit of ethical conduct and Divine knowledge will gain immortality as the rabbis further point out 'Even a pagan who studies the Torah of Moses may be considered in the category of a high priest' (*B. Tal. B. Kama* 38)."<sup>64</sup> Most observers believe that *Maimonides* held that, in order to be considered among "the pious of the nations," one would have to believe that the Noahide laws were divinely revealed.<sup>65</sup>

e. **Rabbi Isaac (12<sup>th</sup> Century French Authority)** addressed the critical issue of association or entering into business relationships with idolaters and whether Christians should be considered to be in this category. The problem comes from the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 63b) where one is prohibited from causing someone to swear by a false god. Therefore, if a Jew were to engage in business with a idolater, it might result in the latter swearing by his (from the Jewish perspective) "false god," causing the Jew to have committed the sin of "You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind" (*Lev.* 19:14). Responding to this issue, Rabbi Isaac ruled: "Although they (Christians) mention the name of Heaven, meaning thereby Jesus of Nazareth, they do not at all events mention a strange deity, and moreover, they mean thereby the Maker of Heaven and Earth too; and despite the fact that they associate the name of Heaven with an alien

deity, we do not find that it is forbidden to cause Gentiles to make such an association, ...  
*since such an association (shituf) is not forbidden to the sons of Noah.*"<sup>66</sup>

**f. Rabbi Menachem Ha-Me'iri of Provence (14<sup>th</sup> century)** held Christians above idolaters but below Jews. "Christians recognize the Godhead" and "believe in God's existence, His unity and power, although they misconceive some points according to our belief."<sup>67</sup> The historian Jacob Katz, reflecting on this rabbi's influence, writes: "that the exclusion of Christians ... from the category of the idolatrous – an exclusion that had been suggested purely casuistic by earlier halakhists – was to be acknowledged as a firm and comprehensive principle."<sup>68</sup>

**g. Obadya ben Jacob Sforno (Italian Biblical Commentator and Physician; 1475-1550):** In his commentary on Ex. 19:6 ("You shall be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation."), Sforno clarifies that Israel "... will be God's treasure if you serve as a kingdom of priests to enlighten and teach the entire human race to invoke God's name and serve Him with one accord as it is stated, 'You shall be named priests by the Lord, men shall call you ministers of our God' (Is. 61:6); and as it is also stated, 'Out of Zion shall go for the teaching and word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Is. 2:3).'" This underlines the Jewish mission to teach the nations about the God of Israel.

**h. Rabbi Abraham Farissol (15<sup>th</sup> century Italian):** Held that Jesus was a Messiah for Christians: "Let us assume that their Christ is a Messiah for them and we [Jews] shall neither deny nor affirm ... For they have declared – and it is in fact true – that, since he

came and imparted his doctrines, they have been redeemed and cleansed of the pollution of idol-worship."<sup>69</sup> He offers the important perspective that, even from the Jewish perspective, Christianity hold a valid purpose to Christians and the world.

**i. The Shulhan Arukh:** This comprehensive code of Jewish Law included Rabbi Menachem Ha-Me'iri's decision and considered both Christianity and Islam to be monotheistic. Rabbi Moses Isserles, in his Ashkenazi addendum to the code, also ruled that Jews could associate with non-Jews.<sup>70</sup>

**j. Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (1525-1609):** In his *Beer Ha-Golah*, Rabbi Lowe argued for pluralism: "Because men are unique, each one received a particular aspect of the truth in accordance with his mental perspective... and when these are gathered up, we have the truth in all its many-sidedness."<sup>71</sup> This approach affirms that no one religion has a monopoly on *the truth*. Indeed, many valid religions may serve to provide individual perspectives, each limited in dimension, on a complex, multi-dimensional divine truth.

**k. Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi:** In 1580, Ashkenazi offered a novel and interesting interpretation of the Tower of Babel in his *Ma'aseh ha-Shem*.<sup>72</sup> Reading into the text, he suggested that God created different religions – not just languages at the time. Once such a world wide variety of religious approaches had been achieved, then, and only then, could Abraham discover God by investigating each faith. Prior to this there was only one religious language, one theology leading to absolutism which, Ashkenazi suggested stifled free and creative thought and authentic religious expression. Here too, we find a

Jewish justification for the validity, or even the necessity, of religious pluralism as well as the suggestion that God is behind the diversity of religions. As Byron Sherwin summarizes, "For Ashkenazi, truth was not that which was imposed by religious absolutism (of the pre-Tower era), for faith is what comes through free intellectual investigation in an atmosphere of religious pluralism."<sup>73</sup>

**I. Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697-1776):** This central European rabbi believed that the Nazarene (Jesus) and the Apostle to the Gentiles (Paul) acted entirely within the Halakha in creating a religion for the Gentiles based on the Noahide Commandments. In a commentary on *Pirke Avot* 4:11 ("Every assembly that is for the sake of Heaven will in the end be established") he ruled that both Islam and Christianity are assemblies for the sake of heaven, "to make Godliness known among the nations, to speak of Him in distant places."<sup>74</sup> (By contrast, he declared the heretical Jewish sects such as the Karaaites and the Sabbatians as not being assemblies for the sake of heaven.) He also declared that Jesus "the Nazarene brought about a double kindness in the world. On the one hand, he strengthened the Torah of Moses majestically .... On the other hand, he did much good for the gentiles... by doing away with idolatry and removing the images from their midst. He obligated them with the Seven Commandments so that they should not be as beasts of the field."<sup>75</sup>

#### 4. MODERN AND POST MODERN THOUGHT

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Emancipation and the Enlightenment brought dramatic changes to Jews and to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Before this time, Christianity was often viewed as a threat to individual Jews, the Jewish community and to Jewish continuity. Virtually every nation that had hosted a substantial Jewish community had, at one time or the other, expelled that community with the edict: "convert, leave or die." With Emancipation and Enlightenment, Christianity became more of a seduction than a threat. The message became "convert and join the larger culture and be a success." It is in this time period that Jewish thinkers begin to seriously expound about Christianity, its teachings and relationship to Judaism.

**a. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786):** Mendelssohn made his name and reputation as a philosopher of the Enlightenment with interests in aesthetics, psychology and ethics. His focus on Judaism and his book, *Jerusalem*,<sup>76</sup> came as a result of his being challenged to convert to Christianity by the Swiss theologian, Johann Casper Lavater, in 1769.<sup>77</sup> This resulted in the book and an ongoing dialogue that was closely followed by both Jews and Christians. He responded to accusations of deicide in a most rational manner: "How should I know what my ancestors in Jerusalem seventeen or eighteen hundred years ago, considered just or unjust verdicts? I would be very hardpressed if I felt obliged to vouch for all the verdicts which for example are handed down by the royal high court here, during my own time."<sup>78</sup> He commented eloquently on the futility of proof-texting: "How insufferably wretched would the fate of man be if the eternal solution of all mankind

were dependent upon the exegesis of obscure passages in a book written in Asia in times long gone by, in a strange and now dead language, and for a specific people!"<sup>79</sup>

Mendelssohn believed that all peoples could achieve salvation through the ethical and religious teachings that is their own unique possession. The attention that his book and his exchanges attracted resulted in increased attention to the emancipation of Jews and the beginning of genuine Jewish-Christian dialogue.<sup>80</sup> This illustrates a concept that I will dwell upon at length in the next chapter, the idea that these two religions (indeed, any of the world's great religions) can serve as an *Ezer Ke-negdo* (a helper in opposition) to each other. In this case, it is clear that without the prodding, even the ill-intentioned prodding, of Christian thought, Mendelssohn might never had made his substantial contributions to Judaism and to the Jewish-Christian dialogue.

**b. Elijah Benamozegh (1823-1900):** This Italian rabbi and theologian was the first to focus on a systematic comparison of Jewish and Christian ethics (rather than on Jesus and the origins of Christianity) with a book<sup>81</sup> responding to claims of Christian superiority. He sought to demonstrate Christianity's debt to Judaism. He argued that if one revelation replaced another, what is there to keep a third revelation from replacing it. This is an interesting precursor to modern Christian thinking which uses the same logic in asserting that God has not renounced his covenant with the Jews. He recognized that Christianity has a mission to the world and not only the Jews and that, as Jews, "We admire these children of ours ... although they have not yet introduced the Messianic Era into the world, but they have prepared the road for its advent. Yes, the Synagogue does admire

them, and though gravely injured at the hand of the Church, it has never stopped proclaiming this.”<sup>82</sup>

**c. Rabbi Marcus Horovitz (1844-1910)** ruled that it was a mitzvah for a Jew to donate charity money to a church, specifically for the building of a Christian church. He ended his responsum “by thanking God for allowing Christians, though their teachings, ‘to be among the pious and great men of the nations of the world.’”<sup>83</sup>

**d. Claude G. Montefiore (1858-1938):** Walter Jacob describes Montefiore as being the first well respected Jew in modern times (he edited the leading English-Jewish magazine, the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, for many years) to view Christianity entirely sympathetically.<sup>84</sup> Montefiore stressed the important principle that a proponent of a religion should not compare the best of his own religion with the worst of the other. Speaking of Judaism and Christianity he wrote: “Both religions, or rather the exponents of both religions, have a tendency to caricature the other. Both have a tendency to judge the other religion from its defects rather than from its qualities.”<sup>85</sup> He admired Jesus and saw him as a liberal Jew of his time; he also expressed admiration for the New Testament and felt that Jews could learn much from it.

**e. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935):** Rabbi Kook was the Chief Rabbi of Jewish Palestine during a period critical to the development of both intra-Jewish and interfaith dialogue. A number of his statements on the latter are instructive:



- He observed that in all religions there are authentic elements, "a seeking after God and His ways in the world."<sup>86</sup>
- "At a time such as this we must clarify the common elements of all religions, according to their degree of development, and not be intimidated by the customary disdain which lurks in the soul against everything alien."<sup>87</sup>
- "The brotherly love between Esau and Jacob (referring to Judaism and Christianity), between Isaac and Ishmael (referring to Judaism and Islam), will rise above the confusion fostered by the evil emanating from our creaturely character. It will rise above them and turn them to light and compassion without end."<sup>88</sup>
- "Conventional theology assumes that the different religions must necessarily oppose each other .... But on reaching full maturity the human spirit aspires to rise above every manner of conflict and opposition, and a person then recognizes all expressions of the spiritual life as an organic whole."<sup>89</sup>
- "The love for people must be alive in heart and soul, a love for all people and for all nations, expression itself in a desire for their spiritual and material advancement; hatred may direct itself only toward the evil and the filth in the world."<sup>90</sup>

**f. Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929):** Rosenzweig's special perspective regarding Christianity is due in no small part to the fact that he almost converted. He saw a special relationship between the two religions; one that Judaism has with no other religion. In his well known *Star of Redemption*, he pictured the two faiths symbolically connected

with Israel as the "star" and Christianity as the "rays." As he put it, "The truth, the entire truth belongs neither to them nor to us."<sup>91</sup> As Walter Jacob summarized: "Truth, then, appears to man only in this divided form – the Jewish way and the Christian way – but before God it remains united. The unity exists, but only in the eyes of God; therefore, in our life and in the world there remain two truths."<sup>92</sup> Rosenzweig was one of the first Jews to speak of this kind of unity between the two religions. He also developed a unique way for Christians to understand the Jewish relationship with God and how the Jews lie outside the restriction that "no man comes to the Father except by Me" (i.e., Jesus – *John* 14:6). He writes: "No one can approach the Father – but it is different if one need no longer come to the Father, if one is already with him. This is the situation of the people of Israel (though not of the individual Jew)."<sup>93</sup> He believed that in the eschaton, there will be no need for Jesus since all will be worship God/Father and thought that Christianity would lead to a universal Judaism. But for the time being, the two faiths have separate roles. Neither religion must attempt to follow the path of the other, for then they "will both postpone the coming of the kingdom of God."<sup>94</sup> He asserts that "Israel can bring the world to God only through Christianity."<sup>95</sup>

**g. Martin Buber (1878-1965):** Buber has been called the most influential Jewish thinker of the twentieth century, having made major contributions to several fields of Jewish study including *Hasidut*, biblical translation, biblical studies and philosophy. He studied Christianity for more than sixty years and, for many years, had a larger following among Christians than among Jews.<sup>96</sup> In his dialogue with Christian theologian Karl Ludwig Schmidt, he observed: "We can acknowledge as a mystery that which someone

else confesses as the reality of his faith, though it opposes our own existence and is contrary to the knowledge of our own being. We are not capable of judging its meaning, because we do not know it from within as we know ourselves from within."<sup>97</sup> He reflected that "What joins Jews and Christians together is their common knowledge about one uniqueness... No one outside Israel can understand the mystery of Israel. And no one outside Christendom can understand the mystery of Christendom... How is it possible for the mysteries to exist side by side? That is God's mystery... We will serve, until the day when we may be united in common service..."<sup>98</sup> He adds: "From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother...and today I see him more strongly and clearly than ever before. I am more than ever certain that a great place belongs to him in Israel's history of faith and that this place cannot be described by any of the usual categories."<sup>99</sup>

Buber espoused true pluralism that is beyond tolerance. "It behooves both you [Christians] and us [Jews] to hold inviolably fast to our own true faith, that is to our own deepest relationship to truth. It behooves both of us to show a religious respect for the true faith of the other. This is not what is called 'tolerance,' our task is not to tolerate each other's waywardness but to acknowledge the real relationship in which both stand to the truth. Whenever we both, Christian and Jew, care more for God himself than for our images of God, we are united in the feeling that our Father's house is differently constructed than our human models take it to be."<sup>100</sup>

**h. Samuel Sandmel (1911-1979):** Sandmel's contribution to a Jewish understanding of Christianity is noteworthy because of his status as a leader of Reform Judaism (he was Provost of Hebrew Union College) and because of his books explaining Christianity to his Jewish readership. These books include: *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament* (Cincinnati: 1956), *We Jews and Jesus* (New York: 1965) and *The Genius of Paul* (Philadelphia: 1979). He summarizes his perspective as follows: "I do not regard Judaism as objectively superior to Christianity, nor Christianity to Judaism. Rather, Judaism is mine, and I consider it good, and I am at home in it, and I love it, and want it. That is how I want Christians to feel about their Christianity."<sup>101</sup>

**i. Will Herberg (1901-1977):** Herberg was a proponent of the "double covenant" approach to Jewish-Christian understanding. He believed that the Jewish people are to be a community faithful to God's original revelation (Torah) while Christians have a mission in the world to seek others to join in this covenant and believed both missions are supportive of one another.<sup>102</sup> "Through Christianity, God's covenant with Israel was opened to all mankind – without requiring a change of ethnic or 'national' status.... God's covenant with Israel is opened to all mankind through Christ."<sup>103</sup> He saw the relationship between the new covenant of Christianity and old covenant of Judaism as analogous to the way "we speak of the New World side by side with the Old World," as extending and enlarging not supplanting.<sup>104</sup> He admired Paul for his making Christianity more than just another Jewish sect. In an article discussing the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity, Herberg summarized: "And so the Jew and Christian stand separated yet united. The unity far transcends the separation, for we

are united in our common allegiance to the living God and in our common expectation of, and longing for, the One who is to come. Jew and Christian ... stand united until the end or history in the struggle for the Lord of time against the 'gods of space.'"<sup>105</sup>

**j. Abraham J. Heschel (1908-1972):** Called by Jacob Neusner, "the greatest Judaic theologian of (the 20<sup>th</sup>) century,"<sup>106</sup> Heschel was also one of the key players and perhaps the most important Jewish player in the Catholic Church's rethinking of its relationship to Judaism before and during the Second Vatican Council.<sup>107</sup> He was also influential in encouraging Jews into dialogue with Christians. Beyond his considerable political activity in causes as diverse as civil rights, Soviet Jewry, Israel and Zionism and against the Vietnam War, it was Heschel's spiritual passion and clarity of religious thought and faith that helped many Christian theologians and laymen discover that Judaism was a living and rich religion, not inferior to Christianity or dryly legalistic.<sup>108</sup> He decried the dejudaization of Christianity and the unwillingness of the great religions of the world to communicate: "Even political states, though different in culture and competing with one another, maintain diplomatic relations and strive for coexistence. Only religions are not on speaking terms. Over a hundred countries are willing to be part of the United Nations; yet no religion is ready to be part of a movement for United Religions."<sup>109</sup>

Heschel also asked how Jews should view Christianity: "Opposition to Christianity must be challenged by the question: What religious alternative to we envisage for the Christian world?"<sup>110</sup> And: "No honest religious person can fail to admire the outpouring of the love of man and the love of God, the marvels of worship, the magnificence of spiritual

insight, the poetry, charity and sanctity in the lives of countless men and women, manifested in the history of Christianity... It is our duty to remember that it was the Church that brought the knowledge of the God of Abraham to the Gentiles. It was the Church that made Hebrew Scripture available to mankind. This we Jews must acknowledge with a grateful heart. Religion is a means, not the end. It becomes idolatrous when regarded as an end in itself. Over and above all being stands the Creator and Lord of history, He who transcends all. To equate religion and God is idolatry. Does not the all-inclusiveness of God contradict the exclusiveness of any particular religion?"<sup>111</sup>

Heschel maintained that Jews do not have the exclusive insight into religious truth or holiness: "Holiness is not the monopoly of any particular religion or tradition. Wherever a deed is done in accord with the will of God, wherever a thought of man is directed toward Him, there is the holy. The Jews do not maintain that the way of the Torah is the only way of serving God...Conversion to Judaism is no prerequisite for sanctity...The Jewish attitude enables us to acknowledge the presence of a divine plan in the role of Christianity within the history of redemption...Christianity and Islam, far from being accidents of history or purely human phenomena, are regarded as part of God's design for the redemption of all men."<sup>112</sup> He writes eloquently about the purpose of interreligious cooperation: "It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another; to share insight and learning, to cooperate in academic ventures on the highest scholarly level, and what is even more important to search in the wilderness for well-springs of devotion, for treasures of stillness, for the power of love and care for men."<sup>113</sup>

## 5. CONTEMPORARY JEWISH THOUGHT

The literature today is fairly bursting with Jewish thinkers dealing with the question of Jewish pluralism. The recent book, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, (Westview Press, 2000), edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, and Michael A. Signer, is an excellent example with thirty four scholarly and thoughtful essays on Jewish-Christian relations from both traditions' perspectives.<sup>114</sup> While it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to capture all modern thinking on this subject, it is worth highlighting a few notable examples.

**a. Irving Greenberg:** An Orthodox rabbi and a leader in promoting intra-Jewish understanding among the movements, rabbi Greenberg has made a number of important observations about Jewish views of Christianity. Speaking of the world after the *Shoah*, he cautions that "Jews have a vested interest in Christianity's existence. Modern values created a milieu as dangerous as – more dangerous than – Christianity at its worst. In pure secularity, humans appoint themselves God and thereby become the devil."<sup>115</sup> He suggests that Jesus was a "failed messiah" rather than a false messiah, the former being "one who has the right values but did not attain the final goal" in the manner of Bar Kochba.<sup>116</sup> Reflecting on the redemption of Judaism inherent in the State of Israel, he asserts: "Confirmed now in its resumed redemption and responding to the Holocaust's challenge not to put down others, Judaism must explore the possibility that through the covenant, nurtured and given birth through its body, God has called the Gentiles."<sup>117</sup>

Greenberg speaks of other valid revelations to other peoples and notes that "Throughout the Bible and thereafter, there are echoes of valid revelations to other peoples and traces of might redemptive acts bestowed on other nations (Gen. 14, 18ff; Num. 22-24; Is. 20, 21, 23; Jer. 1:4-10). Suffice to say that at the end of days when the whole world is redeemed, other nations will have contributed their portion and will share in it fully (Is. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-5; Is. 57:6-7)."<sup>118</sup> He speaks of the revelation to the Christians as not being broadcast to the Jews, as uniquely intended for its own audience. This signal "would not be heard by the bulk of Jewry, not because of spiritual deafness or arrogant hard-heartedness, but because the signal was not intended for them."<sup>119</sup> In summary: "Christianity is a divinely inspired attempt to bring the covenant of *tikkun olam* to a wider circle of Gentiles. God intended that Judaism and Christianity both work for the perfection of the world (the kingdom of God). Together, both religions do greater justice to the dialectical tensions of covenant than either religion can do alone."<sup>120</sup> Our task is to learn "how to serve God as a favorite child, one of many favorite children! What parent will not affirm the deepest truth: I love each of my children as my favorite, and my love is not exhausted by that fact."<sup>121</sup>

**b. Michael Kogan:** Dr. Kogan is the Chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Montclair State University. He is currently writing a book called *A Jewish Theology of Christianity*<sup>122</sup> and has written provocatively in the literature on this subject. He understands the current perspective, that Christianity is "theologically exclusive" (understanding that Jesus Christ is the only way to God) and "humanistically universal" (opening this way to all peoples) while Judaism is "theologically universal"



(asserting at all righteous have a share in the rewards of heaven) and "humanistically exclusive" (reserving Judaism to one extended family).<sup>123</sup> Acknowledging the progress made from the Christian side, he asks "Are Jews ready and willing to affirm that God, the God of Israel and of all humanity, was involved in the life of Jesus, in the founding of the Christian faith, in its growth and spread across Europe, in its journey to America, and in its central place in the hearts of hundreds of million's of their fellow beings? If Jews are not, if they view the birth and growth of this great faith as some kind of historic mistake or accident, how are they any more enlightened than Christians who refuse to affirm the Jews' ongoing spiritual validity as a religious people? Jews *are* God's chosen people – but who said God can make only one choice?"<sup>124</sup>

In another paper, he extends this thinking. On the question of whether Jesus is the Messiah, he asks: "If we mean different things by 'Messiah,' then the question 'Is Jesus the one?' can be answered (as I do when my New Testament students ask it), 'Yes and no, depending on how you define the term.'"<sup>125</sup> He sees Christianity as playing an important Jewish role: "Surely, if the (Jewish) covenant has been opened to the nations, and if God has done this through Jesus, then a tremendous event in covenant – that is, Jewish – history has taken place. Viewed in this light, Christianity is not a worldly threat to Judaism but a Jewish outreach into the world, an outreach that has certainly brought 'blessing' to its recipients who would otherwise be pagans.... Can we not see in Jesus Israel's conveyer of the blessing of Abraham's calling to a waiting world?"<sup>126</sup> He concludes: "Judaism can ... hold open the possibility of the truth of Christian claims (including the incarnation of God in Jesus, the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of

the world, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead), as long as it insists that these claimed truths are for the sake of the gentile nations. Once this is understood, Judaism can endorse the Christian enterprise as mainstream Christian churches have endorsed the ongoing witness of Israel, the people of God."<sup>127</sup>

c. *Emet ve-Emunah*: In 1988, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism issued its statement of faith, "*Emet ve-Emunah*." The following is an excerpt from the statement:

"As Conservative Jews, we acknowledge without apology the many debts which Jewish religion and civilization owe to the nations of the world. We eschew triumphalism with respect to other ways of serving God. Maimonides believed that other monotheistic faiths—Christianity and Islam—serve to spread knowledge of, and devotion to, the God and the Torah of Israel throughout the world. Many modern thinkers, both Jewish and Gentile, have noted that God may well have seen fit to enter covenants with many nations ...

Theological humility requires us to recognize that although we have but one God, God has more than one nation. Our tradition explicitly recognizes that God entered into a covenant with Adam and Eve, and later with Noah and his family as well as His special covenant with Abraham and the great revelation to Israel at Sinai. It is part of our mission to understand, respect, and live with the other nations of the world, to discern those truths in their cultures from which we can

learn, and to share with them the truths that we have come to know."<sup>128</sup>

d. *Dabru Emet*: In September 2000, the editors of *Christianity in Jewish Terms* published a statement in the *New York Times* responding to the numerous statements of Christian churches. Signed by a long list of Jewish scholars, the statement endorsed eight key points:

1. Jews and Christians worship the same God.
2. Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book – the Bible (what Jews call "*Tanach*" and Christians call "Old Testament").
3. Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
4. Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
5. Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.
6. The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.
7. A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.
8. Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.<sup>129</sup>

The complete text of this statement and a list of its signatories is included as Attachment 4-1.

## **ATTACHMENT 4-1**

### **DABRU EMET**

#### **A JEWISH STATEMENT ON CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY**

In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterize Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official Church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself.

We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. Speaking only for ourselves -- an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars -- we believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.

**Jews and Christians worship the same God.** Before the rise of Christianity, Jews were the only worshippers of the God of Israel. But Christians also worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; creator of heaven and earth. While Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews, as Jewish theologians we rejoice that, through Christianity, hundreds of millions of people have entered into relationship with the God of Israel.

**Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book -- the Bible (what Jews call "Tanakh" and Christians call the "Old Testament").** Turning to it for religious orientation, spiritual enrichment, and communal education, we each take away similar lessons: God created and sustains the universe; God established a covenant with the people Israel, God's revealed word guides Israel to a life of righteousness; and God will ultimately redeem Israel and the whole world. Yet, Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.

**Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.** The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised -- and given -- to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

**Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.** Central to the moral principles of Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being. All of us were created in the image of God. This shared moral emphasis can be the basis of an improved relationship between our two communities. It can also be the basis of a powerful witness to all humanity for improving the lives of our fellow human beings and for standing against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade us. Such witness is especially needed after the unprecedented horrors of the past century.

**Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.** Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors.

**The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.** Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition. That difference will not be settled by one community insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other; nor by exercising political power over the other. Jews can respect Christians' faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.

**A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.** An improved relationship will not accelerate the cultural and religious assimilation that Jews rightly fear. It will not change traditional Jewish forms of worship, nor increase intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, nor persuade more Jews to convert to Christianity, nor create a false blending of Judaism and Christianity. We respect Christianity as a faith that originated within Judaism and that still has significant contacts with it. We do not see it as an extension of Judaism. Only if we cherish our own traditions can we pursue this relationship with integrity.

**Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.** Jews and Christians, each in their own way, recognize the unredeemed state of the world as reflected in the persistence of persecution, poverty, and human degradation and misery. Although justice and peace are finally God's, our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world. In this enterprise, we are guided by the vision of the prophets of Israel:

It shall come to pass in the end of days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established at the top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills, and the nations shall flow unto it . . . and many peoples shall go and say, "Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in his paths." (Isaiah 2:2-3)

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## **Chapter 5: Christianity as an *Ezer Ke-negdo* to Judaism (and vice versa)**

### **1. Introduction: Need for Theological Humility**

If, as suggested by so many Jewish thinkers cited in the previous chapter, there are multiple paths to God, is it still possible for us to assert that there are unique truths of the Jewish path? Does accepting the validity of (let's be specific here) Christianity mean that it is acceptable for Jews to convert to that faith? Wouldn't such an assertion be an insult to all those faithful Jews throughout history that endured unspeakable hardships, left their homes and possessions, and even gave their lives rather than surrender their Jewish beliefs? In other words, can we embrace a pluralism that asserts Christianity is a valid path to God without be inauthentic to our Jewish traditions?

I believe that such a pluralism is both possible and desirable and the most important reason for it and precondition to it is theological humility. We must consider whether Judaism, or any religion, can claim to know with certainty the nature and desires of God. The question relates to both the nature of humanity and the nature of God. The argument can be summarized by the statement: "A God that I could completely know and understand is not one worthy of being called God." We can't completely know God for two reasons; first we are finite and our knowledge is limited, and second, God is infinite and God's knowledge is unlimited. We can only speculate; we don't have all the answers.

To my mind, each religion's speculation about God is reminiscent of the poem, by the Muslim poet, al-Rumi, of the blind men examining an elephant. The one touching the elephant's leg believes the animal to be like a tree trunk. The one touching the elephant's tail thinks it's like a snake and so on. The traditional Jew "examining" God holds that God's primary desire is for obedience to God's own given Torah. The Muslim would understand God's primary request relating to submission to the divine will as revealed to the prophet Mohammed. The Christian would focus on faith in God and God's characteristic of love and forgiveness and the triune nature of God. Blind men examining an elephant would probably acknowledge their own limitations in understanding the true nature of the animal. Can religious thinkers, whose sight and insight into matters divine is also limited, also acknowledge their limitations? Needed is humility that informs our theologies.

Heschel summarized this idea profoundly: "Respect for each other's commitment, respect for each other's faith, is more than a political and social imperative. It is born of the insight that God is greater than religion, that faith is deeper than dogma..."<sup>130</sup> Neil Gillman, a leading theologian of the Conservative movement, adds his own eloquent plea for "theological humility." He asserts that:

"The most significant assumption we have to make when we do theology is that no human being can have a literal 'fix' on God... What kind of a God would God be if *I* could understand God (emphasis Gillman's)? That, I think, is what the sin of idolatry is all about... No human being knows what God wants. Only God knows what God wants. No human

being knows what the literal meaning of Torah is. Only God knows the *pshat*, the literal meaning of the Torah... Therefore we remain with pluralistic reading of God's will. There is no single truth. There is no God's Truth. There is no one Truth. There are as many readings of God's will as there are reading communities, and they do not simply end within the Jewish community. If what we have is what we understand God's will to be, then our theological humility as Jews must include those communities who are not Jewish but who have their own reading of God's will, and *those readings are as legitimate as ours*. It is a messy position. The polar positions are not messy."<sup>131</sup>

David Hartman, the Director of the Shalom Hartman Institute, a Senior Lecturer in Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew University and an Orthodox proponent of pluralism, believes that interfaith dialogue itself leads to further humility:

"There is nothing healthier for restoring humility to the human spirit than confronting people who disagree with you with dignity and conviction, just as there is nothing that liberates the human psyche more than marrying a person who is genuinely independent of you. Because Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism are distinct spiritual ways warranting serious consideration, they bear witness to the complexity and fullness of the Infinite... Consciousness of the existence of multiple faith commitments is spiritually redemptive. It helps one to realize: 1) that one's own faith commitment does not exhaust the full



range of spiritual options, and 2) that no human being can transcend the limitations of human finitude and comprehend the infinite reality of God."<sup>132</sup>

Zalman Schacter-Shalomi tells a story that aims at our bubble of pride and certainty.

"The Messiah finally arrives. Jews and Christians, after waiting for so many centuries, rush to meet him. The Jews cry, 'This is the first time You have come, is it not?' The Christians, raising their voices above the Jews, insist, 'This must be Your second coming that we have been waiting for!' The Messiah smiles wearily and waits for the noise to subside. Then, in a quiet and gentle voice, long suffering, He says, 'My dear, foolish children. I have come not once, nor twice. I have been here hundreds of times. But you have all been so busy fighting with one another you have never even noticed.'"<sup>133</sup>

## **2. What Should Jews Want for Non-Jews?**

Jews point with pride to the fact that we don't seek converts. As I learned in my first Introduction to Judaism course, Judaism is the one true path – for Jews.<sup>134</sup> So what then would we Jews want for the 99.75% of the world's population that does not happen to be Jewish?

Perhaps we should ask only that they obey the seven commandments of the children of Noah and leave us alone. Perhaps, as one very traditional Jew I met in Jerusalem told me, they should be servants to the Jews so that we can better serve God. It's easy to dismiss the second response but I would also dismiss the first. Anyone who has taken

his or her Judaism seriously knows the depths, rewards and pleasures of the spiritual, religious life. Would we ask, would we expect, would we think that God would expect that non-Jews limit their spiritual lives to obedience to seven dry commandments and that any further religious practice is wrong or misguided? I think not. We should want non-Jews to have a rich spiritual life so long as it is consistent, at a minimum, with the Noahide commandments. To first order, any religion that teaches "the Golden Rule" and tolerance of others should fulfill this. As Michael Kogan puts it: "To appeal to the Noahide Laws in dealing with Christianity today is evidence that the Jews who do so continue to ignore Christianity as a distinct movement. No Christian can recognize herself or himself in this limited list of minimal requirements for civilized life. To hold that this is all that God expects of Christians is profoundly insulting to the moral and ethical system that is the fruit of Christian faith."<sup>135</sup>

Marginalizing or ignoring the non-Jewish world is simply not an option for Jews. Since Jews have an affirmative mission to teach the world about God<sup>136</sup>, we do not opt for the path of the ancient Essenes or modern day Amish. We do not go off and live separate lives in order to avoid contact with the rest of the world. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the rabbis rejected political and military power and authority in favor of worship and study at Yavne but they go on at *Bavel* to accept *dina de-malkhuta dina* (the law of the authorities of the land within which we dwell is the law). We agree to the path of dwelling within and among the non-Jewish world.

There even seems to be a pattern in our dwellings. We seem to cling to the other Abrahamic religions. One does not find many major Jewish population centers except among the Christians and Muslims. In this regard, it is interesting that the two major centers of Jewish life in ancient times, Palestine and *Bavel*, became centers of Christian and Muslim life. Focusing on Jewish-Christian relations, we note that at no time in history did a majority of Jews turn from Christian lands to go to Muslim or other lands even in the aftermath of horrible persecution under Christianity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These expelled and fleeing Jews simply left one Christian land for another.<sup>137</sup> Even in the Ghettos of Italy, there was broad and continual interaction between Jews and Christians during daylight hours, with separation only at night.

In the Bible (Ex. 4:22), Israel is described as God's "firstborn." This implies the existence of other children who are loved and valued. God's concern for non-Jews is evident in the biblical Book of Jonah. I believe that, in order to complete creation, God has (from a Jewish perspective), engaged in covenant with many peoples. People were created equal -- but different, and have different skills, cultures, motivations, and thoughts. It is inconceivable that God would want all people to think alike and act alike. In this light, is it possible to hold to a theology that assumes that the rest of the world is simply wrong or mistaken? According to such a theology, of what could God possibly have been thinking? What purpose would be served by misleading all but a tiny fraction of the world's population?

Stanley Hauerwas, a Duke University Christian theologian, summarized: "... Jewish theological readings of Christianity must face the challenge that the existence of Christianity is not a mistake but is, rather, one of the ways God desires to make His covenant with Israel known to the nations."<sup>138</sup> Irving Greenberg takes this a large step further: "There remains one question to be asked. When Christians carry on their covenanted mission, are they members of the house of Israel? Are they in a parallel covenant or part of a single covenant alongside Jewry? Personally, I believe that world religions such as Islam and noncovenantal faiths such as Buddhism and forms of Hinduism should be recognized as movements legitimately striving to fulfill the universal divine covenant with humanity. However, only the Christians (although possibly also Muslims) may be deemed to be members of the people Israel, even as they practice differing religions than Jewry does."<sup>139</sup>

What should Jews want for non-Jews? A rich religious life in which they can serve along with Jews as partners in the world of *tikkun olam* under the rulership of the God of Abraham. Being more specific, Jews should want Christians to be good, faithful and religious Christians.

### **3. Our Goal as Jews: To be a Light of Nations**

Judaism is a religion of ethical monotheism. It is *ethical* in that it holds that God's primary demand (not God's only demand) upon us is that we treat one another ethically. It is *monotheistic* in that it holds that there is one and only one God. Through the prophet Isaiah (49:6), God calls us to more than ethics, to do more than just obey the *mitzvot*. "It

is too little that you should be My servant in that I raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will also make you a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

The role of Jews and of Judaism is to promulgate the message of God in the world, to bring God's name, message and salvation to all peoples of the world. So how are we doing? If our goal were to convert the world to Judaism, we could be considered a dismal failure. Of the world's 6 billion people, there are only some 15 million Jews, making us less than 0.25% of the population. On the other hand, if we ask what fraction of the world worships the God of Abraham, the answer would be about fifty percent with approximately 2 billion Christians and 1 billion Muslims in the world.

How can we make sense of God's reasons for the small size of the Jewish people. We are a tiny and often hated minority who preach the message of God's ethics concerning how to treat our fellow man. In remaining a tiny and distinct people, we have staked our survival on the success of our task of teaching ethics. If we fail to deliver God's message successfully, surely we will be the first to suffer. It has often been observed that Jews serve as a "moral canary" signaling the arrival of moral poisons in society just as the canary in the coal mine signals the presence of gaseous poisons. In short, when societies turn evil, they go after their Jews first.

As Rabbi Martin A. Cohen observes, the Jewish people introduced an egalitarian-utopian "Wilderness Ethic" at Sinai.<sup>140</sup> This group of newly freed slaves introduced some ideas

that, while revolutionary to the larger society at the time, made great sense to those of their then-lowly status. Jews taught that all people are created in the image of God, that life is sacred, that the nobleman and the commoner are both subject to God's law and both should be treated with equal justice. Throughout history, we Jews have staked our very existence on the acceptance of the message of the Wilderness Ethic. For Jews to be safe, we must deliver and the world must accept our message of universal ethics.

By remaining small, the Jew is a tightrope walker (or even a "Fiddler On the Roof"), working without a safety net. We know that to fail in our mission of teaching ethics means death and disaster for our people. Could it be that God knew that just as Jews needed to be refreshed by each week's Sabbath with a vision of the world to come, that we also needed to be animated by the thought that our very existence depends on the success of our living authentic Jewish lives and delivering our message to the world? Could it be that if Jews were a majority culture, we might lose our zeal for promulgation of the Wilderness Ethic? Might we become smug and self-satisfied and no longer care so much about the downtrodden of society? Do we see small signs of this in present day Israel, where Jewish ideals clash daily with the problems of keeping order and the realities of political expediency? Do we learn this from the history of Biblical Israel when most kings of Israel did not follow the ways of God? Can Israel be simultaneously true to both Isaiah's vision to be a "light to the nations" and to the Zionists' dreams to be a "nation like any other nation?"

Even in the United States where we are accepted as in no country in our history, many Jews worry that, as a minority, we may yet be subject to another *Shoah*, that we may yet need the escape route to Israel. We are at the forefront of causes that promote civil rights and constitutional guarantees, not only for Jews, but for minorities of all races and persuasions. We hold our society accountable to high standards (which are, in fact, God's standards as enumerated in the Torah) whenever society falls short. If Jews became a majority, would we still cling to this role as though our lives depended on it? If Jews disappear, who would fill this role? Could it be that God's plan provides for a small but ever-present Jewish People?

I believe that there may be a sort of Darwinian survival effect at work in God's design. Throughout history, in every nation where we had a significant population, Jews were given the simple choice of "convert, leave or die" (with the sole exceptions of the Americas, where Jews have never been expelled, and Nazi Germany where, eventually, Jews had no choice to make). Many Jews accepted expulsion, with its extraordinary risks to lives and property rather than give up their Judaism while others chose conversion to preserve their homes and way of life. A few risked living secretly as Jews while many were murdered. Who can blame those who converted, those who did not choose to continue to live as Jews? How many of us would be willing to give up our homes, our friends, our jobs, and our possessions to remain within our particular religion?

It seems to me that God has used a kind of evolutionary natural selection in order to strengthen and preserve Judaism and the Jewish People. The rigors of history have

provided that only those Jews most committed to Judaism actually survive as Jews with their Judaism intact. I, of course, do not mean to marginalize or disrespect those Jews murdered for their faith. I mean only to ask what it is about those Jews who survived the stresses of our troubled history and remained committed to their Judaism.

In our own day, the largest threat is perhaps not from a hostile non-Jewish world, but from an extremely friendly one. Currently, the non-Jewish world doesn't hate us, they love us! I mean that literally. Most of us have relatives who have married non-Jews. Jews are, thank God, not told to "convert, leave or die." We are, however, tempted by life outside the discipline of living an authentic Jewish life. It will be only those Jews not lured by the other temptations of society that will remain true to the Jewish mission. It should not surprise us if many Jews choose not to remain Jewish. Could this be part of God's plan for Jews and Judaism? Might this be just another form of natural selection in which only those Jews most fiercely attached to their faith will remain Jewish?

Our role in being a light to nations is both interactive and catalytic. It is interactive in that we participate in the larger culture, influence it and are influenced by it. A good example of the latter is the extent to which Islamic thought influenced Judaism's view of the nature of God.<sup>141</sup> Yet, like a catalyst in a chemical reaction, there is an element in Judaism that strives to remain unchanged by the world in which we live.



#### 4. Importance of Actions Greater Than Belief

Almost every comparison between Judaism and Christianity presents the former as emphasizing correct actions and the latter as emphasizing correct belief. In fact, of all the 613 commandments understood by Jewish tradition to be presented in the Torah, perhaps only the first of the 10 Commandments demand that we believe anything (or command us to deny anything) – the rest are focused on actions or mandated inaction. By comparison, Christianity places great stress on its creeds to the point of heresy trials (from the Inquisition to witch hunts) and wars.<sup>142</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud (*Haggigah* 1:7) quotes God as saying that “Better that they (the Jews) abandon me, but follow My laws.”

Beyond Judaism's emphasis of right action over right belief, the Reform Movement in particular has stressed the right *ethical* actions over and beyond right *ritual* action. As a Jew and a Reform Jew, I am most concerned with the actions of my fellow Jews, their *mitzvot*, their work to heal the world, than I am with the details of their theology. A Jew who keeps strictly kosher, prays three times a day and is then unethical in his business practices or treats others poorly does not impress me as a religious Jew. How much more so should I be concerned with the right actions, especially the right ethical actions, of Christians (and other non-Jews) and not be concerned with the theology that leads them to these actions. When Christians tend to the sick, hungry and homeless, they heal the world in the best Jewish traditions of *tikkun olam*. They are fulfilling important *mitzvot* although they would use different terminology and different theology to explain their actions. I care not if they do these *mitzvot* to imitate Jesus, as a sign of being “saved” or “reborn,” or in conformance with their own tradition's teachings. I also suspect that

those who are clothed, fed, housed and comforted are not so concerned with the theological origins of their sustenance.

### 5. *Ezer Ke-negdo*: The Relationship Between Judaism and Christianity

There is a biblical phrase that captures what I believe is God's intended relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The phrase is *Ezer Ke-negdo*, and it first appears in the second chapter of the book of Genesis in verse 18 and 20. The term is used by God to describe the mate that the human (*Adam*) seeks and only finds in the woman that God makes from his *tzela* (usually translated as "rib" but also carries the meaning of "side"). *Ezer ke-negdo* is variously translated as "helper,"<sup>143</sup> "help meet,"<sup>144</sup> "helper corresponding (to him)"<sup>145</sup> and "fitting helper."<sup>146</sup> Nahum Sarna's comment on this term is instructive: "Literally 'a helper corresponding to him' (Hebrew *ke-negdo* unique to this verse and verse 20, has this meaning in post biblical Hebrew). This term cannot be demeaning because Hebrew *ezer* (Hebrew *ezer* is used of God in Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20; 70:6; 115:9-11; 146:5) employed here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often used of God in His relation to man."<sup>147</sup> In Ex. 18:4, Moses names his second son Eliezer, acknowledging the God of his father at *Ezer*; in Deu. 33:7, Moses invokes God to be an *Ezer* to the tribe of Judah; in Ps. 33:20, God is described as *Ezreinu* (our help); in Ps. 70:6 as *Ezrei* (my help); in 115:9 as Israel's help; in 146:5, we are told that "happy is the one whose *Ezer* is the God of Jacob." The BDB's definition of *ke-neged* includes phrases such as "in front of, before; in the sight or presence of; opposite to; *ex adverso* (coming from an adversary)."<sup>148</sup>

I believe that the term, *Ezer Ke-negdo* reflects an intended relationship of partnership where no one partner dominates the other or is subservient to the other. It is a relationship of support which knows when to assist and when to oppose in loyalty. The woman (subsequently named Eve) is in opposition and in balance to the man (Adam). Adam was a fully formed, and apparently self-sufficient being before Eve was created. But God said that it was "not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18 - this is the first time God indicates that anything is "not good"). God understood that Adam could not do his intended work in the world without Eve, who was unique among the possible candidates for *ezer ke-negdo* (Gen. 2:18-20). I believe this term can be reflective of the relationship between God and humankind; God has made us partners and helpers in completing the task of creation, in pursuing *tikkun olam*.

So too, I believe that Christianity is an *Ezer Ke-negdo* to Judaism, having been formed from its body. I hasten to add that, just as I believe that the woman is in no way formed subservient to the man, Christianity is formed in no way subservient to Judaism. Indeed I believe that the *relationship* of the two religions is one of *Ezer Ke-negdo*. Each religion should ideally serve as a helper to and constructive critic of the other. I would also hope that the relationship between all of the world's major religions would develop in the image of this support in opposition.

Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are sibling religions, both coming from biblical Judaism. Some Jews (historical and modern day Karaaites, for example) would argue that rabbinic Judaism is not really Judaism at all but a variant that they call "talmudism."

Others would point out that Christianity is, in some ways (use of priests, the sacrifice, incense, the altar, etc.), closer to biblical Judaism than is rabbinic Judaism. In the same way that the rabbis reread their *Tanach* to justify the tremendous changes in the religion with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, so too did the early Christians reinterpret their Old Testament to understand the events of the first century, C.E.

I believe it is the genius of God that planted the original seed in biblical Judaism that would sprout in the two faiths. Each of these two cultures would develop along very different lines as civilization evolved. Perhaps we can ascribe to God the concept of "planned endurance" in contrast with the "planned obsolescence" that we know so well. The critical mission of our two faiths is, in this century and millennium, to jointly combat secularism, which I believe is a far greater threat to the world than religion. In this regard, it is noteworthy that one of the stimuli to increased encounter and discussion is the revolution in communication, which has also stimulated secularism.

Seeing starving children, the horror of war, AIDS and other diseases on television, brings us into contact with, in the words of Irving Greenberg, the "image of God in the other"<sup>149</sup> in a way that simply did not exist before this media's explosion. Improved communications also provided the opportunity for ordinary Jews and Christians to meet each other in addition to the interactions of theologians and scholars who are now, in some ways, catching up in the world of interfaith dialogue. Perhaps our age's equivalent to the destruction of the Temple is the *Shoah* itself, calling for a response just as dramatic.

The complex and varied demands of the twenty first century require a multitude of religious responses, both to provide a wider range of approaches and solutions and to keep any one approach from dominating (this is the *ke-neged* element). As one participant in a Catholic-Jewish Colloquium put it: "You can't study history adequately with your own kind."<sup>150</sup> Rabbi Dr. Norman Solomon (Fellow in Modern Jewish Thought, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies) adds: "Only in dialogue is one forced to address the most contentious areas of one's own theology... Dialogue shatters self-indulgence. One is forced to ask radical questions of one's own theology. How, for instance is 'chosenness' to be interpreted when others plausibly see themselves as in a covenantal relationship with God? Why should privileged status be accorded to rabbinic interpretation of scripture as against other available hermeneutics?"<sup>151</sup>

I turn now to exploring the ways that the two religion are *Ezer Ke-negdo* to each other.

**Christianity as a Help to Judaism:** There are a multitude of ways that Christianity has helped and can help Judaism in our mission:

- As detailed in chapter 4, many Jewish thinkers have observed that Christianity has brought the Torah and *Tanach* to more people of the world than the Hebrew versions ever did. Christianity's decision to include the *Tanach* as its Old Testament has resulted in the world wide dissemination of Jewish scripture, teachings and values. In the most important way, Christian ethics is the same as Jewish ethics, each revolving around the Golden Rule.

- Christianity can help Judaism question whether we focus too much on the letter of the law, on our system of *halacha* and ritual, and lose sight of the spiritual and ethical intent behind the law.
- Christianity can also make us question whether we overemphasize the communal while neglecting the spiritual needs of the individual.
- Christianity's success makes us ask whether we have lost our role in the spiritual education of the world commanded by God to Abraham. Do we Jews have a responsibility to interact far more with the non-Jewish world than we do now?
- Christians can alert us to "avoid the seductions of introspective insularity,"<sup>152</sup> reminding us that it is necessary and healthy to come into contact with those who could benefit by our teachings and even those who would challenge them.
- A deep understanding of Christian worship can expose us to the beauty and power of other approaches to God. One example is the wordless spiritual power of the Eucharist..
- Jews can be inspired with how Christianity inspires many of its followers into lives of selfless service. In Rabbi Greenberg's words, how it makes "unreasonable claims on its followers," leading them to lives of extraordinary service to those less fortunate around the world.<sup>153</sup>
- Jews can recover an insight into the Temple cult by means of the sacramental rites of high Christian religions (Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, etc.).
- A non-hostile Christian world can free up marginal Jews to be more than simply anti-Christian. I know Jews whose sole Jewish passion is for preventing Christmas programming in the public arena (mostly their children's schools).

Perhaps these individuals, once convinced that Christianity is not out to convert them or their children, can redirect their passions toward deepening their own spiritual lives rather than fighting against Christianity.

- I think Jews also have much to learn from the "God talk" of many Christians. Many Christians with a powerful and direct experience of God in their lives speak of God and God's presence in their daily conversation. Although this kind of speech is also heard among many Orthodox Jews (*baruch Ha-Shem*), the more liberal movements of Judaism could learn something about vocalizing the experience of God in one's life. I believe that such vocalization, even when it becomes routine, can make the experience of God more real. After all, God created the universe with words; we can "create" the reality of God in our lives with words.

**Judaism as a Help to Christianity:** There are also a multitude of ways that Judaism has helped and can help Christianity in its mission:

- Christians can "enrich their own revelation by learning from rabbinic response and the development of halachah how humans become (in Joseph Soloveitchik's words) cocreators of Torah."<sup>154</sup>
- Increasingly, we find Christian laypeople studying Hebrew as a way to gain better insight into their Old Testament and to the Judaism of Jesus. As Jewish-Christian relations warm, we may see increased joint study of this nature. We might also see increased contact by Christian clergy with a broader array of Jewish sacred literature such as the Talmud, Midrash and traditional commentaries that will

allow them to gain better insight as to how the founders of Christianity understood their Jewish tradition and scriptures.

- Christianity can learn the importance of the communal and national element of a religion from Judaism.
- Jews remind Christians that the reign of God has not yet arrived – that there is a lot of real work to do in this world, even as we might look forward to the world to come. Moreover, we can present a model of how to behave while waiting for the eschaton; perhaps a deeper understanding that the Messiah's arrival (or return) is not immediately expected.
- The history of Christian Antisemitism reminds Christians of the dangers of triumphalism.
- Many Christians overlook the important role that humanity has in solving the world's problems. They could learn from Judaism's sense of humanity as partners in the work of creation, specifically as having an important role in addressing the problems of the world.
- In the understanding of many Christians, evil is the result of the fall of Adam and Eve and the work of Satan. Perhaps, Christianity could benefit from Judaism's view of the nature of the human as not inherently sinful but as having a *yetzer tov* and a *yetzer ha-rah*.
- Perhaps Christianity could benefit from Judaism's view of the necessity to achieve human reconciliation before sins can be forgiven.
- Recent scandals in the Catholic Church concerning abuse by priests is responsible for a reexamination by many Christians of Christian attitudes with regard to



sexuality. Christianity could benefit from Judaism's view of sexuality as partnership (and not a war) between spirit and flesh. Judaism offers a model of a sacred approach to rather than tolerance of sexuality.

- Christians can learn from the talmudic practice of presenting both contradictory opinions in disputes – rather than having such disputes divide them.
- Christians, whose political power has declined in recent years as Jewish political power has increased, can learn that such power and influence can grow even after adversity (the *Shoah*) and in the face of small numbers.<sup>155</sup>
- Christianity could learn from Judaism's experience as a powerless diaspora religion as it (Christianity) becomes more like one in a world increasingly dominated by secularism.<sup>156</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, Christian theologian, put it this way: "...Christians in the West are just beginning to learn to live the way Jews have had to live since Christians took over the world by making Caesar a member of the church. Put simply, we must learn from the Jews how to survive in a world that is not constituted by the recognition much less the worship of our God."<sup>157</sup>

**Jewish-Christian Cooperation as a Help to the World:** Perhaps even more important than what Judaism can do for Christianity and what Christianity can do for Judaism, is what both traditions, working together, can do for the world. If Jews and Christians, enemies of 2000 years, can "bury their hatchets" perhaps other longstanding enemies can too. What an inspiration this could be for such longstanding enemies such as Northern Ireland's Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, etc. The

Jewish-Christian experience shows both where such enmity leads and how relationships can be repaired.

Beyond this, I believe that the two traditions are joined in battling a more serious enemy – secularism. The experience of the twentieth century suggests that Jews have much more to fear from a secular world than a religious Christian world (this may not have been true in medieval times, but it is true today). The *Shoah*, Communism, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons all show us the danger of technology unrestrained by a commitment to the sanctity of life. If it's hard to trust God after the *Shoah*, it's impossible to trust humankind. As a survivor put it in commenting why there was little armed resistance to ghetto resettlement operations: "We fell victim to our faith in mankind, our belief that humanity had set limits to the degradation and persecution of one's fellow man."<sup>158</sup> Greenberg understands the *Shoah* as revelation. He asks: "What was God's message when God did not stop the Holocaust?"<sup>159</sup> Perhaps it is God's way of revealing to us that first, complete faith in man is misplaced, second, Judaism must embrace secular power or risk total destruction, and third that Christianity must embrace this world lest evil triumph while they stand by.<sup>160</sup> As Rabbi Jacob J. Petuchowski put it, "neither Jews nor Christians can really afford to be isolationists. In this pagan world of ours ... We *together* are the minority people of God."<sup>161</sup>

## **6. Christianity is Communally Asking Judaism for Forgiveness. What is Our Response?**

We learn (Mishna, *Yoma* 8:9, and *Mishne Torah*, Laws of Repentance 2:9) on the High Holy Days that God cannot forgive us for the sins that we commit against other people until we have sought and received the offended person's forgiveness. We also learn (*Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 2:10) that one is obligated to forgive his or her offender provided the latter sincerely seeks it. Given this, we know that we cannot forgive the Christians and others who sinned against Jews in ages past. Those who could forgive have long since gone to their graves. But what about communal contrition and communal forgiveness. We Jews acknowledge communal guilt – that, for example, for our sins the Temple was destroyed and that we (even the innocents) were sent into exile. We should understand this when another community comes to us to acknowledge their guilt and seek restoration of relationship if not forgiveness.

One tradition holds that, if someone comes to us for forgiveness and we fail to forgive the sin transfers to us; to quote the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilchot Teshuvah*, 2:9), "... the person who refused to grant forgiveness is the one considered as the sinner." If we fail to respond to the overtures of the Christian community, does the sin (and its consequences) fall to us? I think, perhaps, it does in that our failure to seek lasting brotherhood with Christianity condemns our children to the prospects of continuing enmity with this mass of the human population. Our tradition speaks to us concerning bearing grudges, collective guilt, and the failure to respond to repentance:

- Lev. 19:18 – “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the members of your people. Love your fellow as yourself: I am Adonai.”
- Ezekiel 18:20: “... A child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt ... the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone.”
- Ezekiel 18:21-22 “Moreover, if the wicked one repents of all the sins that he committed and keeps all My laws and does what is just and right, he shall live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions he committed shall be remembered against him because of the righteousness he has practiced, he shall live.”
- Recall that in Abraham’s argument with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, the notion of collective punishment is rejected.<sup>162</sup>
- The *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of Repentance 2:10) says: “Even if he [the offender] has caused him [the victim] much trouble wrongfully, he must not avenge himself, he must not bear a grudge.”

We should be heartened that some traditional enemies within the Christian world are making progress in overcoming old rivalries. Noteworthy is the rapprochement between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches as well as the Lutheran Church in recent years.

## 7. Bottom Lines

I believe that the *Shoah* introduced a new reality into the Jewish and Christian worlds. Christianity realized that the logical result of their anti-Judaism was mass murder, even if

it was not official Christian policy to implement "the Final Solution." Shocked into this realization, Christian official attitudes toward Jews and Judaism have changed direction in a virtual about face in only some fifty short years. The time for a positive Jewish response is now. I pray that this thesis is a small step in that direction, that a theology of constructive help and support in opposition, as *Ezer Ke-negdo*, can and will emerge.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Many Jews disapprove of the term Holocaust since the word has an etymological origin in the concept of a burnt offering to God. For them, the Hebrew word *Shoah* meaning "utter destruction," is more appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> C. Leighton, "Christian Theology After the Shoah, in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, et al., eds., (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 40.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>4</sup> S. Cohen, "The Unfinished Agenda of Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3, (Summer 1997), 326.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 328.

<sup>6</sup> D. Novak, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 2.

<sup>7</sup> Following Prager and Telushkin (in *Why the Jews: the Reason for Antisemitism*, Simon & Schuster, 1983)

I adopt this spelling of *antisemitism* rather than the more common *anti-Semitism* which suggests that there is a concept, Semitism, that anti-Semitism opposes.

<sup>8</sup> *CCAR Yearbook*, vol. I, 1890, 155-116.

<sup>9</sup> D. Novak, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (London, Penguin, 1972), bk. 4, ch. 34, p.177.

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Anti-Semitism."

<sup>12</sup> Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1985), 50-52.

<sup>13</sup> *Disputation & Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, F. E. Talmage, editor, (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1975), 72-73.

<sup>14</sup> J. Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 189.

<sup>15</sup> *Disputation & Dialogue...*, op. cit., 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 34-36.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ben-Sasson *Trial and Achievement: Currents in Jewish History* (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House, 1974), 254-255.

<sup>18</sup> Cardinal J. O'Connor, "A Step Forward in an Ongoing Dialogue," in *Catholics Remember the Holocaust*, (United States Catholics Conference, 1998), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Goldenberg, *The Nations the Know Thee Not: Ancient Jewish Attitudes Toward Other Religions*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>22</sup> R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud & Midrash* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1903).

<sup>23</sup> J. Mann, "Genizah Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 2, 1925, 306.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes* (Hebrew Union College Press, 1974), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Hasdai Crescas, *the Refutation of Christian Principles*, trans. with intro. and notes by Daniel J. Lasker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, op. cit., 12.

<sup>27</sup> J. Kimhi, *the Book of the Covenant* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 32-35.

<sup>28</sup> I. Troki, *Faith Strengthened*, translated by M. Mocatta, (New York: Ktav, 1970), 1:4, pp. 18-20.

<sup>29</sup> He is referring to Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>30</sup> David Ellenson (trans. and notes), "A Jewish Legal Authority Addresses Jewish - Christian Dialogue: Two Responsa of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein," *The American Jewish Archives Journal*, 52:1& 2 (2000): 122.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6 (1964): 5-28.

<sup>32</sup> "Vatican II on the Jews, *Nostra Aetate*, (n. 4), October 1965, as cited in Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Stimulus Books, 1977), 1-2

<sup>33</sup> Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, *In Our Time: the Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, editors, *Pope John Paul II, Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 63.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>38</sup> Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 54.

<sup>39</sup> The Vatican, *Prayer at the Wall*. [cited Feb. 18, 2003]. Available from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000326\\_jerusalem-prayer\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000326_jerusalem-prayer_en.html)

<sup>40</sup> A. J. Rudin, *A Jewish Guide to Interreligious Relations* (The American Jewish Committee, 1996) 5.

<sup>41</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *United Church of Christ – The Relationship Between the UCC and the Jewish Community*. [cited 14 February, 2003].

Available from <http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/UCC-Relationship.htm>

<sup>42</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community*. [cited 14 February, 2003].

Available from [http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/Lutheran\\_Declaration\\_to\\_Jewish.htm](http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/Lutheran_Declaration_to_Jewish.htm)

<sup>43</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *Canadian Church Urges End to Proselytizing of Jews*. [cited 14 February, 2003].

Available from [http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/United\\_Church\\_Canada.htm](http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/United_Church_Canada.htm)

<sup>44</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *Building New Bridges in Hope: Statement of the United Methodist Church on Christian-Jewish Relations* [cited 14 February, 2003].

Available from <http://www.j-cinstitute.org/ChurchStatements/Methodist-hope.htm>

<sup>45</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *United Methodist Church Calls for Yom HaShoah Observance* [cited 12 November, 2002].

Available from <http://www.jcrelations.net/stmnts/umc5-00.htm>

<sup>46</sup> American Baptist Churches, USA, *An American Baptist. Response to Dabru Emet* [cited Feb. 18, 2003].

Available from <http://www.abcusa-unity.org/DabruEmetResponse.html>

<sup>47</sup> International Council of Christians and Jews, *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation Among the Churches in Europe*: [cited Feb. 18, 2003].

Available from <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/displayItem.php?id=1010>

<sup>48</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, *Southern Baptist Convention*: [cited 12 November, 2002].

Available from <http://www.jcrelations.net/stmnts/evangelism.htm>

<sup>49</sup> J. T. Pawlikowski, "Christian Theological Concerns After the Holocaust," in *Visions of the Other: Jewish and Christian Theologians Assess the Dialogue*, Eugene J. Fisher, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1994) 41.

<sup>50</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Covenantal Pluralism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3 (Summer 1997): 432.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>52</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption," in *Judaism in Christian Terms* op. cit., 143.

<sup>53</sup> Pinchas Kehati, translator, *Mishnah: Seder Nezikin Vol. 4* (Jerusalem: Maor Wallach Press, 1994) 123.

<sup>54</sup> Elliot N. Dorff, "'A Jewish Theology of Jewish Relations to Other Peoples,'" *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*, ed. Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman (New York: Oxford, 1999), 273.

<sup>55</sup> *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 118.

<sup>56</sup> Of course another midrash (*Sif. Deut.*, 343) makes the opposite point, telling how each of the other peoples rejected the Torah.

<sup>57</sup> Ben Zion Bokser, "Witness and Mission in Judaism," in *Issues in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Jewish Perspectives on Covenant, Mission and Witness*, Helga Croner and Leon Klenicki, eds., (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 93.

<sup>58</sup> *Seder Eliahu Rabba*, M. Friedman, ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1969), ch. 10.

<sup>59</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni* (Jerusalem: Lewin-Epstein, 1954) on Is. 26:4.

<sup>60</sup> Ben Zion Bokser, "Witness and Mission in Judaism," op. cit., 97.

<sup>61</sup> *The Responsa of Rabbenu Gershom Meor Hagolah*, Shlomo Eidelberg, ed. (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1955), 76.

<sup>62</sup> Dorff, "A Jewish Theology...", op. cit., 276.

<sup>63</sup> Maimonides, *Sefer Mishneh Torah*, Law of Kings 11:4 (my translation).

- <sup>64</sup> Leon D. Stitskin, ed. & trans., *Letters of Maimonides* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), 106-107.
- <sup>65</sup> Ben Zion Bokser, "Witness and Mission in Judaism," op. cit., 106.
- <sup>66</sup> Cited in Ellenson, "A Jewish View of the Christian God: Some Cautionary and Hopeful Remarks," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 73 (emphasis Ellenson's).
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 74.
- <sup>68</sup> Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times*, (New York: Schocken, 1969), 35.
- <sup>69</sup> Quoted from manuscripts of Abraham Farissol's *Magen Avraham* in Samuel Lowinger "Recherches sur l'oeuvre apologetique d'Abraham Farissol," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. 5 N.S. (1940), 38; cited in Byron L. Sherwin, "'Who Do You Say That I Am?' (Mark 8:29): A New Jewish View of Jesus," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31:3-4 (Summer-Fall 1994): 259.
- <sup>70</sup> *Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayyim*, 156: 1.
- <sup>71</sup> Cited in Ben Zion Bokser, "Witness and Mission in Judaism," op. cit., 104.
- <sup>72</sup> E. Ashkenazi, *Sefer Ma'aseh ha-Shem* (Venice, 1583, and Poland, 1858), sec. *Ma'aseh Berehsit*, chap. 3.
- <sup>73</sup> B. L. Sherwin, "'Who Do You Say That I Am?' (Mark 8:29): A New Jewish View of Jesus," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31:3-4 (Summer-Fall 1994): 258.
- <sup>74</sup> Cited in Harvey Falk, "Rabbi Jacob Emden's Views on Christianity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19,1 (1982): 106.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 110.
- <sup>76</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. M. Samuels (London: 1838).
- <sup>77</sup> Walter Jacob, *Christianity Through Jewish Eyes*, op. cit., 15.
- <sup>78</sup> Cited in Jacob, p. 18.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid., 20.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid., 23.
- <sup>81</sup> Elijah Benamozegh, *Morale Juive et Morale Chretienne* (Florence, 1925), cited in Jacob, 34.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 4 f, cited in Jacob, 39.
- <sup>83</sup> Marcus Horovitz, *Matte Levi, Yoreh Deah*, 28, cited in Ellenson, "A Jewish View...", op. cit., 75.
- <sup>84</sup> Jacob, op. cit., 93-94.
- <sup>85</sup> Claude G. Montefiore, *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (London: 1923), 2.
- <sup>86</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems*, Ben Zion Bokser, transl. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) 12.
- <sup>87</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid., 33.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 28.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid., 136.
- <sup>91</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung* (Heidelberg, 1930), 3:200ff., cited by Jacob, 126.
- <sup>92</sup> Jacob, op. cit., 126.
- <sup>93</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe* (Berlin, 1935), p. 73, cited in Jacob, 131.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., 310f, cited by Jacob, 136.
- <sup>95</sup> Cited by Will Herberg, "Judaism and Christianity," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, Fritz A. Rothschild, ed., (New York: Continuum, 1990), 251-252.
- <sup>96</sup> Jacob, op. cit., 172.
- <sup>97</sup> Martin Buber, *Die Stunde und die Erkenntnis* (Berlin, 1936), 152.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., 155f, cited by Jacob, 174.
- <sup>99</sup> Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, translated by Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Macmillan Co., 1951; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 12-13.
- <sup>100</sup> Martin Buber, *Israel and the World*, (New York: 1948), 178 ff.
- <sup>101</sup> Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 151.
- <sup>102</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, "Will Herberg," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, Fritz A. Rothschild, ed., (New York, 1990), 236.
- <sup>103</sup> Will Herberg, "Judaism and Christianity," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, op. cit., 244.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid., 245.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid., 255.



- <sup>106</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Stranger at Home: "The Holocaust," Zionism and American Judaism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 82.
- <sup>107</sup> John C. Merkle, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interfaith Dialogue," *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 19, n. 4 (1986): 25.
- <sup>108</sup> John C. Merkle, "Abraham J. Heschel," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, op. cit., 272.
- <sup>109</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island (1965)," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, op. cit., 315.
- <sup>110</sup> Ibid., 316.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid., 317.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid., 321-323.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., 324.
- <sup>114</sup> A slightly earlier and shorter work along similar lines is *Toward a Theological Encounter: Jewish Understandings of Christianity*, Leon Klenicki, ed., (New York: Stimulus Foundation, 1991).
- <sup>115</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism, Christianity, and Partnership After the Twentieth Century," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 30.
- <sup>116</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid., 32.
- <sup>118</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption," in *Judaism in Christian Terms*, op. cit., 143.
- <sup>119</sup> Ibid., 150.
- <sup>120</sup> Ibid., 155.
- <sup>121</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Covenantal Pluralism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3 (Summer 1997): 436.
- <sup>122</sup> Michael Kogan, private communication, June, 2002.
- <sup>123</sup> Michael Kogan, "Jews and Christians: Taking the Next Step," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 26:4 (Fall, 1989): 706-707.
- <sup>124</sup> Ibid., 709 (emphasis in original).
- <sup>125</sup> Michael Kogan, "Toward a Jewish Theology of Christianity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 32:1 (Winter, 1995): 98.
- <sup>126</sup> Ibid., 98-99.
- <sup>127</sup> Ibid., 106.
- <sup>128</sup> "Emet ve-Emunah" (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988).
- <sup>129</sup> *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., p. xvii-xx.
- <sup>130</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1966), 181.
- <sup>131</sup> Neil Gillman, "Authenticity Without Demonization," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3 (Summer 1997): 346-349 (emphasis added).
- <sup>132</sup> David Hartman, "On the Possibilities of Religious Pluralism From a Jewish Viewpoint," *Immanuel* 16 (Summer, 1983): 113.
- <sup>133</sup> Cited by Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "Redemption: What I have Learned From Christians," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 275.
- <sup>134</sup> Taught by Rabbi Alan Greenbaum of Temple Adat Elohim in 1983.
- <sup>135</sup> Michael Kogan, "Toward a Jewish Theology of Christianity," op. cit., 92.
- <sup>136</sup> Maimonides writes "...[Jews] are in duty bound to proclaim this true religion to the world, undeterred by fear of injury from any source. Even if a tyrant tries to compel us by force to deny Him, we must not obey, but must positively rather submit to death; and we must not even mislead the tyrant into supposing that we have denied Him, while in our hearts we continue to believe in Him." *The Commandments*, vol. 1, Positive Commandments, no. 9, pp. 12-13, in the translation of Charles B. Chavel.
- <sup>137</sup> Robert Chazan, "Christian-Jewish Interactions Over the Ages," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 20.
- <sup>138</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Christian Ethics in Jewish Terms," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 140.
- <sup>139</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 158.
- <sup>140</sup> Martin A. Cohen, *Issues in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, op. cit., 162-163.
- <sup>141</sup> Michael Lotker, "Influence of Medieval Muslim Thought on Jewish Views of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence," unpublished, May 2000.

- <sup>142</sup> Elliot Dorff, "Another Jewish View of Ethics, Christian and Jewish," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 128.
- <sup>143</sup> *JPS Tanakh*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 4.
- <sup>144</sup> *Pentateuch and Haftorah*, J. H. Hertz, ed., (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 9.
- <sup>145</sup> *The Chumash – Stone Edition*, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1993), 13; and *The Five Books of Moses*, E. Fox, trans., (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 20.
- <sup>146</sup> *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, Nahum Sarna, commentary, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 21-22.
- <sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21 and 354 – the latter page consisting of Sarna's footnote presented above in parentheses.
- <sup>148</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), 617.
- <sup>149</sup> Irving Greenberg, "The New Encounter of Judaism and Christianity," *BARAT Review*, 3:2 (June 1967): 113-125.
- <sup>150</sup> Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, "The Catholic-Jewish Colloquium: An Experiment in Interreligious Learning," *Religious Education*, 91:4 (Fall 1996): 434.
- <sup>151</sup> Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, Remarks at the Inaugural Symposium of the Flannery-Hyatt Institute for Interfaith Understanding, April 4, 2000, 23.
- <sup>152</sup> Phillip A. Cunningham, *A Story of Shalom*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 59.
- <sup>153</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Their Respective Roles in the Strategy of Redemption," *Visions of the Other*, op. cit., 25.
- <sup>154</sup> Irving Greenberg, *Judaism in Christian Terms*, op. cit., 155.
- <sup>155</sup> David Novak, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 367.
- <sup>156</sup> George Lindbeck, "What of the Future? A Christian Response," *Judaism in Christian Terms*, op. cit., 365.
- <sup>157</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 140.
- <sup>158</sup> Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom: A Memoir* (New York: Rinehard, 1965), 103.
- <sup>159</sup> Irving Greenberg, *Judaism in Christian Terms*, op. cit., 35.
- <sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>161</sup> Jacob Petuchowski, "A Jewish Response to [H. Berkhof's] 'Israel as a Theological Problem in the Christian Church,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 6 (Summer, 1969): 349, his emphasis.
- <sup>162</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 325.

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Title of Thesis: Making Meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah: A Family Spiritual Journey

Author: Jane Londy

Number of Chapters: Nine Chapters and References

Summary of Thesis:

This thesis explores how Jewish parents navigate the struggle for meaning in the contemporary bar/bat mitzvah experience. The thesis has four major components. In the first part, the thesis studies some of the sociological, familial and educational trends in the development of the contemporary bar and bat mitzvah experience in American liberal (Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist) congregational settings, especially the distinction between the folk and elite understanding of the life cycle event.

In the second part, the thesis explores some of the general and Jewish literature that addresses the topic of spiritual "journeying and seeking" among adults, and specifically among adults identified as the baby-boomer generation. Over the past twenty years much has been written about this population, in particular the religious or spiritual habits of this population. This paper examines this topic by reviewing the current sociological literature on adult faith formation in contemporary American and Jewish society in order to obtain a clear understanding of the spiritual journey of parents of bar and bat mitzvah children.

In the third section, the thesis examines how various educators have constructed bar and bat mitzvah curricula to respond to the parent's search for Jewish spiritual meaning in their planning and experiencing of their child's life cycle celebration.

In the last part, the thesis offers a unique curricular plan, four workshops in preparation for a new home ceremony called the bar/bat mitzvah Seder. This curriculum piece addresses how Jewish parents can be guided to construct religious meaning during this process. This curriculum reflects the understanding that Jewish educators can both address the needs for individual meaning and expression, and direct and affirm that the bar/bat mitzvah needs to be a meaningful affirmation of Jewish adulthood celebrated within the community.