

EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

dialogue

Fuller Theological Seminary



MINDING OUR HISTORIES: New Approaches to Jewish-Christian Dialogue in North America

SPRING
2015

At a Glance

Introduction Cory B. Willson

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MINDING OUR HISTORIES:

How the Past Shapes Present Interreligious Encounters

History continually bears upon the present. Whenever we interact with others, the events and experiences of our past shape how we perceive and act moment by moment. Sometimes this history is beneficial and contributes to a more meaningful interaction; at other times this history colors our perception negatively and influences our interactions. This is especially true in interfaith engagement between communities with a shared history. Faithful Christian discipleship must not only attend to our own history but to our neighbor's as well.



In the 2000-year history of Jewish-Christian interactions, the issues of identity, evangelism, and conversion have been heated and are disputed up to this present day. Centuries of anti-Semitism, violence, and most recently the Holocaust are deeply ingrained in the psyche of the Jewish community. As Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein explains, it is not unheard of for a Jew to perceive a "gospel invitation" to conversion as a form of arrogance that in some combative approaches harkens back to the inquisitions of fifteenth-century Spain.¹

White American evangelicals, such as myself, are largely ignorant of just how deeply these past atrocities form an integral part of Jewish self-understanding and their perception of Christian forms of evangelism. Of prominence for us evangelicals from a fundamentalist background, on the other hand, is a minority mentality of a different sort. Fear of external assaults against the veracity of the Christian faith—as well as internal temptations to cower from fulfilling the Great Commission—feature prominently in the conscience of many evangelicals in my community. These communal histories create tensions and pose questions that must be carefully navigated as both communities seek fidelity to their distinct identities while engaging each other with humility, sensitivity, and conviction.

In this issue of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* journal, writers from both communities discuss various aspects in the history of Jewish-Christian encounters, the pressing issues facing these relationships today, as well as new forms of constructive engagement for the future.



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Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

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Summary Statement

The collected essays in this issue address different dimensions of Jewish-Christian engagement in North America today in light of the history of their 2000 years coexistence. These essays represent a wide range of Christian and Jewish perspectives, including Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Emergent. Both Jews and evangelicals are global communities that have taken root in diverse cultures around the world throughout history. These essays draw on the religious histories of these two communities in an effort to promote new modes of relating in the North American context today.

On the Cover:

Kurt Simonson, photo of the ark at the Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, California

See back cover for more on the artist.

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TO KNOW AND BE KNOWN: Evangelicals and Interfaith Dialogue¹

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is a pivotal command incumbent on all Christians. Moses established this teaching, and Jesus reinforced it, declaring that love of God and neighbor is the mega commandment for his followers (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:28–34).

Introduction

Every concerned and culturally alert generation of Christians must keep asking, “Who is my neighbor?” There is a good possibility one’s neighbor may be a Jew or a Muslim, especially in the cities and suburbs. Next to Christianity, Judaism and Islam are the two largest world religions found in America. How many evangelicals Christians really know their neighbors, especially when they espouse a different faith tradition from their own? And how many Jews and Muslims have been sensitively encouraged to cross the “interfaith divide” so they may really know evangelical Christians? Is it not presumptuous for a Christian to claim he “loves his neighbors” when he has made little effort to know and understand those of different faith traditions living in his locale? Is it possible to fulfill Jesus’ command by choosing to remain largely aloof from one’s neighbor, and to remain uninformed about his religious beliefs and practices? Do Christians have an obligation to build bridges of understanding and dynamic engagement with those of other faiths? In heaven, will there be any credit for avoiding the other?

My conviction and experience is this: if Christians are *to be known*, they must also *know*. One cannot genuinely love another he does not know. To “know” is not to confront abruptly, then dismiss quickly. Knowing someone implies a process; it is not a “bump and run.” Indeed, to “know,” as I use this term in the context of interfaith relations, is to grow in understanding and appreciation of the other through respectful conversation and shared experiences that lead to mutual enrichment and trust. In this essay, I will explore some of the lessons I have learned from my own personal journey of more than forty years as an evangelical venturing into the world of interreligious conversation.

Search for Hebraic Roots

I was raised in a Christian home, attended a Christian high school, and graduated from an evangelical Christian college and seminary. Following seminary, my university training was in Semitic and Mediterranean Studies, the languages, history, and culture of the Bible world. I began my teaching career in the early 1960s at an evangelical Christian College in New England. At the time, I thought I understood the history of the Jewish people, biblical literature, and how it applied to life today. As I look back, however, I realize how shallow my understanding was, especially concerning biblical Judaism and the last two thousand years of Jewish history. In addition, I soon discovered that what was lacking in my own personal life was actually a rather ubiquitous Christian problem, one prevalent throughout the church.

One of the hallmarks of historic, classic Christianity is belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. This point however has caused division and hostility between Christians and Jews for nearly two thousand years. It remains an impasse which, humanly speaking, only God himself can ultimately bridge.

The consequence of this Christian-Jewish impasse left many Christians believing that Jews have everything to learn from them, but Christians have little or nothing to learn from Jews. For centuries, many in the church were mainly taught to feel sorry for Jews because they had missed the boat, theologically speaking. In the Christian scheme, Jews were often viewed as objects to confront and win over to the Christian side for the sake of the “gospel.” Christians, on the other hand, typically saw themselves as having no ongoing need of Jews and Judaism. Such limited thinking doubtless influenced the general malaise, passivity, and indifference of Christians toward Jews at the time of the Holocaust. Thus, because the church tended to view Judaism as a defective and “incomplete” faith, Christian teachers largely refused to take Jews and Judaism all that seriously. Rather, for many, the church had replaced Israel; the church was the new and true people of God. Hence Judaism was basically viewed as a theological cadaver, an antiquated, legalistic religion, a mere springboard to Christianity. So, once Christianity was established, the importance of Jews and Judaism had every reason to fall off the Christian radar screen. I had, in general, inherited and been influenced by this view of Jews and Judaism.

During my first semester as a full-time college professor, I remember how frustrated I was. Students would ask me questions about Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations I could not intelligently answer. I was woefully unprepared because my Christian teachers had never given any serious attention to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and to understanding the importance of postbiblical Judaism. I still remember many of those frustrating questions. Here are a few examples: If the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., and animal sacrifices ceased, how do Jews today seek atonement of sin? When Jews hold a Passover Seder today, why do Jews eat chicken or fish, rather than lamb? Why do traditional Jews usually prefer Tuesday for their wedding day? Why does a bridegroom smash a glass at a Jewish wedding? In the book of Genesis, if Jacob and Joseph were both embalmed, why are Jews today usually opposed to embalming the dead? What is the relation of Jewish ritual immersion to early Christian baptism? Paul was a Pharisaic Jew from the tribe of Benjamin and a student of the Jewish sage Gamaliel. If the Jew Paul held to the teaching of “original sin,” why do modern rabbis seem to oppose this teaching (cf. Phil 3:5; Acts 22:3; Rom 5:12–19)?

My frustration with the questions above, and others like them, soon started me on a search to help fill this yawning gap in my education. Before long, I came to conclude that most evangelical

Major Religious Traditions in the U.S.

| | % AMONG ALL ADULTS | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|------|-------------|
| CHRISTIAN | | | 78.4 |
| • Protestant | 51.3 | | |
| > Evangelical Churches | | 26.3 | |
| > Mainline Churches | | 18.1 | |
| > Hist. Black Churches | | 6.9 | |
| • Catholic | 23.9 | | |
| • Mormon | 1.7 | | |
| • Jehovah’s Witness | 0.7 | | |
| • Orthodox | 0.6 | | |
| • Other Christian | 0.3 | | |
| OTHER RELIGIONS | | | 4.7 |
| • Jewish | 1.7 | | |
| • Buddhist | 0.7 | | |
| • Muslim* | 0.6 | | |
| • Hindu | 0.4 | | |
| • Other World Religions | < 0.3 | | |
| • Other Faiths | 1.2 | | |
| UNAFFILIATED | | | 16.1 |
| DON’T KNOW/ REFUSED | | | 0.8 |
| | | | 100 |

*From “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream,” Pew Research Center, 2007.

Due to rounding, figures may not add to 100 and nested figures may not add to the subtotal indicated.

Christians tend to score quite high in their knowledge of Jews and Judaism from Abraham to Jesus; their knowledge is generally very low, however, in the same subject areas from Jesus to the present. Christians tend to have little understanding of how Judaism, from the end of the first century onward, began to be reformulated, resulting in a reinterpretation of many aspects of biblical Judaism. In the Christian community this ignorance and blind spot have led to naiveté, misunderstanding, and distortion of contemporary Judaism by Christians everywhere. Indeed, it has often resulted in painful caricatures and ignorant, gross violations of the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exod 20:16).

Overcoming Fear and Learning to Listen

The first few years of college teaching, I became increasingly concerned with the question of why Christians seemed so indifferent and unconcerned about Christian-Jewish relations and the Hebraic roots of the church's faith. To me, it just did not compute. The very foundation of the Christian faith came from the Jewish people. I could not understand, however, why so many Christians seemed to care less. The church's Scriptures, its theology, ethics, spirituality, and its understanding of history, social justice, and worship all came from Israel. Indeed, Gentile believers were "grafted into Israel"; Paul warned them not to be arrogant or triumphal, for the root of the olive tree (Israel) supported them (Gentiles), not they, the root (Rom 11:18–20). In light of these life-changing gifts of the Jews, in my mind, the only acceptable attitude of Gentile believers toward Jews was one of indebtedness, thankfulness, and appreciation. The more I studied, however, I became convinced that one of the main reasons the Holocaust was allowed to happen is because anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism were allowed to fester in and around the church from the early Christian centuries to the twentieth century. The church had received its spiritual heritage from the Jews. Instead of esteeming that inheritance, the offspring had turned against the parent. I wondered why the church, a people who had received so much from the Jewish community, could be so seemingly insensitive and uncaring.

Early on, I came to realize the evangelical and Jewish communities really did not know each other. Evangelicals and Jews passed like ships in the night. For the most part, Jews feared evangelicals because Jews saw them mainly as heavy-handed proselytizers, a people who only knew how to confront Jews about where they had fallen short on theology in general and the Messiah in particular. Sadly, some Jews rather crassly described the evangelical mindset as having but one goal: the stealing of Jewish souls.

Since the 1950s, many Jews had become increasingly wary of the evangelical movement in American society, especially its alleged goal of "Christianizing" America. Few Jews, however, were actually experienced in personal dialogue with evangelical leadership, and so they largely lacked an appreciation for the diversity of the evangelical movement and its intellectual depth.

A major consequence of this lack of social interaction and friendship-building resulted in much stereotyping of evangelicals in very pejorative terms. I have heard Jews make a caricature of an evangelical as little more than a missionary seeking to "prey" on uninformed Jews. An evangelical-Jewish encounter was often viewed with trepidation because Jews feared it would be a one-way

street and they resented the notion of being targeted. There had to be a better way. All profitable conversation involves listening to each other, seeking to understand each other, and learning from each other.

Often when Jews have encountered evangelicals, Jews have expressed fear and defensiveness, worrying some unpleasant confrontation would result. Interfaith events can result in genuine dialogue and an opportunity to develop positive friendships, or they can be distasteful and even repulsive experiences. But this is not an exclusive, one-way street. Occasionally, Jews have taken the offensive against evangelicals. Over the years, I have personally witnessed some expressions of hostility, challenge, and even outright belligerence on the part of Jews toward evangelicals. But either way, every situation I have witnessed has left me with the conviction that we must find a better way. We have to talk. There is such a thing as respectful conversation, not a war of words. We can learn to disagree without being disagreeable.

Evangelicals in the Synagogue

My first few years of college teaching had left me convinced that book knowledge about Jews and Judaism was not enough. If the knowledge gap was to be narrowed, there had to be personal, long-term interaction with the Jewish community. At first, I invited local rabbis to lecture in some of my classes. It helped to put an address and a face on things we were studying in class. Often these lectures were sponsored by the Jewish Chautauqua Society. For the most part, the lectures were very beneficial. But they did more than inform. The physical presence of a rabbi in class began to break down the communication barrier and mysterious wall that seemed to separate us. Students could ask questions of the rabbi in the familiarity and security of their own Christian classroom. Lasting friendships with the Jewish community began to be established. This form of education about Jews and Judaism posed a question for me that is still not resolved: the Jewish community is willing to sponsor its scholar-teachers to go into Christian institutions to teach on virtually any requested theme about Judaism and the "Jewish story." Will the day ever come when the Christian community makes its scholars available to speak in the Jewish community—and at its own expense? Would the Jewish community ever be open to this, or is this stretching interfaith engagement too far?

Within a few months, one of the Chautauqua-sponsored rabbis who had spoken several times to my classes, called me. He asked if I would be willing to read a section from the Torah (Deut 28) at his installation service at a nearby synagogue. I told him I would be honored to do so. It is always a privilege to read Scripture. The

Varieties of Jewishness

Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism evolved in early nineteenth-century Germany when Jews began integrating into German society on a large scale after having previously been confined to ghettos and subjected to discriminatory laws that limited their integration with their fellow countrymen.¹ The Reform movement evolved out of an effort by European Jews to integrate their Jewish heritage with Western ideas and culture, wherever they could combine the two without conflicts.

Today's Reform Jews have eliminated dietary restrictions and codes of dress. They do not await a personal messiah, believing instead that through its own progress, humanity will accomplish the messianic work of redemption.² Reform Jews observe the Sabbath, albeit typically in a more relaxed manner than do members of most other Sabbath-observing Jewish movements. Reform Jews consider the Torah and Talmud to have been divinely inspired but influenced by humans, and tend not to see the commandments as binding.

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism emerged as a distinct sect in mid-nineteenth-century Europe as a response to Reform Judaism; Orthodox Jews rejected the idea that Judaism was in need of reform.³ They consider the Torah (the Pentateuch) and the Oral Torah (the Talmud) to have divine authorship and the commands and wisdom therein be eternally applicable. Orthodox Jews aim to obey the letter of the law, though the details of some practices vary among Orthodox communities. For the Orthodox, the law consists of the Torah and Talmud only, though some commentaries are also authoritative.⁴

Orthodox Jews observe the Torah's dietary laws, separate men and women in synagogue worship, and strictly observe the Sabbath. Synagogue services are led in Hebrew, and Orthodox Jews expect a personal Messiah to return to Jerusalem. Perhaps the factor that most distinguishes the Orthodox from other Jews is their commitment to premodern Judaism; from the Orthodox perspective, God authored both the Torah and the Jewish traditions, which makes them eternally perfect by definition.

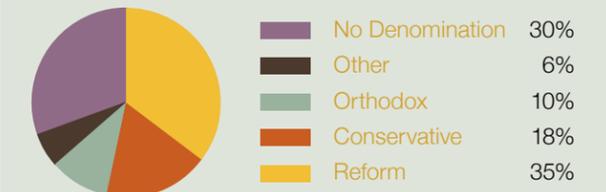
Hasidic Judaism

Modern Hasidic Judaism was founded in Poland in the mid-eighteenth century by mystic rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. Though it began a century before Orthodox Judaism distinguished itself from other Jewish movements, modern Hasidism is considered to be a type of Orthodox Judaism. Hasids can be distinguished from other Orthodox Jews by their unique clothing, their notable commitment to their leaders, and their interest in the "inner" (mystical) aspects of the Torah.

Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century as Zecharias Frankel led European Jews in reimagining Judaism as a faith that was capable of evolving in practice with modernity but which was rooted firmly in Jewish tradition.

Jewish Denominational Identity in the U.S.



Source: "Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews." February 20–June 13, 2013. Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Based on the net Jewish population (both Jews by religion and Jews of no religion).

Pew Research Center

Conservatives believe the Torah and Talmud to have divine roots, but unlike Orthodox Jews, Conservatives believe the books to have human influences as well. Unique to Conservative Judaism is its take on the Jewish law, *halakhah*; for Conservatives, *halakhah* includes not just the letter of the law, but also the spirit of the law.⁵ Because of this, Conservative religious practice can and does evolve, though the law is binding.⁶ Like Orthodox Jews, Conservatives observe the Sabbath and the dietary restrictions of the Torah, but unlike their Orthodox counterparts, they ordain women as rabbis, practice mixed-gender worship, and hold in high regard the *halakhic* process (discernment of Jewish law).

Conservative Jews tend to be quite supportive of the nation of Israel, believing it to be the ultimate destiny of all Jews. Hebrew is used in Conservative liturgy. There are varying beliefs within the Conservative movement regarding the existence of a personal Messiah.⁷

Reconstructionist Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism was founded in the early twentieth century by an American rabbi named Mordecai Kaplan. Kaplan was a passionate champion of women's rights, an issue that led him to believe that Judaism must be reconstructed (as opposed to merely reformed or conserved). Kaplan rejected supernaturalism altogether, eliminating as well in this new version of Judaism the notion that the nation of Israel was a chosen people.⁸ Kaplan defined Judaism as a "civilization" complete with food, customs, languages, and laws; because he did so, many irreligious Jews were inclined to join the movement.

Like Reform and Conservative Jews, Reconstructionist Jews seek to combine traditional Jewish culture and traditions with modern beliefs and ways of living. Reconstructionism rejects the concept of a personal Messiah and a divine origin of the Torah, and considers the *halakhah* (Jewish law) to be sacred but nonbinding.⁹ Despite the comparative lack of structure within the movement, Reconstructionism's aim is to keep the faith's history and tradition alive.



A rabbinic scribe at work writing a Torah scroll at the Masada synagogue in Israel. Scribes at Masada synagogue work behind a glass-enclosed wall amidst a steady stream of year-round tourists.

occasion proved to be joyful, yet sobering. The event began to open my eyes to the possibility of Christians learning from Jews and participating with Jews in the synagogue. I took a measure of encouragement from the observation of Martin Buber, the late Jewish biblical scholar: “We [Jews and Christians] share a Book, and that is no small thing.” I could see some real learning potential through on-site visits to synagogues. But I wondered how Jews would respond to a large group of non-Jewish visitors. I was curious to find out, so I decided I needed a course to be the vehicle for engaging in this type of off-campus learning.

The next fall I developed a new course. I called it Modern Jewish Culture, a title that has remained to this day. From the beginning, the course has proved to be a sort of potpourri on “Everything I wish I had been taught about Jews and Judaism, but was not.” Its main components, however, have included the beliefs and practices of Judaism, the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, and the history of Christian-Jewish relations. I want my students to be familiar with the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity, and also with why interfaith relations is important and how it is done. I was determined that learning must not be limited to textbooks and lectures. Students also had to learn from and interact with Jews in situ. To do so required field trips, a decision I am very glad I made.

To this day, I have made with my Christian students over four hundred, course-related field trips into the Jewish community. These visits have significantly shaped our perceptions of Jews and Judaism. We have visited worship services at Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Hasidic houses of worship. We have celebrated Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashanah, Succot, Simchat Torah, Purim, Pesach, and Shavuot. We have attended Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Commemoration) gatherings, visited Jewish day schools, Jewish funeral homes, Jewish historical sites, and attended dozens of lectures and interfaith events at Jewish Community Centers. We have spent dozens of hours in local synagogues discussing Judaism and Christianity with rabbis, either before or after services. We continue to be graciously received.

Extending Hospitality in Worship

But do Jews feel as welcome and comfortable in evangelical churches as Christians typically do in most synagogues? From the Christian perspective, many churchgoers would quickly say, “Yes,” quite

unaware of how de-Judaized the church has become over the centuries! From the Jewish perspective, however, Jews often feel like fish out of water. To be comfortable within a church is not an easy matter. Some Jewish leaders openly discourage visiting churches, or they express extreme caution about this idea. There are historical, theological, practical, and even symbolic reasons for this point of view. If Jews ever do enter a church, many Jews see themselves doing so only as “visitors,” or “observers,” never as “participants” of any service. In this modern society, marriages, funerals, and other rites of passage often bring Jews into churches. In addition, the high rate of intermarriage and the consequent expectations placed on the Jewish partner of an interfaith couple have increasingly brought many Jews within churches. Many separatistic, traditional Jews, however, tend to abide by at least two unwritten instructions concerning Christians: (1) never enter a church and (2) never discuss theology with a Christian.

In addition to the above restrictive guidelines, occasionally Orthodox Jews have been known to protest and to use physical force to ban their own from taking part in an interfaith event. This, of course is an expression of a very closed Judaism, unlike the more open modern Orthodox who have made certain adaptations to the realities of modern society. I will share one interfaith illustration from an experience I had with closed Orthodoxy. In the 1990s, I was invited to be one of the Christian

speakers at an international interfaith conference at the Jerusalem Convention Center. Other Christian speakers on the program included the Archbishop of Canterbury and a Catholic cardinal from Germany named Joseph Ratzinger, a decade later elected pope, assuming the title Benedict XVI. Before the conference began, the Chief Rabbi of Israel appeared on television and told Israeli Jews to protest the event and to warn others not to attend. The Chief Rabbi’s position was that Jews were a majority religion in Israel, and so Jews had no reason meeting with or talking to those of another faith. The same day on which the archbishop, the cardinal, and I lectured, dozens of Orthodox Israeli Jews waged a sit-down protest, barricading the entrance to the hall of the Convention Center. I had never witnessed before in America this kind of protest of an interfaith event. I was glad when the Jerusalem police removed the protestors and allowed the conference to proceed.

Fortunately, not all Jews take the position that to enter a church, to meet with Christians in their house of worship, or even to meet in another neutral venue is to condone or put one’s approval on all the teachings and activities of the other. If that were the case in America, Christian-Jewish relations would not have made the enormous strides that it has since World War II, while many Jews are still somewhat tentative about entering the doors of a church to be present for a service of Christian worship. I have heard different responses from two rabbi friends of mine. I will briefly comment on each. The first rabbi, Orthodox in his identity, explains to me that he has no difficulty with certain aspects of the Christian worship service. For example, he says that from a Jewish theological perspective, there is not a line in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9–13) with which he disagrees. He says, in principle, he could pray these words of Jewish origin with a group of Christians, but he chooses *not* to do so. According to this rabbi, the reason he will not pray the Lord’s Prayer is primarily symbolic. That is, it boils down mainly to a matter of outward, social Jewish identity. In the rabbi’s view, if he were to stand beside Christians in a church and pray a prayer coming from the Christian Gospels, this act could easily send the wrong message. So the rabbi chooses to abstain, even from the more “Jewish” parts of a Christian service.

Another rabbi, a friend whose view I also respect, is from the Conservative movement. He takes a different position. Personally, he is open to “selective participation” in church services. For example, this rabbi has told me of an evangelical church where he has a close relation with the pastor. The pastor and church members study Hebrew with the rabbi and sometimes join in services at his synagogue. The rabbi and his congregants are occasionally present at the church across the street. The rabbi states that he does this because he is sincerely open to learn from Christians, a point few rabbis will admit to—all the more so in

public. In the rabbi’s words, “We Jews don’t know everything about God; we have a lot to learn from this church in town.” The rabbi further emphasizes, “These [Christian] people have a spontaneous expression of spirituality which is moving; their prayers are natural and from the heart, and their music is alive.”

Toward Refining Interfaith Conversation

Continued progress in interfaith relations cannot be taken for granted. There are still barriers to break down and there is yet much to learn about the other. As I have emphasized in this essay, if evangelicals are to be known, they must also make a sincere effort to know the other. No friendship could genuinely prosper if one partner were to impose his own way and insist, “It’s about me; come and learn solely about me; I am everything!” It does not work that way. Friendships are two-way streets. Friends value honest sharing. If a relationship is to grow and prosper, there has to be giving, not simply receiving. In interfaith relations, respectful conversation must replace confrontation; dynamic engagement replace strident badgering; and dialogue replace monologue.

From the time I first entered the world of interreligious dialogue, I have learned many valuable lessons through reading, listening, attentively watching, and personally participating. Accordingly, I offer a number of guidelines or rules of thumb for evangelicals to consider in order to move the dialogue to a greater maturity and productivity.

First, one must be committed to work on making gradual progress, with small steps, rather than quick giant strides. Often, it is more like being on a seemingly unending journey, rather than realizing one has suddenly arrived home. Evangelical-Jewish dialogue is a long-term venture. But it can be like a roller coaster; it has its ups and downs. Sometimes we take three steps forward and two backwards. Patience is required, for there is often a newness and strangeness to one’s dialogue partner and his faith orientation. It takes a commitment of time over many months—even years—to come to know the other and to build trust with the other.

There is no room for preemptive turf claiming here. “Love is patient” and “always perseveres” (cf. 1 Cor 13:4, 7). Inaccuracies and misperceptions of the other cannot be overcome overnight. After nearly two thousand years of considerable animosity, conflict, and avoidance, only in the decades after World War II have we begun to see some progress toward rapprochement between us. Therefore we must always be reminded that when Christians and Jews come together, history is on the table. Sadly, Christians especially carry a lot of baggage due to a long history of misunderstanding, hatred, and contempt.

My second guideline has to do with the style with which evangelicals conduct dialogue. Evangelicals must first commit themselves to listen, then speak. Listening is a godly virtue; some would even call it the ultimate form of humility. When the time comes to speak, evangelicals must always speak truth—as they personally have come to know and understand this—in love (Eph 4:15). There will be times when evangelicals and Jews disagree. When evangelicals disagree, they must learn to disagree sincerely, yet graciously. Such is a Spirit-filled art, not something that comes by intensive training from a debate coach. The style and demeanor of evangelicals should always be one of humility and modesty, especially regarding truth claims. Evangelicals understand that the truth they proclaim is already the truth that has sought them out. Thus, an evangelical's attitude and posture is not one of triumphalism, assertiveness, showmanship, or arrogance. Rather, evangelicals speak as beggars telling other beggars where they have found bread.

A necessary prerequisite for effective dialogue is the willingness of evangelicals to learn from Jews. Thus, there is no place for pride, aggressiveness, or hubris. Evangelicals are servants, not masters. Evangelicals will seek no compromise on their theological nonnegotiables. But they must be committed to display integrity, uprightness, and the highest moral principles in their discussions. Evangelicals must learn to humbly submit their views for discussion at the dialogue table, not pontificate on them to others with a spirit of self-importance. Too often in centuries past, Christians have spoken for Jews rather than allowing Jews to speak for themselves. There is therefore a reticence and reserve required by Christians in dialogue. Indeed, Paul admonishes, “in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). It is contradictory for people to say they have experienced grace yet not display graciousness; have experienced mercy yet be unmerciful and judgmental; have experienced love yet be unloving.

Third, evangelicals believe the Spirit of God is active everywhere. The Spirit primarily works relationally in the lives of people—guiding, teaching, comforting, empowering, and convicting them. The Spirit has a special redemptive role in the lives of believers. But God's presence may also be discerned in the lives of others outside the church; God providentially works far beyond the categories theologians often confine him to. The so-called common grace of God is everywhere active in the world. If God can describe Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king, as “my servant,” and Persian King Cyrus, “my anointed,” God indeed may be present and active in interfaith activities that are God-honoring. When caring for the poor and hungry, justice, righteousness, reconciliation, goodness, kindness, and peacemaking are displayed in this world, such may be potent signs of God's presence and the manifestation of his will for humankind.

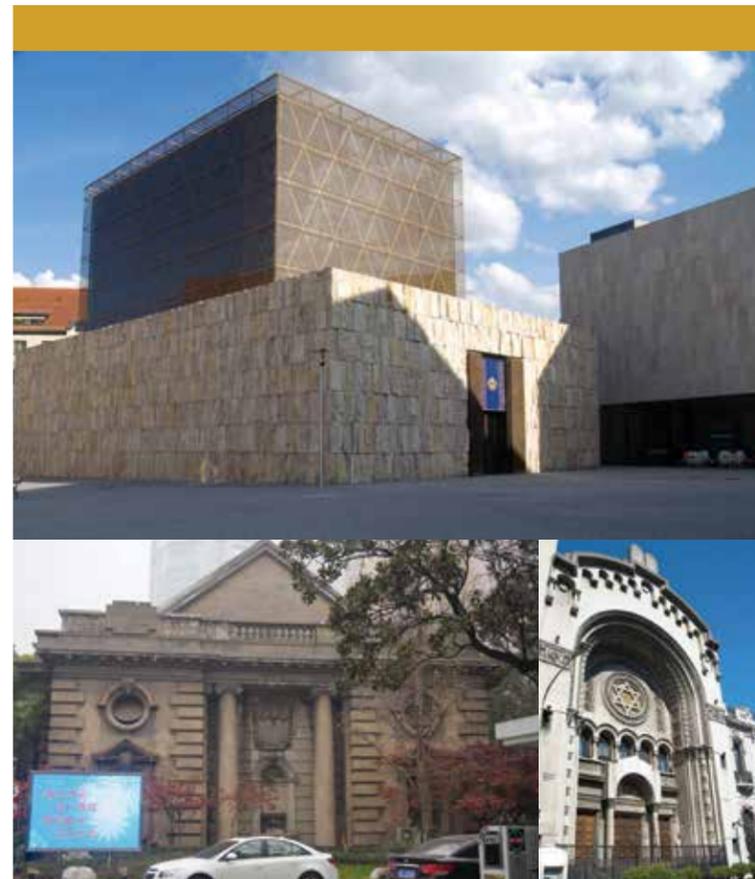
The starkness of a purely theological starting point for dialogue, if it fails to include also the relational dimensions emphasized in a more pneumatologically focused paradigm, is likely to minimize dynamic practical concern for the other. Unfortunately, exclusivism has often led to isolationism. God, to be sure, is at work in relationships. Theology is not simply propositional; it also has incarnational and dynamic dimensions. One's partner in dialogue can be too quickly dismissed because he fails to measure up to the standard of the other's theological yardstick.

In interfaith dialogue, however, when looking into the face of one's partner, one may see the image of God (Gen 1:26). As divine image bearers, Christians and Jews remind us every human life has significance, dignity, and value to the Almighty. Though marred by sin and finiteness, each person reflects a divine likeness. Therefore, it is imperative that when evangelicals come to the dialogue table they show respect, honor, appropriate regard, and consideration for their dialogue partner. Agreement on everything is not necessary; a willing spirit is. We can sincerely believe others are wrong and still respect them, show unconditional love for them, and do good to them. The dialogue table is no place for the last word. Only God is absolute, and only he has the right to judge with finality and perfect knowledge.

There is a fourth guideline I wish to emphasize. Evangelicals must be reminded they presently know only “in part” (1 Cor 13:12). What cannot be fully harmonized or reconciled in this life must be left in the hands of the Ultimate Reconciler. In the meantime, these issues and tensions cannot be resolved by crusaders, jihadists, or political forces aimed at militantly furthering one people's religious agenda at the expense of another's. The diverse religious communities of any nation will have their disagreements among themselves and among other nations. In that vein, suicide bombing is never an acceptable expression of protest. Why? Every human being, right or wrong, has been created in God's likeness. Whatever intentionally and randomly seeks to destroy innocent human lives defaces his creation and so diminishes the divine Presence in the world. The evangelical acknowledges a different type of conflict and a different means for conflict resolution. Ultimate resolution of conflict comes not by force or power but by the gentle persuasion and yielding of the human heart and will, voluntarily moved in submission to the Almighty. One's “weapons” are not earthly, but of the realm of the Spirit (Zech 4:6; Eph 6:10–18).

My fifth observation is this: In seeking a better way through respectful conversation, evangelicals must realize they may often have to be satisfied with incomplete answers and partial agreement on various interfaith discussion points. In Scripture, truth is often indirectly or obliquely approached through the use of parables, analogies, or the answering of a question with another question.

In certain evangelical circles there is an almost black-and-white approach to truth, a mindset that demands one must come to full agreement and closure on every issue *now!* In Jewish-Christian relations, as in the interpretation of a large part of Scripture itself, there will always be ambiguities, loose ends, and contrasting schools of thought. The differences between Christianity and Islam tend to be even greater due to Islam's claim to a new revelation, the Qur'an, in the seventh century C.E. But if agreement on everything is a necessity for dialogue, then there can be no dialogue. The main prerequisite for dialogue is to come to the table with the right of self-definition and to grant that same right to others around the table. Depending on the agenda, this will lead to a mutual search for understanding and discovery of truth, wherever it lies. Though evangelicals first seek answers from biblical sources, they also acknowledge the importance of tradition, reason, and experience in working out the implications of their faith.



Synagogue architecture varies significantly between geographic locations and historical contexts, as can be seen in these pictures of synagogues from Germany, China, and Argentina.

Evangelicals must acknowledge that a partial agreement on the discussion of what is truth and the will of God is better than total rejection of an entire system. There must be the ability to live with dialectical tensions, paradoxes, and incongruities. Dialogue will not work if one has to be right on every issue. One has to listen on every issue, and listen with a teachable spirit. Every human being must acknowledge they are fallible and far from omniscient. If the sole purpose of dialogue is to get an “opponent” to concede, rather than to see and understand, then dialogue is not dialogue. Only God has ultimate authority; no one has the power to compel belief. What one does with the discussion and evidence presented in dialogue is a very personal matter. A successful dialogue is respectful conversation, not relentless argument; a willingness to hear the depths of the pain of another, and be heard; the discovering that God loves honest questions and is pleased with those who seek answers.

Many evangelical critics of interreligious dialogue fear such a venture is really reductionism. That is, they claim such an encounter is aimed at reducing each faith to its lowest common denominator so a symbiotic, homogenized, generic religion will emerge. In my view, this is totally false and a misunderstanding of the word *dialogue*. This is not about relativism or theological capitulation. I and most other evangelical Christians I know are fully committed to historic Christian beliefs for specific reasons. Evangelical Christian identity is not a matter of physical birth but of scripturally born convictions. We are called to know what we believe and why we believe it. In evangelical Christianity, the preexistent Word, the deity of Jesus, his sinless life, atoning death, bodily resurrection, and second coming as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (see Rev 17:14; 19:16) are among the classic, central beliefs which distinguish Christianity among the Abrahamic faiths. And it will always be that way. A Christianity that becomes theologically diluted loses its distinctiveness and ceases to be an authentic expression of that faith.

To be known, one must first know. The twenty-first century will reveal if American evangelical Christians are willing to accept the current cultural challenge to reach out to further bridge the interfaith divide. **EIFD**

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FROM POLITENESS TO FRESH TERMS FOR JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE



I am pleased to respond to an article Marvin Wilson, a pioneer in initiating dialogue between Jews and evangelical Christians. The article under consideration, both in its shorter and longer forms, invites evangelicals who have not heretofore

engaged in dialogue with Jews to enter this particularly delicate conversation. As a veteran of the conversation between Jews and Christians over many decades, not only with evangelicals, I offer annotations to the essay.

This article is a primer in interfaith etiquette, an appeal for politeness. It reaches out to those evangelicals for whom conversation with Jews (and stretching forward to anticipate those with Muslims) offers a fresh opportunity for self-reflection. Those of us who have labored in this vineyard avidly seek fresh recruits to tend the vines that we have been cultivating into the future. And so Wilson has put his hand to this plow so to speak.

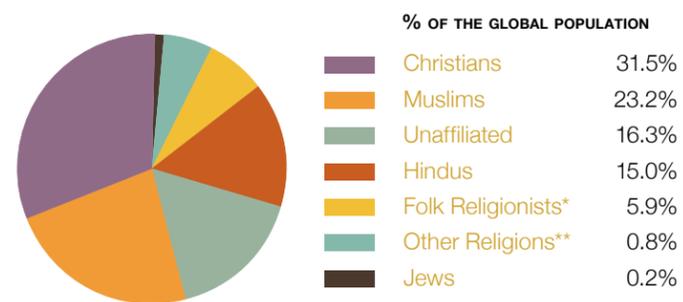
In this article, Wilson invites the evangelical community to act politely by inviting a posture of humility, encouraging evangelicals to eschew arrogance, self-righteousness, and combativeness in conversation with Jews. To this end, he helpfully points out attitudes and behaviors that would not be helpful. That itself is helpful.

Mastering appropriate etiquette for entering this most painful of conversations is essential, but a constructive posture alone does not advance the conversation itself. The essay does not apprise readers of the gross and violent history of Christian proselytism of Jews that lies behind the admonitory etiquette. Absent this knowledge, an uninformed evangelical readership may lack adequate background to appreciate the gravity of the call for respect that powers the primer. For example, evangelicals may believe that their desire to convert Jews to Christ is an act of love, while it is experienced

by Jews as a hostile and aggressive stance that is basically disrespectful.

To the end of self-reflective engagement, it would be helpful to distinguish polemic and debate from dialogue, for these are quite different undertakings. The public literary and verbal history of Jewish-Christian relations beginning in the second century is replete with polemic in the form of arguments to demonstrate the falsehood or inferiority of the other position. In debate, formerly called disputation, each position seeks to demonstrate its superiority over the other. Polemic and debate have been the predominant means of conversation between Jews and Christians, almost always with Christians by definition having the upper hand. Dialogue is a relatively recent and quite different undertaking because it involves risk. Dialogue takes place when all parties

Global Religious Landscape



*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions, and Australian aboriginal religions.

**Includes Bahá'ís, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians, and many other faiths.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012.

to the conversation come to learn about the other in the other's own terms, not in the terms in which one's own tradition has classically interpreted the other. This is exceptionally important in the Jewish-Christian conversation because each one's received read of the other is radically different from one's own read of one's own tradition and therefore of oneself.

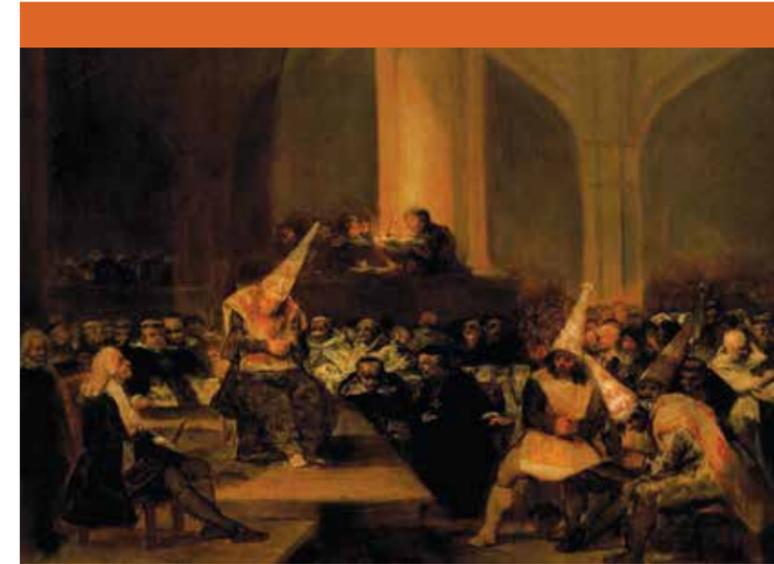
Even more than coming to learn of the other in the other's own terms is coming to learn of oneself based on the perspective of the other. It requires being open to seeing oneself as one is seen. Within the framework of dialogue, each party to the conversation must be open to being spoken to and enriched by the other's theological reality. Jews have been abused by the debate format over specific points of Christian doctrine that have set the terms of engagement. Those memories burn hot in Jewish institutional memory. The issues here are not to be adjudicated by deductive demonstration but savored by those who are willing to taste a new cuisine.

While politeness toward strangers is always appropriate, and respect for their personal integrity helpful, Wilson mentions that dialogue calls for granting self-definition to the other. However, the theological terms on which Pauline Christianity is based have difficulty respecting Jewish beliefs and practices because Paul and the Gospel writers redefined Judaism as Christianity. Yet anything short of respect for Judaism in its own terms is patronizing in a dialogical setting. Christianity's two-thousand-years-long teaching of contempt for Judaism requires Christians to develop fresh terms on which to understand and value Judaism in order for there to be parity in the conversation. What then are the fresh terms on which Jews and Christians can set aside mutual theological contempt and seek a fresh start?

Here Judaism may have an advantage over Christians because once Christianity was legalized and politically institutionalized, flexing its political muscle, Jews abandoned whatever proselytizing instincts they had. Jews have no trouble accepting other religions and recognizing that non-Jews may choose other religions. It long ago gave up the hope of "being right" or of having the truth that others lack. Thus, it may be easier for them to accept Christian integrity even when they do not understand its intricacies.

Now I turn to a few substantive matters missing from the essay before us. First, it offers no admission of both the anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism that have by and large characterized Christian treatment of Jews and Judaism both explicitly and subtly. Such

recognition of Christian sinfulness toward Jews and Judaism accompanied by a request for forgiveness is generally requisite in order for Jews to accept an invitation to talk, and even then, some Jews will pass on the opportunity. Perhaps one helpful footnote



Francisco Goya's painting *Scene from an Inquisition* depicts one of Christianity's most horrific collisions with nationalism—the 15th-century Spanish Inquisition. In order to maintain orthodox purity in Spain, Jews and Muslims alike were forced to convert or be exiled from the country or burned at the stake. The four people donning tall hats stand accused and surrounded by interrogating Inquisitors and a crowd of witnesses.

here is that while Christianity carries all sin to God asking for forgiveness, Judaism distinguishes sins committed against other people from those committed against God. As for the former, Judaism sets aside an entire month each year in which individuals are expected to approach everyone they have wronged during the past year (assuming that that is feasible) and seek forgiveness. Only if the request is persistently denied does one carry it to God in prayer. The difference in the two traditions' patterns of seeking atonement is noteworthy when approaching the other.

Second, our article offers no guidelines on the goals of such conversation. To come together in a meaningful way it is necessary for the two partners to agree on what is desired from the interchange. In dialogue, learning about the other can be a

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ETHNICITY, HUMILITY, REVELATION, AND ACTION



Introduction

After briefly explaining my own interest in interfaith dialogue in light of the historical points that Professor Marvin Wilson makes in his thought-provoking and wise essay, "Christians Engaging Culture: A Better Way," I will engage four of his philosophical points from my Jewish perspective. In doing so, I hope to support and reinforce the thrust in Jewish-evangelical Christian dialogue that he describes and espouses, for I think that the direction he suggests in his essay, reflecting decades of work in this area, is exactly the right way to go.

My Own Interest in Interfaith Dialogue

Except in Israel, Jews are a minority in every nation in which they live, including the United States, which is home to the second-largest Jewish community. It is hard, therefore, for American Jews not to be aware of Christian culture and to interact with it. Jews learn at least something of the history of Christian anti-Semitism through discussions at home and in their religious training, and in some cases they learn about that directly when they are called "Christ killers" or when some negative stereotype of Jews or Judaism is hurled at them. Furthermore, Jews learn from their Christian friends or from reading Christian biblical or liturgical sources that Christianity itself portrays Jews negatively, as deniers of Christ, as legalistic, and as lacking love and forgiveness. This view of Jews has been transferred to secular literature by Christians too, perhaps most obviously in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Ultimately, most Christians have been taught to see anyone who denies that Jesus is Christ as damned to hell, and so even well-meaning Christians historically have tried to convert Jews to Christianity to save their souls. This is still true today for some groups: in fact, that was exactly the message of a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* several years ago sponsored by a large group of evangelical Christian leaders. We love you, and therefore we want you to become Christian! So Jews' minority status, the history of Christian anti-Semitism, Christian sacred and secular literature, and the doctrines of Christianity itself have all fostered negative views of Jews among Christians. No wonder

Jews are wary of interacting on any serious religious level with Christians!

Vatican II's document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) was nothing short of revolutionary in the history of the relationship between Christians and Jews, and in subsequent years several Protestant denominations followed suit. No longer were all Jews at the time of Jesus, let alone any Jews since, to be held responsible for the death of Jesus, and Judaism was not to be seen as superseded by Christianity but rather, to use Paul's metaphor, the root from which Christianity sprang. God does not retract his commitments, and so the Covenant between God and the Jews is to be seen as eternally valid.

These developments in the larger world and my own personal background have led me to be intensely interested in improving Jewish-Christian relations in the future. I became part of the Priest-Rabbi Dialogue, sponsored by the Los Angeles Archdiocese and the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, as soon as it began in 1973, and I have served as its co-chair for the last fifteen years. Through the National Conference of Christians and Jews, my rabbinical students met each year with seminarians studying for the ministry or priesthood in local seminaries. I was part of several projects of the World Council of Churches. It was, however, through my friendship with Dr. Richard Mouw, immediate past president of Fuller Theological Seminary, that I came to know and interact with evangelical Christians over the last twenty years. The reflections below on Dr. Wilson's essay are rooted in the long and fruitful interactions that this rabbi has had with Christians about serious theological and moral issues.

Beliefs vs. Birth and Deeds

Possibly the hardest thing for Christians to understand about Judaism is that, unlike Christianity, Judaism is not based on an official set of beliefs that define one as a Jew. Judaism certainly has some core beliefs—ethical monotheism, the sanctity of both the Written and Oral Torah, and strong commitments to the People and Land of Israel and to making this world better for everyone (*tikkun olam*, "repairing the world"), for example—but one can be a Jew without believing in any of them. That is because Jewish



The article that signaled the beginning of Henry Ford's seven-year hate campaign against the Jews. (COLLECTIONS OF THE HENRY FORD MUSEUM, GREENFIELD VILLAGE)

Left: *The International Jew*, published by Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company in the early 1920s, is one of the ugliest examples of anti-Semitism in the United States in the 20th century. In a series of pamphlets published in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, Ford decried what he saw as the world's problem: the Jews. Right: *Der ewige Jude* (The Wandering Jew) was part of Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda in the late 1930s that depicted Jews as communists and swindlers.

common shared goal. But if evangelicals are still coming hoping to convert Jews, whether they state that or not, it is generally problematic for several reasons. Christians are about two billion strong throughout the world, while the world's Jewish population is estimated at 13.75 million, most of whom are in North America and Israel. Jews reasonably want Judaism to exist in the world, and Jewish defection to Christianity is a threat to the survival of the community that is already threatened by secularism. Further, because the church is arguably Judaism's archenemy, defection to Christ has been experienced by the community as treachery.

Judaism has a strong sense of communal identity and focuses on communal political redemption, while Christianity is far more individualistic and emphasizes personal salvation. This means that Christians generally have stronger respect for acts of individual conscience while Jews highly prize group loyalty. Here is another asymmetry that Christians entering conversation with Jews would do well to consider.

Finally, in regard to Jewish apostasy to Christianity, there have been periods both in the Middle Ages and in modern Europe when Jews were pressured to convert, and that compliance with Christian desires brought social and economic advantages, or at least the lifting of civic disabilities imposed on Jews by Christian authorities. Indeed, citizenship in late medieval Spain and modern European nations as these emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sometimes required Jews to apostatize. Jews have subsequently viewed Jewish apostates as weak willed, unable to tolerate the disabilities required of staying faithful.

In conjunction with the last mentioned point is the fact that Christians have wanted Jews to apostatize since Paul agonized that other Jews did not accept his gospel. Generation after generation of Christians have tried everything from sweetness to threat to force to make this happen, but most Jews have resisted. When Christians are rebuffed, some become angry and hostile, as was the case with Martin Luther. Today, as

religious preference is becoming disassociated from educational, social, political, and economic opportunity, clearing the way for conversion on the grounds of sincerity alone, Christians can come to terms with the fact that Christianity holds little allure for most Jews who for the most part do not experience themselves as needing rescue from divine wrath at the totality of their sinfulness. Judaism knows nothing of either original sin or total depravity, ideas that originated with Augustine of Hippo, elaborated by Jean Calvin. Judaism contains within itself mechanisms for expiating sin and never developed the elaborate rhetoric about the wrath of God that has often powered Christian evangelism.

I offer the above to annotate the invitation to informed conversation between evangelicals and Jews. I salute Marvin Wilson for his pioneering work and hope that his legacy will be forwarded by future generations of evangelicals.

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“Possibly the hardest thing for Christians to understand about Judaism is that, unlike Christianity, Judaism is not based on an official set of beliefs that define one as a Jew.”

identity is defined by being born to a Jewish woman or reborn through the rites of conversion. There thus can be, and are, secular Jews—that is, people who very much identify as Jews but who rarely, if ever, set foot in a synagogue or observe Jewish home rituals. They may nevertheless express their Jewish identity through efforts to improve the world, through Zionist activities, or through cultural activities involving Jewish music, art, literature, dance, drama, and foods, or simply through social activities. This is clearly not the preferred mode to be a Jew from the point of view of classical Judaism, but as many as half of American Jews are secular.

Even those who identify religiously, however, often feel unprepared to engage in theological discussions with Christians because Jews historically have interpreted their beliefs in multiple ways.¹ Therefore Jews cannot point to a creed with a clear and official meaning and state confidently that this is what Judaism stands for.

More importantly, Judaism emphasizes following God’s laws to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6), and so many Jews would much rather talk about how their religion influences their practices than talk about beliefs. Put another way, Judaism is a religion of deeds rather than creeds. This means that even agreeing on the topics to be discussed in a dialogue between Jews and Christians can be a problem.

Messiah

The other thing that Christians have a hard time understanding is why Jews do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah. The first thing to note about this issue is that although Judaism definitely has Messianic beliefs—in fact, Christianity inherited them from Judaism—for Christians the belief that Jesus is Christ is central to their identity as Christians, while for Jews the belief in the Messiah is just barely on the radar screen, if it is at all. So Jews find it odd that Christians focus so much on life after death and

heaven and hell when there is so much work to be done to make this life better. Although no Jewish theology that I know of says this exactly, Jews effectively believe that if we do what God wants of us in this life by following God’s laws and making life better for everyone, God will take care of whatever happens after death, if anything.

Why, though, do Jews not see Jesus as the Messiah? It is primarily because Jesus did not fulfill the job description. Isaiah (chaps. 2 and 11), Micah (chap. 4), Zechariah (chap. 9), and other biblical sources describe the Messiah as, among other things, bringing universal peace, and Jesus did not do that. Christians do not deny that we live in a world of wars, poverty, and prejudice, and hence the Christian doctrine of the Second Coming explains the delayed fulfillment of these messianic promises. Jews, in contrast, think that Jesus was a rabbi, as he is called in the Gospels, one whose teachings have much in common with those of other first-century rabbis, but not the Messiah, to whose coming we still look forward. As one of my friends put it, when the Messiah comes, we will ask him, “Is this your first trip or your second?”!

Revelation and the Oral Torah

Revelation is already problematic in the Bible. How do you distinguish a true prophecy from a false one? Jeremiah complains bitterly about false prophets (e.g., 6:13–15; 14:4; 23:23–40; 27:9–18; 28:1–17; 29:21–32). Deuteronomy twice tries to distinguish true prophets from false ones. In chapter 13, it says that a true prophet says exactly what I, Moses, say. This, of course, makes it impossible for God to reveal anything new to us. Chapter 18 says that a true prophet predicts something that comes true. The problems with this are, first, some of the accepted prophets of the Hebrew Bible predict things that do not come true,² and, second, all that a clever person need do is predict something for hundreds of years from now, and nobody will know during the person’s lifetime whether he or she is a true prophet or not. Probably as a result of considerations like these Zechariah (13:2–4) already (late sixth century B.C.E.) says,

In that day . . . I will also make the “prophets” and the unclean spirit vanish from the land. If anyone “prophesies” thereafter, his own father and mother, who brought him into the world, will say to him, “You shall die, for you have lied in the name of the Lord, and his own father and mother, who brought him into the world, will put him to death when he “prophesies.” In that day, every “prophet” will be ashamed of the “visions” [he had] when he “prophesied.”

The Rabbis maintain that prophecy ceased shortly after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. It was replaced, however, by new interpretations of the one accepted revelation,

the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), which is understood as being more trustworthy than any of the other biblical prophecies because, according to the biblical account, 600,000 Israelite men witnessed the revelation event at Mount Sinai (Exod 12:37; 19:15–20:14). Thus the Talmud (*b. Bava Batra* 12a) says this:

R. Abdimi from Haifa said: Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, the prophetic gift was taken away from the prophets and given to the Sages.—Is then a Sage not also a prophet?—What he meant was this: although it has been taken from the prophets, it has not been taken from the Sages. Amemar said: A Sage is even superior to a prophet, as it says, “And a prophet has a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). Who is (usually) compared with whom? Is not the smaller compared with the greater?

The Sages to whom this source refers are the people who know and interpret the Torah and the later tradition; from the first century C.E. on, they are called “rabbis.” This source therefore means that Jews see the texts of the Tradition as begging for new interpretations to reveal what God wants of us in our time, for “There are seventy faces to the Torah”³—that is, the Torah is open to multiple interpretations and applications. This requires a high degree of epistemological humility in our claims of knowledge of God’s will as we see that other intelligent and moral people interpret the Bible differently. This clearly will not satisfy those who want things neat and clean, but the Jewish tradition maintains that at Sinai itself each person there understood what God was saying according to his or her own abilities.⁴ The community must decide which of many interpretations of *legal* passages will become the communal standard of practice, but in *theological* and other types of verses, where no standardization is

required (remember Judaism is not built on creeds), people may and should interpret the texts in as many ways as possible to gain as much meaning from them as one can. Furthermore, revelation is ongoing, for the text of the Torah may reveal new meanings to us each time we read it. This entire approach to revelation is, of course, radically different from fundamentalist doctrines of an “inerrant text” that has one, and only one, correct meaning, and so those Christians who believe some version of the latter will have much to discuss with Jews.

Lessons Learned

My own interactions with evangelical Christians have thankfully shattered many of the stereotypes that I had had of them: that they

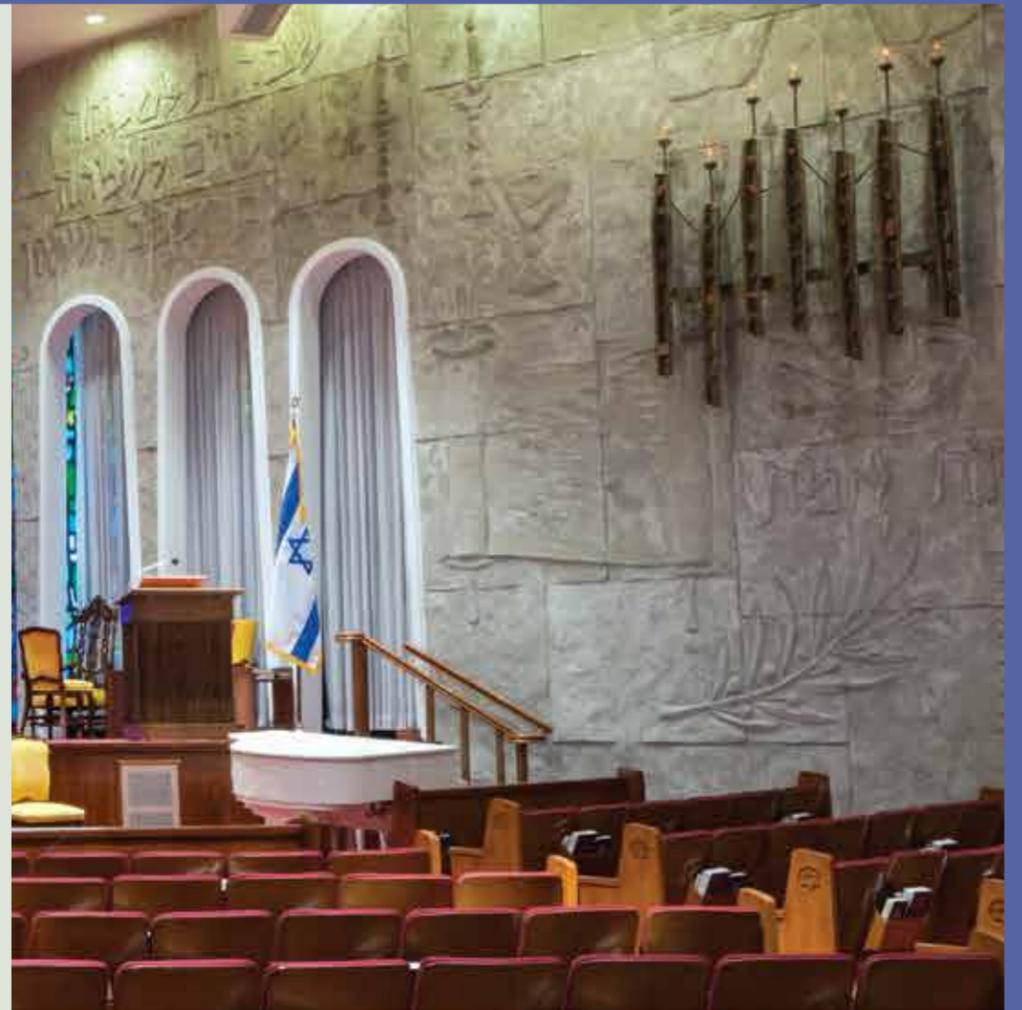
Regional Distribution of World Jewish Population as of 2010



| | REGION | POPULATION | % OF POPULATION |
|--|--------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| | North America | 6,040,000 | 43.6% |
| | Middle East/North Africa | 5,630,000 | 40.6% |
| | Europe | 1,410,000 | 10.2% |
| | Latin America/Caribbean | 470,000 | 3.4% |
| | Asia-Pacific | 200,000 | 1.5% |
| | Sub-Saharan Africa | 100,000 | 0.7% |

Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012.



Temple Beth Am

Memory and identity are intertwined in Judaism, and liturgical practices play an integral part in perpetuating Jewish memory and reinforcing communal identity. This distinctive of Jewish worship is ingrained in the architecture of the sanctuary at Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles, California. At the focal point of the image in the center frame stands a modern stained glass depiction of the burning bush cresting the top of the ark of

the covenant. As the community gathers the Torah scrolls are taken from the ark of the covenant and read aloud. In this act of worship the community enters into sacramental time and stands at the foot of Sinai receiving the law of God from Moses.

On both sides of the sanctuary, stone walls stretch from floor to ceiling. On the right is mounted a light with seven fixtures symbolizing the Menorah and surrounded with engraved symbols and Hebrew phrases that name the numerous gifts

of God to the Jewish community throughout its history. Among these gifts are the annual harvests and Jewish festivals, the Law and commandments. Juxtaposed with this wall, on the left of the ark hangs a light made of gnarled metal and prison wire with six fixtures representing the six million Jews killed during the Holocaust. The wall is filled with the major losses and laments of the Jewish community including the Shoah, medieval pogroms, and the destruction of the Second Temple.

The architecture of Temple Beth Am is no mere religious ornamentation. Those inhabiting this sacred space on a regular basis are ushered into an act of worship of God with eyes wide open. As Rabbi David Wolpe once put it, "To the extent that faith ignores the world, or filters out the uncomfortable bits, it is weakened and impoverished."¹ Reception of the Law of God is to be done amidst the rehearsal of the community's joyous gifts and painful losses. It is in this context that Jewish identity is forged through memory in worship.

are overwhelmingly uneducated, that they are conservative to the point of being mean, and that they are too worried about hell to have a sense of humor. Richard Mouw, by contrast, is among the brightest, well-read, thoughtful, compassionate, and funniest people I know, and the evangelical Christians to whom he has

introduced me have shared many of those traits. I would hope that Christians entering into serious dialogue with Jews will likewise gain a more realistic and positive view of Jews and that together we can seek to make the world a better place for us all. 

Elliot Dorff was ordained a Conservative rabbi by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1970 and earned his PhD in philosophy from Columbia University in 1971 with a dissertation in moral theory. Since then he has directed the rabbinical and master's programs at the University of Judaism (now called the American Jewish University), where he currently is rector and distinguished professor of philosophy. He was awarded the *Journal of Law and Religion's* Lifetime Achievement Award, and he holds four honorary doctoral degrees. His publications include over 200 articles on Jewish thought, law, and ethics, together with 12 books that he wrote and another 13 that he edited or coedited. They

include *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law* (with Arthur Rosett; 1988), *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable* (1992), *Matters of Life and Death: A Jewish Approach to Modern Medical Ethics* (1998), *The Way into Tikkun Olam (Fixing the World)* (2005), *The Jewish Approach to Repairing the World (Tikkun Olam): A Brief Introduction for Christians* (2008), and *The Unfolding Tradition: Jewish Law after Sinai* (2005; rev. ed. 2010). He is married to Marlynn, and their four children have produced eight grandchildren, who, he thinks, are more important than anything mentioned above!

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JEWES AND CHRISTIANS: A Sacred Double Helix of History



Professor Wilson's call for interreligious dialogue between Jews and evangelicals comes at an opportune moment—a welcome antidote to our age of polarized certainties and exacerbated distrust. Regrettably, the globalization of

communication has not altogether opened channels of mutually rewarding intercultural dialogue. On the contrary! It has enhanced our capacity to select a version of the news that only others like ourselves listen to and to cherry pick among an infinity of websites that, again, only deepen our prejudices.

Simultaneously, terrorism and war have galvanized everyone to erect psychological fences of fear, a sure guarantee that people different from ourselves are more likely to be seen as threats to our security than as opportunities to broaden our horizons. Increasingly, we hunker down among people who are already in our own spiritual and intellectual comfort zone, as we take up residence in gated communities of the mind where anyone substantially different is demonized as dangerous.

This analysis is true even of liberals who think of themselves as open minded on all things. I teach in such a liberal seminary and consider myself religiously liberal. Yet in my world too, those all around me reinforce each other's beliefs without substantially considering alternatives. Whether Reform Jews or evangelical Christians, we are most comfortable in our own certainties.

Not that certainties need be problematic. "Here I stand," Martin Luther is at least said to have said. Pragmatist (and relativist) Richard Rorty denies that there are any essences to reality and thinks the purpose of inquiry must be utility not truth, but even he digs in his spade (as he puts it) in order to plunk for the "progressivist view" of a "liberal humanitarian" America—his own certainty of the way it ought to be.¹ The point is, we all have our own certainties, and so we should. Wilson identifies his as the gospel's good news. As a Jew, I have my own good news that makes its claim upon me.

Let me explain.

Rabbinic literature commands a blessing of God, who "is good and does good," to be said upon "hearing good news"—for example,

in our Grace After Meals, a liturgical event associated with God's promise of everlasting life. I mention this as an example of where I take my stand, but also as an instance of Christian and Jewish common ground. We differ on whether the good news is realized through Torah or through Jesus of Nazareth. But equally, we ought to see the functional equivalence of Torah for Jews and Christ for Christians.

We share as well an affirmation of human sin and the need for repentance and pardon. To be sure, we differ significantly on many matters. To be sure, as well, these differences underscore our own respective uniqueness, but only within a prior commonality that deserves emphasis.

It matters how we speak of that commonality. Not just any language will do. We need a hermeneutic that deepens the religious mystery, a descriptive strategy that moves us farther along in our respective spiritual journeys and equips us for the task of working in the world together. Those who came before us in this experiment in dialogue have bequeathed us the most important lesson: to avoid judgmental characterization of each other as errant. But we need now a further step. Earlier generations replaced the charge of errancy with the facts of history, simple historical recollections of how Jews and Christians developed differently. I am suggesting something further: the language not just of historical analysis but of theological consequence.

My example of praising God for good news in the Grace After Meals can prove telling. Were we to limit ourselves to history, we would enjoy discovering that in our own distinctive ways, we have gone about the business of promising some version of eternal life. We might then profitably explore each other's literature and promise as these have developed through the ages. All that would be well and good. But what, we may ask, is the significance of this parallelism? Are we simply accidents of history, two communities who arose side by side and who then, by chance, moved through history together? I suggest we go farther and find a model of being joined so firmly at the hip from our common origin in late antiquity to now.

What if we describe ourselves as a theological double helix, as if our corner of human history has been a working out of some double-stranded spiritual DNA? Western history, anyway, would be not just the unfolding of historical events on the ground but the unfolding as well of God's will, in which we Jews and Christians have been slated to circle each other perpetually and in close proximity—neither separating completely nor becoming one another, but circling, ever circling, so that we might someday act together for the greater cause that we call God?

Here is a metaphor that not only accounts for the history it describes but also leads us further and higher in our own distinctive callings. To be sure, much of our historical path has not been trod as equals. But the age of Christian hegemony has ended, and here we both remain, together facing a world in which the "sacred canopy" that once enveloped all we do² has been replaced by a secular one. But the sacred world of the past had plenty of room for secular pursuits, and the secular canopy of today invites plenty of opportunity for religion—an opportunity to work together in a world that needs us both.

When Wilson says the purpose of dialogue is to listen, I fully agree. When he says also that we need not worry about losing our own distinctiveness, I agree as well. I am suggesting here, however, that out of our mutual listening there should emerge some common understanding that expands our consciousness of being locked in common commitment to a fateful and faithful partnership with which we have been graced.

Wilson properly understands the main impediment to fruitful dialogue as far as Jews are concerned: the fear that their Christian partners harbor proselytizing purposes. But, similarly, he understands that Jews have often treated Christians with intellectual contempt, as if evangelicals especially have nothing to say that matters. Hence the importance of this moment, when both of us become Abraham, hearing God's invitation to "a land that God will show us." We may not yet know the path to get there, but the world has changed enough for us to suspect that we are unlikely to get there alone. If we always think the way we always thought, we will always get what we always got; and it is time to "get" something new.

Wilson's introductory invitation and my own response above suggest some guidelines to govern our journey.

1. To begin, we will have to reconsider our origins so that Christians are no longer seen as breaking off from Judaism in some manner. That view, historically incorrect, has served nefarious

purposes for both of us. Jews could see Christians as having lost their way while Christians could see Jews as stubbornly adhering to a dead-end past. In truth, we are parallel products of late antiquity, two of many first- and second-century attempts to interpret the Hebrew Bible differently. Christians saw it leading to a second and definitive act of grace in Jesus Christ; Jews invented an entire corpus of rabbinic interpretation whereby Torah became the means to salvation. Dialogue encourages us to work out the consequences of our own respective positions for each other to hear.

2. But as I say, this mutuality of hearing is only part of the task. We need also a higher-order conversation that allows us to see ourselves and each other in greater fullness and appreciation. I have offered the analogy of a sacred double helix. Other helpful metaphoric aids will follow. We will develop an entire body of rhetoric that is neither Jewish nor Christian, but something commonly devised to which we can both assent—something like John Rawls's "public use of reason," argued by Jürgen Habermas as the means by which different religions translate their internal logic into terms amenable to discourse and debate by others than themselves.³
3. A hermeneutic of commonality need not deny the essential differences across the DNA chain. But we will have to share a balancing presumption—again, from Habermas: a common appreciation for "the morality of human rights [as being] compatible with our own articles of faith."⁴ Without at least some agreement to agree on basic human rights, it becomes difficult to see how religion can occupy what Richard John Neuhaus famously called "The Naked Public Square."⁵
4. We go about this task as believers and as scholars. We share a scholar's faith in textual analysis, historical truth, the scientific method, and the sense that academia need not be detrimental to our spiritual health. But similarly, we both believe in prayer, in the very concept of sacred Scripture, in the interpretive capacity of sacred reading, and then, in returning to the world to draw human attention to a higher destiny. **EIFD**

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A VIEW FROM THE GAP



Introduction

Marvin Wilson offers an excellent description of the gap or “impasse” between Jews and (evangelical) Christians, diagnosing its causes and helpfully pointing toward ways to increasingly bridge it.

In what follows, I would like to offer a few reflections from the perspective of one who quite literally lives in the gap.

As a Messianic Jew, or Jewish follower of Yeshua (Jesus), I do not neatly fit into either of the camps Wilson describes; rather, in some profound sense, I belong to both. I was raised in a Jewish home, celebrating Passover and lighting Hanukkah candles and, on occasion, attending synagogue. In college, through a nurturing group of faithful Christian friends, I became a follower of Yeshua. Since then, both personally and professionally, I have been on a quest to discover how these two religious traditions, which have long been averse to one another, can once again fit together. I resonate deeply with the way a good friend once described it, to borrow his words, “asking me to choose between Judaism and Christianity is like asking me to choose between my heart and my lungs.”

Messianic Judaism is a diverse movement, and the moniker means different things to different adherents. The spectrum of Messianic Judaism ranges from a form of Christianity with select Jewish trappings to a form of Judaism that seeks to know and honor Messiah Yeshua through the vehicle of traditional Jewish life.

Our community in Jerusalem falls on (and perhaps defines) the latter end of the spectrum. Naturally, the rhythm of our year revolves around the Jewish calendar and Jewish holidays. Kids are off school for a week for Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) and Pesach (Passover), and December 25 is just another day. Many in our community attend traditional (Orthodox) Jewish synagogues, most of the men wear yarmulkes, and many of them put on tefillin (phylacteries) and pray the traditional Jewish liturgy three times a day.

In many ways, the very existence of a community like ours defies the divide that Wilson describes. As Jews, we believe that knowing Yeshua as Messiah should draw us closer to Judaism (which is,

after all, the religion of Yeshua and his first followers) not farther away from it.

The Messianic Jewish movement provokes a number of questions, both with regard to the traditional parameters of Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as what faithful discipleship looks like for Jewish followers of Yeshua. Let us briefly explore each of these areas.

Messianic Jews and Jewish-Christian Dialogue

While the current milieu of Jewish-Christian dialogue ranges from partnering on initiatives of shared interest to rigorous theological engagement, the role of Messianic Jews has continually posed a curious dilemma for proponents of improved Jewish-Christian relations. Both sides have had a difficult time mapping Messianic Jews on the religious landscape, as Messianic Judaism categorically blurs the lines that the dialogue has come to depend upon. If the dialogue is about reaching across differences and gaining mutual understanding, those differences must be clearly defined.

The dawning of the Messianic Jewish movement in the twentieth century represents the reemergence of an overlapping segment of these two communities that has not existed in visible form since the proverbial parting of the ways. Messianic Judaism challenges the nature of the divide that Jews and Christians so often take for granted. By blurring these historically reinforced

dividing lines, Messianic Judaism suggests that this divide represents not a value-neutral and perhaps inevitable development, but rather a tragic rupture in the one people of God.

If this is the case, an additional goal of Jewish-Christian dialogue is arguably the healing of a historically entrenched schism. Within this framework, Messianic Judaism need not be statically defined as merely a syncretistic nuisance that transgresses mutually relied upon boundaries. It may instead be viewed as a key component in the bridging of a destructive and distorting chasm.

The emergence of the Messianic Jewish movement in the latter half of the twentieth century coincides with the widespread constructive reengagement between Christians and Jews. The same tumultuous history between Judaism and Christianity that led to the mutually exclusive reality in place today has also disallowed for the existence of Messianic Judaism. In an atmosphere in which the relationship between Judaism and Christianity is being thoroughly reconsidered and reconceived, the role of Messianic Judaism requires to be similarly reevaluated.

There are indications that such a reevaluation is beginning to take place, and Messianic Judaism is slowly establishing a seat for itself

at the table of Jewish-Christian dialogue. In 1988, Messianic Jewish pioneer David Stern wrote the following: “I am confident that the Messianic Jewish community will be a major means for healing the worst schism in the history of the world, the split between the Christians and the Jews, while helping both to fulfill their God-given callings.” Perhaps we are just now beginning to see the fulfillment of Stern’s prophetic vision.

While Wilson takes some significant steps in the direction of meaningful Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue, Messianic Judaism requires us to question the mutually exclusive (and widely accepted) division between Judaism and Christianity. If indeed there is a small but arguably theologically significant segment of overlap between these two communities, it seems we need to, at the very least, amend our approach to dialogue.

Covenant Faithfulness for Jewish Followers of Yeshua

I will never forget the interfaith dialogue retreat that forced me to claim an identity I had been struggling to embrace. For several years after college, I fully embodied evangelical Christianity and felt alien in the Jewish world of my upbringing. But, as time passed,



Left to right: *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur*, a late 19th-century painting by Maurycy Gottlieb of the Jewish festival of *Yom Kippur* (the day of Atonement). The morose feel of the painting captures the repentant mood of the holiday as each person atones for their sins against God. A *Purim spiel* is a comic dramatization of the book of Esther celebrating the deliverance of the Jewish community from genocide. At the culmination of the festival of Sukkot stands *Simchat Torah* (“rejoicing in the Torah”), a celebration that marks the conclusion of the annual public reading of the Torah. The celebration includes joyous singing and dancing as the Torah scrolls are carried in processions around the synagogue.

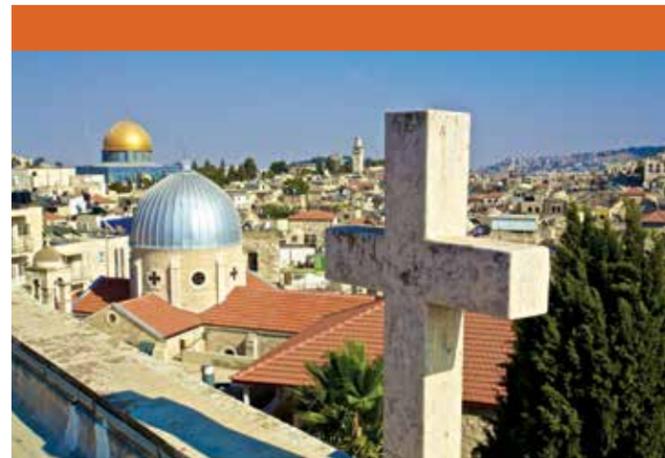
J. SHAWN LANDRES

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I began to feel a beckoning back to the heritage I had left behind. I realized that my Christian identity had left no room for my Jewish identity, and I increasingly felt a longing that I could not ignore.

I showed up at this particular retreat as a representative of evangelical Christianity, but as the days went on I was surprised to discover myself feeling more at home in the Jewish space and Jewish liturgy than among my own Christian delegation. That experience turned out to be a significant moment in my realization that, for me, to follow Yeshua authentically meant to follow him as a Jew.

Christian theology has a long history of dichotomizing “faith/grace” and the “law.” In Christian contexts, “legalism” is practically a dirty



A southern view from the Austrian Hospice of the Holy Family in Jerusalem. In the distance stands the Dome of the Rock with its gold roof. The silver cross and dome of the Armenian Catholic Church's Our Lady of the Spasm is in the foreground. Photo by Nate Harrison.

word, for it is perceived as being diametrically opposed to the life of freedom Christ offers to us. However, from a Jewish perspective, a life of Torah (i.e., “law”) represents the fullest—and most free—life possible. Indeed, these traditional Christian categories need to be reworked.

I invite my evangelical Christian friends and students to consider again what Torah means, especially to the Jewish people. I invite them—and you—to reread what the Psalms have to say about the Torah and, when reading Scripture, to replace the word “law” with Torah, or teaching. Consider, for example, this passage from the Jewish morning prayer liturgy, which draws from Psalm 111, Deuteronomy 33, and Proverbs 1:

Wisdom begins in awe of the Lord; all who fulfill His commandments gain good understanding; His praise is everlasting. The Torah Moses commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction, and do not forsake your mother's teaching. May the Torah be my faith and Almighty God my help. Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and all time.

If obedience to Torah is indeed the heritage of the Jewish people, and faith in Yeshua does not nullify this call to covenant faithfulness, I believe it is the role of the church to encourage ongoing Torah faithfulness among baptized Jews. According to Orthodox Jew and interfaith dialogue pioneer Michael Wyschogrod, this is the true test of whether or not the church has wholly abandoned supersessionism. As Kendall Soulen explains,

for Wyschogrod, the acid test of the church's theological posture toward Israel's election is the church's conduct toward Jews in its own midst, that is, toward Jews who have been baptized. For it is here that the church demonstrates in an ultimate way whether it understands itself in light of God's eternal covenant with the seed of Abraham. If the church acknowledges the abiding reality of Israel's corporeal election, it will naturally expect baptized Jews to maintain faithfully their Jewish identity. But if the church truly believes that it has superseded God's covenant with Israel, it will prohibit or discourage Jews from preserving their identity as Jews and members of the Jewish people. In short, the problem of supersessionism turns on the church's capacity to acknowledge the abiding religious significance of Israel's corporeal election and hence the abiding religious significance of the distinction between Gentile and Jew.¹

Soulen's words challenge the church to think in a new light about the Jews in her midst. If God is honored by Torah-faithfulness among the people of Israel, then Jewish followers of Yeshua should be encouraged to increasingly discover and live out the richness of Jewish life.

The very real existence of Messianic Judaism and communities like ours presents an entirely new set of questions to Christians in our day. It is my hope that alongside the continued strengthening of Jewish-Christian dialogue would come increased reflection on the overlapping of these two communities and increased evaluation—rather than mere acceptance—of the schism between them. 

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ANSWERING THE CALL



“All profitable conversation,” writes Professor Marvin Wilson, “involves listening to each other, seeking to understand each other, and learning from each other.” To this apt description of the interreligious enterprise I would add: and discerning avenues to benefit our communities and the world around us. This exploration of the as-yet-unrealized potential for serious, mutually respectful, evangelical-Jewish encounters is one such timely and welcome avenue.

Wilson's call to know the religious other—“to grow in understanding and appreciation of the other through respectful conversation and shared experiences that lead to mutual enrichment and trust”—evokes three categories of response: (1) appreciation for the call itself, (2) consideration of the call's implications, and (3) inquiry as whether the call implies mutual obligations. In the following few paragraphs I offer reflections on what answering Wilson's call might mean.

Appreciation

Wilson's reflections come during complex times for evangelical-Jewish relations. As he notes, many organized Jewish communities have balanced wariness about proselytistic motives with cautious welcome for evangelical advocacy on behalf of the State of Israel. However, some Jews remain concerned about the eschatological agenda underlying that support. Others note the tendency of certain conservative evangelicals to resist Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation of any kind as well as the tendency of others to embrace the Palestinian cause at Israel's expense. In these matters, to cite Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun.

However, evangelicals and Jews share deep moral and practical concerns about other global challenges. John W. Morehead's list in the pages of this journal includes “world hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS, race relations, human trafficking and the sex trade, as well as religious freedom.”¹ Evangelical support for the nomination of Rabbi David Saperstein as US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, across the Christian political spectrum, was critical in securing his late 2014 confirmation; he is the first non-Christian to hold the post. As Ryan Bolger and I have observed,

evangelicals and Jews alike tend to be somewhat anxious about the fusion of church and state (a worry traditional to both groups); especially among progressives, they share traditions of prophetic dissent against the institutional “identification of religion with the sociopolitical establishment rather than cultural-economic outsiders.”² Answering Wilson's call, then, would only deepen the potential for evangelical-Jewish collaboration to address these critical issues.

The possibilities go even further, however. In the interreligious conversations that Bolger and I observed among Emergent Christians and Jewish Emergents, and which I have witnessed subsequently in other settings, there was much to be learned from one another in the area of congregational change in the light of culture. Both groups are contending with similar questions. For example, how to maintain spiritual community and religious commitment in the face of a secularizing world? How to respond to the disconnect between tradition and contemporary culture? What is the epistemological and practical value of distinguishing between sacred and secular at all? Answering Wilson's call offers the opportunity to expand not only theological and political discourse but also ecclesiological inquiry as well.

Implications

As an outside, albeit interested, observer, it strikes me that taking Wilson's proposals seriously leads to a number of further questions, some of which must be made more explicit than they were in Wilson's essay.

Wilson is fair to observe that certain “separatistic, traditional Jews” resist meaningful theological engagements with Christians. However, if his call is to succeed, there must be explicit acknowledgment of the separatistic tendencies among many traditional evangelicals as well. Recent controversies such as those in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod over participation in multifaith worship services following the September 11 attacks and again after Newtown offer pause to potential conversation partners. In my own experience co-curating the 2006 gathering of Emergent Christian and Jewish leaders (a collaboration of Emergent Village and Synagogue 3000), the *only* objections to the gathering came

from Christian critics objecting to any form of interreligious encounter other than propositional evangelism.

Furthermore, Wilson's essay is silent with respect to historical Jewish reasons for resisting encounters with Christians. Even if most of the more widely known Christian crimes against Jews were conducted under the institutional auspices of the Roman Catholic Church, many Jews neither know nor care to know the differences among Christian denominations and philosophies. Moreover, evangelical Christians have their own share of historical responsibility: setting aside, for a moment, the anti-Jewish hostility of pre-Constantinian Christians, there is a strain of racial and ethnic anti-Semitism beginning with Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers, with which evangelicals must contend if they wish for the most meaningful possible engagement with Jewish conversation partners.

Even when there is a will to engage with contemporary rabbinic Judaism (rather than Israelite religion or First and Second Temple Judaism), there may be other barriers in the way. The first, most practically, is funding. Would Jewish communities ever be open to hearing from Christian scholars about Christianity? Yes, certainly (though not all Jewish communities; there is no one single "Jewish community" any more than there is one single "Christian community"). Will such presentations be funded by Christian contributions? That remains an open question.

An intermediate step might be expanding Christian academic engagement with Jewish studies. A positive case in point is Pepperdine University's Diane and Guilford Glazer Institute for Jewish Studies. It was established "based on the understanding that as a Christian University, Pepperdine's students are especially open to discussions of faith and identity, but are often unacquainted with Christianity's historical and ongoing relationship with Judaism. The Glazer Institute is designed to increase a majority-Christian academic community's exposure to, discussion of, and awareness of Judaism, Jewish Studies, and Jewish culture."³ The institute, however, has been funded from a Jewish source, rather than a Christian one, leaving Wilson's call for Christian funding as yet unanswered. Furthermore, while Pepperdine itself seems to have found a working solution, the typical evangelical institutional requirement that faculty members be actively committed Christians may undermine efforts elsewhere to integrate Jewish perspectives. Finally, it remains to be seen whether serious Jewish studies can be incorporated into required curricula (if not for all students then at least for relevant degrees and major courses of study), rather than only into elective courses. Answering Wilson's call, then, necessarily entails further commitment by evangelicals themselves to understanding and



From right to left: Photo 1—Professor Ryan Bolger, Terry Rosenberg, Professor Steven M. Cohen, Professor Wade Clark Roof; Photo 2—Rabbi Shoshana Leis, Troy Bronsink, Doug Pagitt, Dieter Zander; Photo 3—Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, Troy Bronsink, Rabbi Margie Klein; Photo 4—Rabbi Daniel Alter, Rabbi Dov Gartenberg, Dr. Dwight Friesen, Rabbi Julia Andelman, Tim Keel. Photographs by Larry Hirshowitz. All images provided courtesy of Synagogue 3000.

overcoming the internal historical, theological, and practical barriers that have hindered evangelical-Jewish dialogue to date.

Obligations

"Evangelicals," Wilson writes, "must acknowledge that a partial agreement on the discussion of what is truth and the will of God is better than total rejection of an entire system. There must be the ability to live with dialectical tensions, paradoxes, and incongruities." Without compromising on nonnegotiable faith commitments, he rightly contends, evangelicals can seek to know Jews as Jews, not as hoped-to-be Christians.

But what, then, of Jewish interlocutors? Does answering Wilson's call also imply obligations among Jews? Wilson's own Jewish encounters evoked responses ranging from hostility to deep friendship (in one case in the same person). There is no question but that evangelicals have a reasonable expectation of respect from their dialogue partners, not least from Jewish ones: our deep regard for text and historical context surely must persist in our engagement with other traditions as well.

At the height of the controversy over Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, an episode that raised significant Jewish concern about the attitude of evangelicals toward Jews, I wrote a top-ten list for Jews wishing to engage in dialogue on the issue;⁴ below are slightly revised excerpts applicable to Wilson's concerns:

- DO what Jews do best: study the sources. Read the Gospels for yourself, as well as Paul's letters, especially his letter to the Romans.

- DON'T accuse the Gospels of causing the Crusades, pogroms, or the Holocaust. The powerlessness of early Christianity—and the persecution the earliest Christians suffered at the hands of the majority—made for a very different sort of religion before the Roman emperor Constantine joined church and state.
- DO talk with your Christian friends about your concerns. For most Christians, Jesus' message was about faith, hope, and love—not fear or hatred.
- DON'T forget that there are many different—even opposing—groups that call themselves Christian. Episcopalians, Mormons, and Southern Baptists have even less in common than Reform Jews and members of Chabad Lubavitch.
- DO remind your Christian friends that the persecution suffered by early Christians is a much more recent memory for Jews.
- DON'T be afraid to stand up for yourself and the Jewish people, but do not be surprised if Christians wish to do the same for their faith.

In short, the Jewish answer to Wilson's call is one rooted in knowledge rather than assumptions and in respect for both self and other.

Conclusion

Elsewhere I have argued that religion is empirically visible to the observer solely through the language and behavior of agents acting within social networks in service of whatever situationally is defined as religious.⁵ In short, religion cannot happen unless people (more

than one!) agree it is happening.

This applies as well to the interreligious encounter. Marvin Wilson's call to know and be known deserves recognition and response. As a Jew who understands himself to have been taken out of Egypt to stand freely and accept the covenant at Sinai, a covenant neither erased nor superseded, I am commanded to love my neighbor and the stranger alike. As Wilson notes—echoing voices from the Talmud—we cannot love neighbors or strangers if we do not know them. Thus it is up to those of us who recognize the image of God in one another, despite our differences, to answer this call and in so doing to strengthen the covenants that bind us. **EIFD**

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DIALOGUE AS DISCOVERY



Marvin Wilson's article on evangelicals and interfaith dialogue contains some marvelous mini-definitions of what such dialogue is all about. It involves building "bridges of understanding and dynamic engagement" with adherents of other faiths, he writes. It consists of "respectful conversation and shared experiences" leading to "mutual enrichment and trust." That is a beautiful description of the sort of dialogue that Wilson himself has been involved in and has shared with others over so many years. One can only envy the students in his classes at Gordon College who had the experience of not only visiting synagogue services but also participating in Jewish holiday observances, visiting Jewish day schools, funeral homes, and other sites, and also—as one learns from Dr. Wilson's new book *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage*—experiencing Jewish and Israeli music through the gifts of his wife Polly.¹

To what end? As the author entitles the essay, "to know and be known." The "to know" part—the learning—can be indeed be gained through the college classroom, especially when it includes experiential learning. One clear conclusion to be drawn from Dr. Wilson's example is that all evangelical Christian colleges (of which there are at least 120 in North America, even by the strict definition of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities²) should offer at least one such course. This can be a course on Judaism as such, on the Jewish roots of Christianity, on the fraught history of Christian-Jewish relations, or some mixture thereof. This is part of these colleges' basic mission to convey to their students the essence of the Christian faith and its career in Western culture. (Is there an entity that surveys the colleges to see to what extent this is being done, and to encourage it?)

As to the situation in local communities, it is true that there are many parts of America, despite our increasingly heterogeneous culture, where it is still possible to grow up without personally knowing any Jews, or Muslims for that matter. I myself had the good fortune to grow up in a small city in the Northeast (Allentown, PA, population about 100,000) that had, and still has, a sizable Jewish minority. Thus a good number of my friends and classmates from elementary school onward were Jewish, and observing how well most of them did in school prepared me to learn later how

high a proportion of winners of Nobel prizes and similar awards were Jewish.³ But it was only later, when I encountered the thought of the great Jewish philosopher/theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, and then got to know him personally, that I appreciated the full richness of the Jewish heritage. I have detailed in an autobiographical article how as a young Lutheran seminarian, I found in Heschel's book *Man Is Not Alone* (which I am sure he today would title *Humanity Is Not Alone*) an evocation of the reality of God that I had not encountered hitherto in any Christian writing.⁴

If there are indeed Jews in one's local community or nearby, then what I would suggest as an initial approach, following Wilson's advice to begin with small steps, is to take advantage of any "Open House" that a local synagogue might announce—or, if there is none on the agenda, to take the initiative in suggesting that such an event be planned, and that there would be a positive response to it. This kind of occasion, on a weekday evening or a Sunday afternoon, allows the Jewish partners to be on their own ground and gives the Christian visitors plenty to look at (the sacred objects in the sanctuary) and listen to (explanations by the rabbi or lay members). This may or may not lead, on one or more future occasions, to dialogue in the strict sense, which involves direct conversations about matters of personal faith. It is at this point that the further guidelines that Dr. Wilson offers become so important: be ready first to listen, then speak; recognize the signs of "common grace," that is, of the Spirit's working also in the lives of those outside the church; remember that we presently know only in part; and be willing to live with dialectical tensions, paradoxes, and ambiguities.

The nineteenth-century poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge spoke of a "willing suspension of disbelief" as essential to giving credence to a literary narrative. Perhaps what we have here, in faith's willingness to tread softly, contrary to its inner urge, is a "willing suspension of belief"—not in the sense of denying one's convictions, but putting them "on hold" for the moment, out of respect and even reverence for the integrity of the other. It may also be close to what the philosopher Edmund Husserl meant by *epoché*, the "bracketing" of the truth of a matter while it is being investigated.

There is another way in which I would put it. Taking inspiration from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology, *Christ the Center*,⁵

I would say, if we hold fast to Christ as the center—of our own lives and indeed of human history—then we can be quite open at the circumference. Indeed, we can say with the ancient philosopher, *nihil humanum alienum mihi est* (nothing human is alien to me), and rejoice in the astonishing assertion of St. Paul, "all things are yours" (1 Cor 3:21).

In the online version of his article, Dr. Wilson expands much of what he says about Christian-Jewish relations to Christian-Muslim relations, an even more difficult matter in view of today's polarized views about Islam. I would join in urging this further outreach wherever possible, for surely our Muslim neighbors are deeply in need of our understanding and support. Once again, Wilson's precepts about beginning with small steps, and so forth, are of great importance.

One topic that Dr. Wilson does not deal with in his article, though it is of pivotal significance in evangelical-Jewish relations, is that of attitudes toward the State of Israel. The Jewish community greatly appreciates what it sees as fervent and loyal support of the State of Israel among evangelicals, as compared to the aspersions cast upon it from other quarters. Most mainstream Protestant denominations, on the other hand, try to balance their support of the aspirations of the Palestinian people with their affirmation also of Israel's rightful claims. They view the evangelical position as often naively uncritical of Israel's policies, which is especially ironic in view of the lively debate and dissent within Israel itself—in public opinion, in the press, and in parliament—over just about any given policy. Here there is a need for ongoing intra-Christian as well as interfaith conversation.

In closing, one can only express both appreciation and admiration for Dr. Wilson's many contributions, both in writing and in person, to Christian-Jewish dialogue. He has been a true pioneer and a stalwart servant-leader in this field. **EIFD**

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Abraham Joshua Heschel

At the core of the civil rights movement of the 1960s is a profound story of friendship that spanned across religious divides. The deep friendship between Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was forged through their desire to embody the justice envisioned by the Old Testament prophets in their acts of political protest against the tyrannical forces of racism in America.



Photo of the march from Selma (1965). In the front row from the far left: John Lewis, an unidentified nun, Ralph Abernathy, Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Bunche, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Frederick Douglas Reese.

Dr. Susannah Heschel explains the shifts that took place in her father after he arrived as a refugee in the United States and encountered Dr. King in January of 1963. The central motif of the Exodus in the civil rights movement stood in stark contrast to the German Christian theologians that Heschel had encountered at the University of Berlin who were debating whether to declare that Jesus was an Aryan and to do away with the Old Testament altogether. "What linked Heschel and King theologically," writes Susannah Heschel, "was their reading of the Bible, particularly of the prophets, and the understanding of God they drew from their biblical readings."¹

A failure to appreciate the religious influences on the civil rights movement and the march from Selma could very well lead us to miss out on the immense resources that the Jewish and Christian faiths have to offer our society today. At a time when public opinion seems to be divided between the irrelevance of religion for matters of social justice on the one hand, and a fear that common ground between religions will lead to a loss of identity and particularity on the other, the story of Rabbi Heschel and Dr. King deserves more attention today.

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REFLECTIONS ON MY ENGAGEMENT IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH DIALOGUE



Introduction

I am an evangelical Christian with a life-long interest in the relationship between Christians and Jews. I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and have been blessed with a long list of Jewish

friends. I am certainly not a trained scholar—I read Hebrew slowly and Greek even more slowly—but I am a serious student of the Bible. Over a lifetime of Bible reading I have been impressed by the amount of space in the sacred text given to our father Abraham, his family, their relationship with God, and the attention paid to the details of their connection to a small strip of land along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

I am also privileged to be a friend of Marvin Wilson. Wilson described his book *Our Father Abraham* as “an exposition on what it means for today’s Church to be part of Abraham’s spiritual family.” I have often wondered what the church would look like if it were truly aware of its connection to Abraham’s family tree. I have spent much of my adult life studying the history of Jewish-Christian relations and trying to build these relationships within my circle of friends.

Had I organized my academic career more carefully I might be teaching the fine points of Jewish-Christian relations to students in ivy-covered buildings instead of sharing my accumulated insights with jet-lagged tourists while bumping along the highways and byways of Israel and eastern Europe. However, I would not have wanted to miss my lifetime of unique adventures: leading over 65 tours to Israel since 1978; working on a plethora of projects with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas (a great group of folks); serving for many years as the only evangelical on the Minnesota Council of Churches Jewish-Christian Relations Committee; lobbying on Capitol Hill with my dear friend Esther Levens and a variety of pro-Israel activists; bringing American Christians to Auschwitz on the March of the Living; serving as US Coordinator for Christian Friends of Yad Vashem and currently working with Christians United for Israel and serving as curator of the Jewish-Christian Library Center in suburban Minneapolis. My life has not been dull.

In his article about Jewish-Christian dialogue, Marvin Wilson lists

five “guidelines or rules of thumb for evangelicals to consider in order to move the dialogue to a greater maturity and productivity.” In the light of these guidelines I have been considering some of my experiences in this field and will share a few insights that I have discovered.

A Long-Term Venture

Wilson’s first rule of thumb is that evangelical-Jewish dialogue is a long-term venture. I agree and try to remind newcomers to this field that nearly 2000 years of misunderstanding can’t be fixed while standing on one foot. Back in the 1990s I was involved with a dialogue between local Jewish leaders and evangelical Christians. We met quarterly to get to know each other. Most of the participants were willing to listen as well as speak but occasionally a pastor might attend who could only think in terms of giving a three-point sermon and expecting to have all the Jews agree with his logical presentation. Alas, this style of dialogue usually brought a cold chill into the room rather than the refreshing breeze of the Spirit. We need to study our own history before trying to sell our message to our Jewish friends.

A doctrine later known as “supersessionism” and sometimes referred to as “replacement theology” rose up early in church history and has complicated Jewish-Christian relations ever since. As the church moved away from Israel and its Jewish matrix, Christian theologians began to see Christianity not just as an extension, but as a replacement of Israel. This attitude developed in the time of the church fathers in the second through fourth centuries and can be seen in Justin Martyr, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Origen. In contrast to this, Isaiah tells us to “Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth” (Isa 51:1–2). The Christian church has neglected her relationship with our spiritual parents, Abraham and Sarah, and with their descendants and their worldview for so long that it has been nearly lost and mostly forgotten.

Restoration Efforts

There have been several points in history when Christians



The Western Wall, in Hebrew the *Kotel*, located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, is the holiest site in Jewish life and was part of the Second Temple destroyed by Rome in 70 C.E. The *Kotel* originally made up part of the outer wall surrounding the Temple Mount and has been a place of pilgrimage and prayer for Jews for centuries. Photo by Nate Harrison (natecharrison.com).

endeavored to restore their connection to their Hebrew heritage. A fascinating account of various Christian efforts to discover their Hebraic heritage is found in Barbara Tuchman’s overview of Christian Zionism in *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour*. This book traces the path of an interesting assortment of Christians who, for one reason or another, looked to the quarry from which they were hewn, to the olive tree into which they were grafted (Rom 11:17–21).

In both the Christian and the Jewish branches of the family, the lovers of Zion have been a rather eccentric crew. Tuchman comments on this phenomenon: “It is a curious fact that so many notable English eccentrics have been drawn irresistibly to the East. Perhaps it was because most of them, like T. E. Lawrence, the archetype, were voyaging on some private religious or metaphysical quest of their own and, like Disraeli’s Tancred, sought spiritual rebirth in the place where three great religions were conceived.”¹ Or perhaps it is simply that those seeking God, however confused their motives, tended to search in the land where it all began.

As history continued, anti-Semitism became quite well entrenched in Christian thought. We modern Christians need to study this history in order to understand why Jews often fear Christians in positions of power. Most of today’s evangelical Christians have no intention to force their beliefs on others. Our biblical call is to persuade others, not pummel them into submission. However the Jewish community does have a basis for concern. We need to realize that the Jewish experience under Christian governments has not been positive. German Christians had the right to pray in schools in the 1930s. Unfortunately few who prayed had the wisdom or the courage to perceive and oppose the rise of Nazism. Too few asked themselves the questions: “Where am I?” and “What is happening to my Jewish neighbors?”

Evangelical Christians showed less interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue in the early post-war years. Evangelicals have generally been better at proclamation than at dialogue. There was a mixture of opinion in the evangelical world after the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. Some believed that the restoration of Israel was a fulfillment of biblical prophecy, while others questioned such a view. After the 1967 Six-Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem under Israeli control, more evangelicals became actively supportive of Israel. Organizations such as the International Christian Embassy, Jerusalem; Bridges for Peace; Christian Friends of Israel; and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews sprang up during the 1970s and 1980s. The movement, now often identified as Christian Zionism, became a popular cause in the evangelical world.

One of the serious efforts to bring evangelicals and Jews together for dialogue was initiated by our friend Dr. Marvin Wilson. Between 1975 and 1984 Marvin Wilson organized three gatherings that served to break new ground in this field. Today we have a new cast of characters who would profit greatly from this experience. In addition to public presentations of papers, I believe the current scene would benefit from some form of “round table” discussions between Jewish and evangelical leaders in a venue with enough privacy so the participants could discuss sensitive issues without an audience—the sort of discussion Jews refer to as talking “tachlis.”

I am concerned that many leaders in the pro-Israel Christian community today have little experience in actual dialogue with Jewish people. Often they bring large groups of Christians to travel in Israel and their main sources of Jewish friendships are limited to Israelis involved in the tourism industry. This often guarantees that some Christian leaders never have the benefit of constructive criticism from Jewish friends. I know that both

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Wilson and I are thankful today for the Jewish friends in our early years who were more concerned with honest communication and less concerned with the protection of our fragile egos.

Jewish-Christian Engagement in Twin Cities

I was born and have lived most of my life in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Most local Christians are unaware of the fact that Minneapolis was referred to by one journalist as the “most anti-Semitic city in North America” in the 1930s through the early 1950s.² Then a Christian scholar named G. Douglas Young came to Minneapolis to teach at Northwestern Bible College, an evangelical school. Young came to Minneapolis with a degree from Westminster Presbyterian Seminary and a PhD from Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Studies. The details concerning the horrors of the Holocaust were just beginning to seep into the United States at this time. But at Dropsie, with a mainly Jewish faculty and student body, more firsthand knowledge of the details of the Jewish experience in Nazi Europe was circulating. Young was increasingly shocked and grieved to learn not only of the tragedy of Hitler’s attempt to murder all the Jews of Europe, but also to face the disinterest of the American churches both during the war and afterward. Both his scholarly work and his life experiences were pushing him toward active Christian Zionism.

I listened to his radio program in the 1950s, which fed my growing interest in understanding how Jews and Christians—the two groups who cared about biblical issues—got so far apart. I began my search at the University of Minnesota in 1963 and have continued it into the present. I met Marvin Wilson in the 1970s. During that period of time I began working with several different Christian pro-Israel organizations. Along with friends from local churches—particularly Twin City Fellowship and Hope Presbyterian—I began organizing monthly meetings to host local Jewish speakers, show films about Israel and the Holocaust, lead tours to Israel and later to eastern Europe, discuss the growing collection of books relating to modern Israel and the study of anti-Semitism, and provide a venue for people who shared my interests to get to know each other.

An Inherited Commitment

My personal history in this field began during World War II when my grandmother and I developed an evening ritual, parking ourselves in front of the old Silvertone radio to listen carefully to

the “war news.” Gram always read from the Bible, particularly from the prophet Jeremiah, often the portion that says,

This is what the LORD says,
he who appoints the sun
to shine by day,
who decrees the moon and stars
to shine by night,
who stirs up the sea
so that its waves roar—
the LORD Almighty is his name:
“Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,”
declares the LORD,
“will the descendants of Israel ever cease
to be a nation before me.”
This is what the LORD says:
“Only if the heavens above can be measured
and the foundations of the earth below be searched out
will I reject the descendants of Israel
because of all they have done,”
declares the LORD. (Jer 31:35–37)

Gram would say to me, “God has a covenant with the Jews that will last as long as the sun, the moon, and the stars. This is a terrible war but Hitler will be defeated and the Jews will be back in their ancient land. We must pray for that.”

She died in May of 1947, leaving behind her old Bible underlined at many of the points recording promises to restore Israel. So I was impressed, but not too surprised, when I came home from school a year later to find the Minneapolis *Tribune* headline shouting, “State of Israel Declared.” I thought, “Wow, Gram knew this was going to happen because she read the Bible.” That definitely affected my view of the Bible and world events—and set me on a path that led to life-long involvement with Israel and the Jewish people. The last time I looked, the sun, moon, and stars are still out there. 

JoAnn Magnuson is an evangelical Christian who has been involved in building Jewish-Christian relations for over 35 years. She studied with Holocaust educators at Yad Vashem—the Holocaust memorial and education center in Jerusalem—and has written a variety of materials on the history of anti-Semitism and the importance of Holocaust education and authored a popular study manual for Christian pilgrims to Israel. She has been leading tours to Israel since 1977 and often presents seminars to prepare Christians for that experience. In the summer of 1993, shortly after the fall of communism in eastern Europe, she was part of an interfaith study group of 21 Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant women from Minnesota who visited Holocaust sites in Eastern Europe, including Auschwitz, Teresienstadt, and the Warsaw Ghetto. From 1996 to 2007 she led study groups to Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine, as well as Israel. In 2005 and 2006 she organized the main US Christian delegations to attend the annual “March of the Living” in Poland. JoAnn speaks on a variety of topics, including Christian history and anti-Semitism. She works as the curator of the Jewish-Christian Library Center in Minneapolis (<http://www.jclibrarycenter.com>).

EVANGELICAL AND JEWISH RELATIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND DOCUMENTS SINCE VATICAN II’S NOSTRA AETATE 4 (1965)



The extensive Vatican II Council’s document that sets forth the Roman (Latin) Catholic Church’s beliefs and practices for modern times was released in parts at various times from 1963 through 1965 and contains a smaller document entitled, “Nostra Aetate” (meaning, “in our time”). Released in 1965,

the declaration is a statement of how the Catholic Church understands non-Christian religions. . . . More specifically in section 4 of *Nostra Aetate* one finds numerous paragraphs explaining the Church’s relationship in particular to the Jewish people and to their religion that is called Judaism.¹

Though largely unknown to evangelicals, this document has sparked an unprecedented sea change in relationships between Jews and the Roman Catholic Church and numerous Protestant mainline churches. Evangelicals also have in the same period developed a growing parallel response of their own influenced by the Holocaust (*shoah*) and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. A part of this more recent narrative is presented in the following brief summary of evangelical-Jewish faith relations over the last 40 to 50 years and a description of some of the main documents issued by various evangelical organizations and denominations related to the Jewish people.²

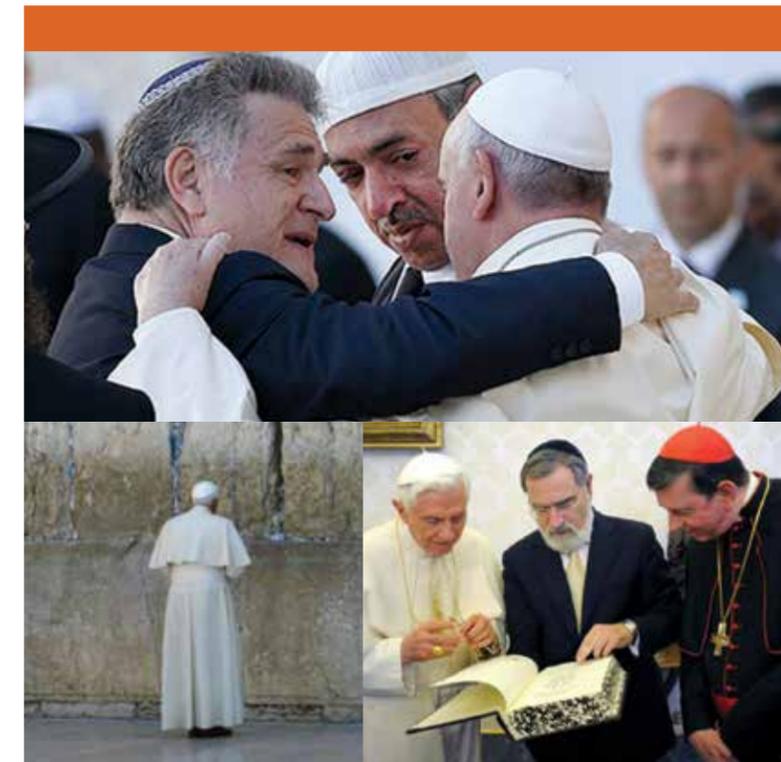
Current Evangelical Discussions with the Jewish Religious Community since Vatican II

The first major evangelical denominational meeting was with the Southern Baptists in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1969. Jointly sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, the conference was held at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The first evangelical national interdenominational meeting was held in 1975 in New York at the Calvary Church under the joint sponsorship of the AJC (Marc Tannenbaum and A. James Rudin) and the Institute of Holy Land Studies, an evangelical study institute located in Jerusalem on Mount Zion. There was some uneasiness on both sides as we were not sure of what motives brought our dialogue partners to such a meeting. Most of us left sensing respect and trust toward those we met, while at the same time we realized also and articulated matters of deep difference.³

Christianity Today and the AJC (A. James Rudin and Marc Tannenbaum) sponsored the second national meeting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, in 1980. Different formats were introduced but with the same wide variety of topics and responses—with both continuing and new participants.

In 1984 a third national gathering of similar composition took place at Gordon College in Massachusetts under the joint sponsorship of



Top: Pope Francis embraces his Argentine friends Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Omar Abboud at the Western Wall in May of 2014. Bottom left: Pope John Paul II at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2000. Bottom right: Pope Benedict XVI alongside Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Lord Jonathan Sacks in 2011. Since the early 1980s Roman Catholic popes have helped significantly alter the ways in which the Catholic Church engages the Jewish community.

Rembrandt and the Jewish Community in Amsterdam



Since the 16th century, Holland has been a safe haven for political and religious refugees from a variety of backgrounds. It was not only the Protestant Pilgrims fleeing British oppression who sought safety among the Dutch in the 17th century, but also Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish communities as well.

Late in his life Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn lived in the Vlooienburg Quarter of Amsterdam that was home to a large Jewish community, and he drew upon many aspects of Jewish life and thought in his works. Against the backdrop of violence and discrimination against Jews in Europe during the Middle Ages, Rembrandt's dispassionate depiction of Jews and Jewish life was remarkably humanizing. Two of Rembrandt's most famous paintings from this period of his life are *An Old Jew* and *Old Rabbi*. Those interested in learning more about Rembrandt's engagement with the Jewish community in Amsterdam will find Steven Nadler's book *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) an excellent resource.



A. James Rudin, from the AJC, and Professor Marvin R. Wilson, a distinguished evangelical Old Testament scholar from Gordon College and a participant in the two previous national meetings. All three of these proceedings were published and have been widely read and cited.⁴

As a participant in these three discussions, I can testify that they were stimulating, eye-opening, very fruitful, sometimes tense, but friendly and trust building. At no time did I feel inhibited in

expressing my own reading of Scripture and my faith commitment. Yet we all learned to do this in a way that respected the other's understandings.

There were local and regional attempts to foster evangelical-Jewish discussions across America in the nineties. For example, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, then with the Chicago office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), brought evangelicals together with representatives of the Jewish religious community from the greater Chicago area for regular discussions around numerous topics of mutual interest for several years. I myself was one of the members of this helpful interchange.

National meetings between Jews and evangelicals were again resumed in 2009 in Washington DC, convened under the leadership of evangelicals David Neff, Ron Sider, and Joel Hunter; and from the Jewish side by Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, Ethan Felson, and Rabbi Steven Gutow. These yearly meetings continue, including plans for 2015. There are between 20 and 25 participants from each community drawn from institutions, organizations, churches, and synagogues across America and broadly representative of the different branches of each community. The agenda in some ways has revisited previous discussion topics, but new ones as well, and with almost a totally new group of persons on both sides from those involved in the earlier conferences. Among other topics, two discussion documents were presented at the 2013 meeting: one titled "An Evangelical Statement on the Jewish People," and the other, "A Jewish Statement on Evangelical Christianity." These were draft discussion statements, and with a number of comments voiced on each will no doubt undergo changes before any final documents are accepted.

Additionally, the national group has discussed a preliminary-guidelines document on how the Palestinian-Israeli discussions can go forward without anti-Semitic or anti-Judaism statements and yet with openness to criticisms of specific Israeli government policies. Finally, we have not yet found a way acceptable to both parties to include Messianic Jewish participants in the discussions.⁵ EIFD

NOTE: Part 2 of Johnson's article is available online at www.fuller.edu/eifd. In it he discusses the various evangelical documentary statements about Jews and Judaism since Vatican II.

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Praxis Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE ON MULTIFAITH ENGAGEMENT



The oldest kid on the interfaith block is also the newest. As an Orthodox rabbi—and one who leans more to the traditional right within Orthodoxy than the more liberal left—my community is the last and most hesitant to join what others have been doing for decades.

Within the Jewish world, we occupy a similar position to evangelicals in the Christian universe. We are seen as far more engaged with religious observance and practice than our other Jewish brothers and sisters. We see Scripture as an accurate and normative expression of the Divine Will. Our families are far larger, and our rate of retention of young people is off-the-charts higher than others. Like evangelicals, we are frequently maligned by those who wish that our version of practice disappeared because it makes them uncomfortable, having bet the barn decades ago that Orthodoxy could never, ever be successfully transplanted to America. Like evangelicals, we are thriving in this great country. While we represent no more than 10 percent of American Jews, among the youngest cohort usually measured by the polls we are already the single largest group. Many people, looking at the unhappy convergence in the non-Orthodox community of a birth rate below zero population growth and a skyrocketing out-marriage rate, believe that in just a few decades we will not only be the last Jews standing outside of Israel, but the only ones.¹

The miracle of Orthodox regeneration after the Holocaust was achieved the same way other groups succeeded: inspired leadership, hard work, and self-sacrifice. In our case, one other factor was crucial: our own educational system. Our children take their faith seriously because they spend half their day or more studying it from the earliest ages in Orthodox schools. Among many other things, these schools put them in touch much more intimately with Jewish history. Memory is elevated to the level of mitzvah—of commandment. Because so much of that history in the last two millennia is stained in blood, much of which was shed by Christians acting in the name of Christianity, Orthodox Jews are often more suspicious of Christians than others. They remember the *auto-da-fes*, the forced debates, the weekly harangue they were forced to listen to in the synagogue. They remember that John Chrysostom was not so golden-tongued when it came to the Jews. Nor was Martin Luther, nor the Romanian prelate asked to intervene against a scheduled shipment of innocent Jewish

children to a death camp. (He told Rabbi Michael Ber Weismandel, "There are no innocent Jewish children. You must all die for that sin.")

Orthodox Jews are particularly suspicious of Christian intentions, thinking that behind easy smiles lurk missionary zeal. Most Jews—Orthodox or not—shut down when they learn of any association between Christians they deal with and groups that proselytize to Jews. The Orthodox are often even more demanding. They put the burden of proof on any rabbi involved in serious conversation with Christians to demonstrate that the encounters are free of any taint of a conversion agenda.

What Does it Mean to Be Jewish?

Survey responses from Jews in the U.S.

| | % NET JEWISH |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| • Remembering Holocaust | 73 |
| • Leading ethical/moral life | 69 |
| • Working for justice/equality | 56 |
| • Being intellectually curious | 49 |
| • Caring about Israel | 43 |
| • Having good sense of humor | 42 |
| • Being part of a Jewish community | 28 |
| • Observing Jewish law | 19 |
| • Eating traditional Jewish foods | 14 |

Source: "Pew Research Center 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews," February 20–June 13, 2013.

Pew Research Center

Yet in some ways, the trip has been more rewarding because of—not despite—my Orthodoxy. Bonding between Orthodox Jews and evangelicals is often instantaneous, as each party recognizes and appreciates the love of G-d and His Word that the other wears on his/her sleeve. Orthodox Jews do not react in horror at the idea of others praying for their salvation. Because they pray three times a

day, they are comfortable with G-d deciding how to respond to whose prayer, and confident enough in their own tradition about eternity that they are not fazed by would-be gatekeepers to the Kingdom of Heaven who sometimes tell them that they are going to be locked out. (On the other hand, because they firmly believe in an afterlife, they do have their doubts about whether people who think Jews must head straight to Hell after they die can really respect them while they are still breathing. It is an area that requires some more thought.)

Conversation between evangelicals and Orthodox Jews flows smoothly, without as many cul-de-sacs in which it can be mugged. While some Jews are offended by in-your-face citation of Scripture by evangelicals, Orthodox Jews simply respond with a verse from their own Scripture. While views on abortion, contraception, and end-of-life issues do not coincide, Orthodox positions are much closer to evangelical ones than those of other Jews. After a short while, both parties in this interfaith relationship realize they are not going to make any headway winning over the other, and just agree to be friends—sometimes very good friends.

I have learned a good deal in my association with evangelicals, some of it shaking up thinking that became embedded in Jewish society after hundreds of years of Christian persecution and contempt. Some Jews, especially those only one degree of separation from Holocaust survivors betrayed by their former friends and neighbors, grew up believing that if you scratch the surface of any non-Jew, you will find some anti-Semitism. I have learned that there are many, many non-Jews free of such a taint, and many Christians in particular who love Jews. I have learned that for many decades, the single largest and most reliable group of allies of the Jewish State are Christians, especially evangelicals. I have discovered that the majority of this support does not flow from apocalyptic visions of mass conversion of Jews in the Holy Land as a precursor to the Second Coming, but from taking the Bible seriously. (It is not only dispensationalists and Christian Zionists who are high on Israel. Many evangelicals who are neither still find something biblical about the return of the Jews to their homeland, and the way they made the desert bloom, whether by drip-irrigation, or turning it into a Middle Eastern Silicon Valley.)

Perhaps most importantly, I have seen these things so clearly, that I have been able to take these findings on the road, and as an insider, speak to Orthodox groups, persuading them that indeed things have changed with millions of Christians.

Orthodox Jews can reciprocate to evangelicals. Traditional Jews spend more time wringing meaning out of the first five books of the Bible than any other. For a variety of reasons, those are the books that Christians devote the least attention to. Jews are holding on to

literally thousands of years of commentary and insight about the Word of G-d, a good deal of which is relevant to all believers. (British former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks demonstrated that much of it is relevant even to nonbelievers; he consistently ranked among the ten most admired people in the UK.) Evangelicals, already open to exploring the roots of Christianity in Judaism, will be delighted by the way two, three, often four generations of Jews will sit around a Shabbat table—each and every week—trading insights into the subtleties of expression in the Hebrew Bible and how they enlighten us.

Exploring Jewish law will also enrich evangelicals. Many have asserted that the most fundamental difference between Christianity and Judaism is whether faith or actions are dispositive in achieving eternity. Besides being simplistic, it is downright wrong. Jews (for whom faith is a *sine qua non* of action) do not believe they have a monopoly on achieving eternal grace. The Talmud argues that the “righteous of the nations of the world have a portion in the World to Come,” and that this righteousness is defined by adherence to no more than seven commandments (including prohibitions against murder, theft, blasphemy), no more than one of which is affirmative. In other words, traditional Judaism never argued that the Law was the high road to Heaven. It was mandatory for Jews, but non-Jews could do just fine without it. (Paul’s message, it turns out, was more Jewish than people know.)

But G-d’s laws are never arbitrary. They are redolent with meaning and significance. The ethos that animates each law is often relevant to non-Jews. They may not need the strictures of the law, the constant attention to detail and all its limitations. But they certainly will be enriched by studying the *telos* of the Law, by the lessons in each law that Christians are free to apply to their lives on their own terms, when and where they want to. Those laws are closed to them without assistance from those who spend many years studying them full time. Simply put, evangelicals need the Orthodox in order to appropriate the ethos of the Law.²

I like to think of all this as demonstrating that the tree on to which Gentiles are grafted is not in a state of suspended animation, awaiting its quickening in the end of days. That tree is alive and vital, with precious sap in it, whose flow is necessary to bring the world to a consciousness that will welcome the Redeemer (we’ll agree to differ as to his identity) when he comes.

Another area that Orthodox Jews and evangelicals can and should explore is putting the power of faith to work to better our communities—materially and spiritually. History pitted us against each other; today, the greater enemies—skepticism, agnosticism, atheism—ought to bring us together to make common cause of showing the world how people who are “G-d intoxicated”³ have a

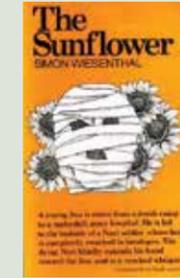
leg up on their neighbors in regard to charitable contributions, voluntarism, family stability, and their ability to deal with moral nuance. At the Simon Wiesenthal Center where I work, we call this cooperation “multi-faith” rather than “interfaith” work.

This exploration is new and tentative. In the Orthodox world, it needs to be enlarged, pulling into the dialogue carefully prepared individuals. On the evangelical side, a number of issues threaten the young relationship. Proselytizing to Jews as Jews (particularly the kind that uses deception, such as missionaries dressed like Hasidic Jews) remains a huge obstacle. Some in the Christian world have argued that after centuries of abusing Jews, Jews should be allowed a bit of space. Another huge issue is Replacement Theology, responsible for centuries of contempt for Jews and for their deaths. Largely through the urging of Palestinian Christians who do not want to see any link between the Bible and contemporary Jews, supersessionism and replacement theology have made a comeback in the last years. Jews cannot stop it. It will take evangelical thinkers and writers to develop a theology true to Christian teaching but that leaves room for the significance of Jews and Judaism even before the end of times.

I try to speak in as many Christian venues as possible, particularly in the seminaries that are training the next generation of leadership. For strong advocates of the State of Israel like myself, this kind of appearance is crucial. Too many Christians encounter Judaism—even favorably—only through the printed word, but do not come face to face with passionate, committed observant Jews. That cannot augur well for the place of Jews in this country, or the way Israel is perceived by non-Jews. I hope and pray that more doors will open up in the future, through which we can walk together, despite theological difference, united in our commitment to G-d. 

Rabbi Adlerstein is the director of interfaith affairs for the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC), the Los Angeles-based human rights organization and global NGO. He holds the Sydney M. Irmas Adjunct Chair in Jewish Law and Ethics at Loyola Law School. In the capacity as interfaith director for the SWC, Rabbi Adlerstein has traversed a good part of America’s Christian landscape. He has lectured to students and faculty in seminaries across the Christian continuum, and has become a regular feature on LA Christian radio, commenting both on issues affecting Israel and on Jewish perspectives on events in the Christian world.

Simon Wiesenthal



The late Simon Wiesenthal (December 31, 1908 – September 20, 2005) was a Holocaust survivor, author, and activist who helped bring Nazi war criminals to justice following the war.

In one of his most famous memoirs, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), Wiesenthal recounts the story of his

bedside encounter with a dying Nazi soldier while imprisoned at the Lemberg Concentration Camp. The SS officer, Karl Seidl, was fatally wounded and sought a deathbed pardon from a Jew. In graphic detail Seidl described to Wiesenthal how his unit forced 300 Jews into a house soaked with gasoline, set it ablaze, and looked on as innocent men, women, and children were burned alive. Three times Wiesenthal tried to walk away but each time Seidl reached out and pleaded with him to stay and listen. When the dying soldier finished his bedside confession he asked for Wiesenthal’s forgiveness. In the silence Wiesenthal walked away without saying a word.

Following Wiesenthal’s story and reflections on his decision not to forgive, *The Sunflower* includes responses from theologians, philosophers, Holocaust survivors, psychiatrists, and many others to the question of whether Wiesenthal did the right thing and what, if anything, would they have done differently.



The Simon Wiesenthal Center is a global human rights organization researching the Holocaust and hate in historic and contemporary contexts. In 1983, Wiesenthal and a delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in Rome.

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End Notes

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⁴ Rabbi Louis Jacobs, "Orthodox Judaism," on the My Jewish Learning website, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Modern_History/1700-1914/Denominationalism/Orthodox.shtml?p=1.

⁵ "Halakhah in Conservative Judaism," reprinted with permission from *Emet Ve'emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, on the My Jewish Learning website: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Jewish_Practices/Halakhah_Jewish_Law/_Contemporary_Attitudes/Conservative.shtml.

⁶ "Movements of Judaism," in *Torah 101*, copyright Mechon Mamre, last updated 24 January 2012: <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/jewfaq/movement.htm>.

⁷ *Emet Ve'emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, copyright 1988 by The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, by The Rabbinical Assembly, and by The United Synagogue of America; available at <http://masorti.iam.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Emet-VEmunah-Statement-of-Principles-of-Conservative-Judaism.pdf>.

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² For example, Jeremiah 22:19 predicts an ignominious end to King Yehoyakim, but he dies a natural death while still king (2 Kings 24:6). Ezekiel predicted the destruction of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek 26:7–14), but he himself later acknowledges that the king's siege of the city was unsuccessful (Ezek 29:17–20).

³ *Numbers Rabbah* 13:15–16.

⁴ *Exodus Rabbah* 5:9.

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¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London and New York: Penguin, 1999), 54, 14–15, 17.

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⁵ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

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³ From the institute's self-description on the Pepperdine website: <http://www.pepperdine.edu/glazer-institute/about/default.htm>.

⁴ J. Shawn Landres, "Passion Response Dos and Don'ts," *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, February 13, 2004, http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/passion_response_dos_and_donts_20040213; see also J. Shawn Landres and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *After The Passion Is Gone: American Religious Consequences* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004).

⁵ J. Shawn Landres, "Misrecognition, Transgression, and the Burden of Unfalsifiability: Toward Interstitial Religion" (working title), in *Entering Religious Minds: Essays on the Study of Epistemic Worldviews*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer and Mona Kanwal Sheikh (2015, in progress); see also my "Interstitial Religion: Approaches to the Study of Religion on the Middle Ground," PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013.

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⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951). For the autobiographical article referred to, see Franklin Sherman, "Steps Along the Way," in *Faith Transformed: Christian Encounters with Jews and Judaism*, ed. John C. Merkle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003). It is significant that Marvin Wilson, in his new book, also pays eloquent tribute to his indebtedness to Heschel.

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Abraham Joshua Heschel

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² Carey McWilliams, "Minneapolis: The Curious Twin," *Common Ground* magazine, September 1946.

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³ Evangelical leaders, among others, included Professor Marvin Wilson (Gordon College) and Dr. Douglas Young, founder and president of the American Institute of Holy Land Studies on Mt. Zion, Jerusalem (now The Jerusalem University College). About 25 Jewish representatives and a like number of evangelicals gathered.

⁴ Marc H. Tanenbaum et al., eds., *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation on Scripture, Theology, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Marc H. Tanenbaum et al., eds., *Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); A. James Rudin and Marvin R. Wilson, eds., *A Time to Speak: The Evangelical-Jewish Encounter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Following these conferences Dr. Wilson published his highly read and respected book *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

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Back Cover

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Seeing Differently Kurt Simonson—Long Beach, California



WALL OF LAMENTS • 2015

Artist Statement

Catholic philosopher Jean Vanier tells the story of walking into an orphanage for disabled children and being struck by an eerie silence. When children realize that no one will listen, he writes, they stop crying out. “It takes too much energy. We cry out only when there is hope that someone may hear us.”¹ Sadly, for many people today, religion is seen as an opiate that numbs us to life’s hardships or else a carefree blissful escape. There is little room for honest speech about pain and suffering within and around us. Too often Christian liturgies filter out the uncomfortable parts of life and deaden our sensitivities to pain. To the degree that this happens our faith in the God who hears and sees us is weakened.

Lament as expressed in the Psalms is an act of faith, not unfaith. Some wrongs are too unjust, some pains too dehumanizing, some hurts so crippling, that to remain silent and refuse to lament would be an act of *unbelief* in God and his promises and detrimental to our humanity. Lament serves faith by helping sensitize us to pain and injustices—it is not an opiate that mutes our senses and stifles our cries for help.

“Man [sic] comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him,” writes Elie Wiesel. “Therein lies true dialogue.”² The architectural influence on the liturgical practices at Temple Beth Am draws worshipers into the ongoing dialogue of the community with God that spans throughout history embracing the entirety of life including suffering and grief.

About Artist

Kurt Simonson is associate professor of photography at Biola University. Kurt’s portfolio can be viewed at www.kurtsimonson.com.

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