

# Jesus in the Context of Judaism: Quest, Con-Quest, or Conquest?

## Editor's Introduction

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Though many articles, reviews, and books are not of one opinion on the life and time of Jesus, there is a general understanding in the dogma of the Church and in the Quests of the Academy that the incarnate Christ of Christian belief lived and died a faithful Jew,<sup>1</sup> and what this says to contemporary Jews and Christians is the focus of this special issue of *Shofar*.

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<sup>1</sup>For a selection of books dealing with the Jewishness of Jesus, see Solomon Zeitlin, *Who Crucified Jesus?* (New York, Bloch Publication Co., 1964); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, *Judaism and Christianity: The Differences* (Middle Village, New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1997); Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000); Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Image of Jesus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Brother Jesus: The Nazarene Through Jewish Eyes*, trans. and ed. by J. S. Klein and M. Reinhart (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006); Philip Sigal, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* (Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/ Brill, 2007); David Flusser, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Oskar Skarsaune and Hvalvik Reidar, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus* (Peabody, Mass.: Hen-

In the context of our time, Pope John Paul II challenged members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to help the Christian understand that the Hebrew Scriptures are essential to their faith (1997). That is to say, Catholic mysteries, including annunciation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and redemption, are derived from the Hebrew biblical *Weltanschauung*. To speak of Jesus in the context of Judaism is affirmed by the Church's acceptance of the Jewish Hebrew Bible as the Christian Old Testament, and this presents distinctive challenges to the visions of the other. When Jewish and Christian servants interweave the narrative and teaching of Jesus into the cultural and social life of first-century Judaism in the Land of Israel under the rule of Caesar, they pinpoint the evolving christology of the Jesus believers, which conflicts with the viewpoints of the Rabbis and jurisdiction of Rome. Second, Christians and Jews committed to reading scripture together are deeply motivated by an academic and reverential disposition toward rabbinic Judaism and the desire to correct the malign image of Jews and Judaism that emerges from erroneous readings of the Gospel sources. Arguably *contra Iudaeos* biases happen when historicity (Pharasaic kinship of Jesus, Peter, and Paul) is conflated with apologetic ("Give unto Caesar") and polemic depictions (Jews are a deicidal and misanthropic people), and theological innovation (Christ replaces Torah).

The *desideratum* is neither extreme skepticism nor full faith acceptance but rather a centralist position, somewhat contrary to an ecclesiastical tradition which teaches that truth is bounded and restricted to New Testament and early Christian *kerygma* (preaching) and *didache* (apologetics). Exploring the place of Jesus within Second Temple Judaism means to apply *drash* (insightful interpretation) to *peshat* (plain meaning of the text). Why so? Because Jesus the historical being, that is to say, the Jesus before the oral and written traditions, is transformed and transfigured into a narrative character that appears in the canonized New Testament. The Jesus in narratology is a fluid figure of creative, idyllic, and dogmatic imagination, whose realness cannot be fixed in any given episode, teaching, or telling.

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drickson, 2007); Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Michael J. Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament: Enhancing Jewish Well-Being in a Christian Environment* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights, 2008); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 4: Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Herbert Bassler, *The Mind Behind the Gospels: A Commentary to Matthew 1–14* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009).

Thus, on reading the Gospel of John's account of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the trial before Pilate, and the sentence of death, one may project that the Evangelist's Jewish opponents are the reason for the virtual negativity of the *Ioudaioi* towards Jesus in his teaching and trial. Also, the cry of the mob, "His blood be upon us and on our children" (Matt 27:25) is neither an acceptance of guilt nor perpetual pedigree of damnation for the death of Jesus but can be seen as an expression of innocence that says if we are not innocent of this man's blood then may the curse be fulfilled (see Acts 18:6 and *b.Sanh.* 37a).

### Jewish-Christian Encounter

The ground rule for Christian-Jewish scriptural reading and discussion is simple but complex. Let the Christian proclaim core Christian dogma (Easter faith) and dicta (e.g., Jesus "the living bread that came down from heaven" [John 6:51] is the savior of Israel) without a hint or utterance of anti-Judaism. Likewise, the Jewish observant needs be aware and sensitive of claims of Christian identity. The objective in the quest for the rediscovery, and possibly reclamation by Jews, of the Jewish Jesus is to penetrate the wall of separation and suspicion of "law and grace" and enable the believer in the Second Testament to appreciate the saga and salvation of Israel experientially in terms of Judaism, that is to say, in accordance with the teaching of Moses and the exegesis of the Sages of Israel. Reciprocally, the follower of the Torah way learns the how and why of the Christian relationship to the Sinai covenant as presented in the Christian spirit of scriptural inspiration and tradition, a strong sign that centuries-old "teaching of contempt" is not doable for Christians and Jews in dialogue, where a shared biblical tradition is the surest sign that the stumbling blocks of religious intolerance can be overcome. Take *lex talionis*, for example.

Three times the Pentateuch mentions the legislation of *lex taliones* (the law of retaliation, of an "eye for an eye" (Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20; Deut 19:18–21). Though the law of "measure for measure" existed in the Ancient Near East, there is little evidence that the Torah meant that this legislation should be fulfilled literally except in the case of willful murder. "Life for life" is taken literally in cases of homicidal intention, and fair compensation is appropriate when physical injuries are not fatal. Equitable monetary compensation is deemed appropriate by the Oral Torah in the case of a pregnant woman whose unborn child's life is lost and when animal life is forfeited. Indeed, the Written Torah casts aside all doubts regarding the intent of the biblical *lex talionis* injunction: "And he that kills a beast shall make it good; and he that kills a man shall be put to death" (Lev 24:21).

Rejecting the literal application of *lex talionis* puts an end to the mean-spirited charge that Judaism is "strict justice." Similarly, the words of Jesus on

the Torah ("For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" [Matt 5:18]) beckon interpretation. Christian citing Matt 5:38–39a ("You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil") to teach that "Jesus cancels the law of revenge and replaces it with the law of love" is wrong on two accounts: 1) syntactically, the Greek text of Matt 5:39 reads *and* not *but*, thereby removing the onus of change; and 2) scripturally, the text in context (see Matt 5:21–26, 27–30, Jesus on murder and adultery) instructs *not* cancellation but affirmation of the commandments. Thus Jesus like the Sages focuses on the significance of the Teaching and its cautionary warning about wrong doing in "thoughts, words, and deeds."

Nonetheless there are significant differences on retaliation between Jesus and the Rabbis. In Matt 5:38–39, Jesus addresses *'ayin tachat 'ayin* ("eye for eye") in terms of personal revenge and related implementations, but the Rabbis' understanding is *mamon tachat 'ayin* ("value of an eye"), and this is seen as remedial justice for the guilty and concern for the injured. Also, a Christian interpretation of the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18) preceded by the prohibition, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge," (Lev 19:18) is the foundation of the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt 7:12; cf. too Luke 6:31). However, the Jewish position is somewhat different. In text, "love your neighbor" (Lev 19:18) is followed by "You shall keep my statutes/*chuqqotai* (revelatory laws without applicable reason)" (Lev 19:19). In the rabbinic tradition, the covenantal partnership at Sinai represents the *modus operandi* to apply the love commandment albeit taught in negative terms, "Whatever is hateful to you do it not to another."<sup>2</sup>

Participants in Jewish-Christian scriptural dialogue aim to show the interdependence of Jewish and Christian biblical traditions and do so by truncating cultural, historical, psychological, religious, and theological differences between them. Some may see this and the absence of sustained critical discussion of texts and historical issues as major weaknesses, but I do not. There is something refreshing in connecting sentences to sentences, parts to whole, book to books. Spiritually informative, evocative in hermeneutics, less interested in critical scholarship that parses Jewish and Christian Scriptures into strands and schools and more concerned in Torah and Gospels that instructs

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<sup>2</sup>The negative version of the Golden Rule suggests the frailty of subjective thinking, i.e., "what is good for me, is good for you." The non-rational nature of *chuqqotai* supports this point of view.

in moral values and fellowship. Scriptural dialogue is a religiously correct lesson for two sibling-religions whose God is the Author of All.

### Testimony of Jesus<sup>3</sup>

There is a line of basic continuity between the beliefs and attitudes of Jesus and the Pharisees, between the reasons which led Jesus into conflict with the religious establishment of his day, and those which led his followers into conflict with the Synagogue.

Two of the basic issues were the role of the Torah and the authority of Jesus. Rabbinic Judaism could never accept the Second Testament Christology since the God-man of the “hypostatic union” is foreign to the Torah’s teaching on absolute monotheism. As the promised Messiah,<sup>4</sup> Jesus did not meet the conditions which the prophetic-rabbinic tradition associated with the coming of the Messiah. For example, there was no harmony, freedom, peace, and amity in Jerusalem, and enmity and struggle abounded elsewhere in the Land. This lack of peace denied the validity of the Christian claim that Jesus fulfilled the Torah and that in his Second Coming the tranquility of the Messianic Age will be realized. As Rabbi Jesus, he taught the divine authority of the Torah and the prophets,<sup>5</sup> and respect for its presenters and preservers,<sup>6</sup> but the Gospels claimed that his authority was equally divine and that it stood above the authority of the Torah. The disparity of the Jewish self and the Gentile other in the ancestral faith of Jesus is abolished in the new faith in Jesus: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>7</sup> I see this testimony as a major point of contention between the Jesus way and the way of rabbinic Halakha that ultimately led to the severance of the Jesus party from the Synagogue. And this acquired new intensity after the passing of the Jewish Jesus and the success of Pauline Christianity.

### ‘Ani Hu’/ I Am He: Seeking Unity in Diversity

No matter how composite is the figure of the historical Jesus and how rudimentary the concept of the Christ-event in the Second Testament, there can

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<sup>3</sup>My view on the historical Jesus is spelled out in Zev Garber, ed., *Mel Gibson’s Passion: The Film, the Controversy, and Its Implications* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 63–69.

<sup>4</sup>Cf., among others, Matt. 26:62–64; Mark 14:60–62; Luke 22:60–70.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Matt 5:17–20.

<sup>6</sup>Matt 23: 1–3a

<sup>7</sup>Gal 3:28. Also, 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11.

be no doubt that the Jewish and Gentile believers bestowed divine attributes and power upon Jesus and venerated him above all creatures. Such an attitude towards the person of Jesus as God incarnate led to conflict with the Sages, who revered only Torah-from-Heaven. This is illustrated in the exegetical dissimilarity between Church and Synagogue in how one is to submit to God's righteousness. Reading the nature of God's commandment (Deut 30: 11–14), the Apostle Paul comments that Christ is the subject of "Who will ascend into heaven? . . . Who will descend into the deep?" and confessing "Jesus is Lord . . . in your mouth and in your heart"<sup>8</sup> is the justified salvation for all. For the Sages, however, salvation is in believing and doing the commandments. "Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you . . . it is not in heaven,"<sup>9</sup> is the *raison d'être* of Rabbinic Judaism. That is to say, the Torah is not in heaven, it is here and near so that Israel can hear "the blessing and the curse" and do the 613 Commandments<sup>10</sup> in order "to choose life"<sup>11</sup> and live.

The doctrine of the eternity of the Torah was axiomatic in Second Temple Judaism. It is implicit in verses that speak of individual teachings of Torah in phrases such as the following: "A perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your [lands of] dwellings" (Lev 3:17) and "throughout the ages as a covenant for all time" (Exod 3:16). Biblical (Proverbs, in which Torah equals wisdom), Apocryphal (the wisdom of Ben Sira), and Aggadic (Genesis Rabbah) traditions speak of the preexistence of Torah in Heaven. Though the Talmud acknowledges the pre-revelatory Heavenly Torah, which the Sages claimed was revealed to Moses at Sinai, it concentrates more on the Torah's eternal humanistic values. Indeed, the rabbinic mind speaks of two strains: revelation ("everything which a scholar will ask in the future is already known to Moses at Sinai"; see BT Menach. 29b) and the power of intellectual reasoning, as suggested in BT Pes. 21b, Ketub. 22a, B.K. 46b, Chul. 114b, Nid. 25a,

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<sup>8</sup>Rom 10:6 commenting on Deut 30:13–14

<sup>9</sup>Deut 30:11–12a

<sup>10</sup>The Talmud states: "613 Commandments were revealed to Moses at Sinai, 365 being prohibitions equal in number to the solar days, and 248 being mandates corresponding in number to the limbs of the human body" (*Mak.* 23b). Another source sees the 365 prohibitions corresponding to the supposedly 365 veins in the body thereby drawing a connection between the performance of Commandments and the life of a person ("choose life"). The standard classification and enumeration of the *TaRYaG Mitzvot* (613 Commandments) follows the order of Maimonides (1135–1205) in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* ("Book of Commandments," originally written in Arabic and translated several times into Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup>Deut 30:19

B.M. 59b, and so forth. And by twinning the two dialectics, it appears, the Sages taught more Torah than received at Sinai.

Volatile are the arguments and disagreements between Petrine and Pauline Christians on issues of faith in Christ with or without observance of the Torah in how to proselytize Gentiles.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the fallout is decisive and divisive in the disputations between the Church and Synagogue beginning with nascent Christianity, as John 8 seems to suggest. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Second Temple was sufficient proof for believers in Christ that God has pronounced dire judgment upon His stiff-necked people and that the God of promises dispensed His countenance to those who accepted Jesus as Messiah. Hence, “Christ is the end of the law,”<sup>13</sup> in “(whose) flesh the law with its commandments and regulations”<sup>14</sup> are abolished. But Torah and its Commandments are the matrix in which rabbinic Judaism was born, and it proved to be the mighty fortress to withstand danger of extinction from without (Rome) and from within (non-Pharisaic philosophies, including Jewish Christianity). Thus, in the rabbinic way, to despise an individual precept of the Torah is tantamount to rejecting the whole Torah; and this explains the measures taken by the Synagogue, e.g., the second-century *Birkat ha-Minim* (prayer against Jewish sectarians inserted in the Eighteen Benedictions), to preserve its national and religious character in the face of adversity and catastrophe.

John 8 (indeed, the entire Fourth Gospel) exemplifies disparate views of the Jesus party on the yoke of the Torah (temporary or eternal) and the separation of a specific Jewish Christian community in the late first century from the Jewish society to which its members had belonged and who were now excluded by Synagogue fiat. On the former, consider Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman at the well, “[S]alvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,”<sup>15</sup> and on the latter, the intensity of conflict between the Jewish Christian community for which John was composed and the reigning

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<sup>12</sup>Galatians, for example, which I discussed in my paper, “How Believable Is the Allegory of Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:1),” given at the annual meeting of the National Association of Professors of Hebrew (NAPH), meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of AAR-SBL, in Nashville, Tennessee, 18–21 November 2000.

<sup>13</sup>Rom 10:4a.

<sup>14</sup>Eph 2:15

<sup>15</sup>John 4:22b–23.

religious authority is reflected in the hostile and vindictive language placed in the mouth of Jesus accusing his Jewish detractors of not accepting the truth, plotting to kill him, and being the children of the Devil.<sup>16</sup>

In the long history of Christianity there exists no more tragic development than the treatment accorded the Jewish people by Christian believers based in part on the anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John. The cornerstone of supersessionist Christology is the belief that Israel was spurned by divine fiat for first rejecting and then killing Jesus. This permitted the apostolic and patristic writers to damn the Jews in the rhetoric of John 8, and more, to assign the worst dire punishment on judgment day. These are not words, just words, but are links in an uninterrupted chain of antisemitic diatribes that contributed to the murder of Jews in the heartland of Christendom and still exist in a number of Christian circles today. How to mend the cycle of pain and the legacy of shame? The key is a midrashic (*peshat cum drash*) interpretation informed by an empathic and emphatic dialogue between siblings, Christian and Jew, individually and together.

Let me explain. It is a fact that Church-Synagogue relations turned for the better when the Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) issued the document *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Times”), the first ever Roman Catholic document repudiating collective Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. In the Roman Catholic world, this inspired many dioceses and archdioceses to implement *Nostra Aetate* and to rid the anti-Jewish bias of Christian teaching. To illustrate, consider the sentiment of the Italian bishops to the Jewish community of Italy (March 1998): “For its part, the Catholic Church, beginning with Second Vatican Council—and thanks to the meeting of two men of faith, Jules Isaac and John XXIII, whose memory is a blessing—decisively turned in another direction [from teaching divinely sanctioned punishment of the Jews –ZG], removing every pseudotheological justification for the accusation of deicide and perfidy and also the theory of substitution with its consequent ‘teaching of contempt,’<sup>17</sup> the foundation for all antisemitism. The Church recognizes with St. Paul that the gifts of God are irrevocable and that even today Israel has a proper mission to fulfill: to witness to the absolute lordship of the Most High, before whom the heart of every person must open.”

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<sup>16</sup>John 8:31–59.

<sup>17</sup>Term associated with Jules Isaac (1877–1963), French Jewish authority on antisemitism, who in an audience with Pope John XXIII in 1960, persuaded the Holy Father to consider the errors of the Church’s teachings on the Jews. Isaac’s writings on *l’enseignement du mépris* played a key role in the declaration of *Nostra Aetate*.

Few can rival Pope John Paul II's papacy in ridding the Roman Catholic Church of antisemitism. He more than any predecessor condemned "the hatreds, acts of persecution, and displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place" (Yad Va-Shem, March 23, 2000). He labeled the hatred of Jews as a sin against God, referred to the Jews as Christianity's "elder brother,"<sup>18</sup> with whom God's covenant is irrevocable, and established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel (1994). The Vatican documents *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998) and *Confessions of Sins Against the People of Israel* (St. Peter's Basilica, March 12, 2000) are major milestones in the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to reconcile with the Jewish people. And, we might add, main-line Protestant denominations in the World Council of Churches, in different degrees, have done likewise.

I welcome this gesture of professing and confessing spoken in the spirit of *teshuvah* (repentance) from the largest member-church in the "Body of Christ" and it bodes well for Jews to offer *teshuvah* (response) in kind. Jews must be true to their Torah, distinct from other sacred scriptures and religions. It is not the role of the Synagogue to judge whether Jesus the Jew metamorphosed into the Christ of faith or that Jesus and the Christ are one and the same individual. Rather Jews must do their homework and cleanse the People Israel of any conceived and/or perceived anti-Christian bias. Jews must see the Roman Catholic Church's altering attitude and action toward them as good omens done in the spirit of humility and contrition. Jews need to be reminded that the Roman Catholic Church views the encounter with Judaism and the Jewish people as an organic part of Christian penance. Indeed, Christianity is a legitimate dialogue partner in *tikkun 'olam*, endowing the world in peace, understanding and unity.

Admittedly, dialogue at times creates unexpected friction, of a kind found in chronicles and hoary debates, if aggressively done for the purpose of settling a score. Progress, not regress, in Christian-Jewish dialogue is only possible if old canards are exposed and reciprocal teachings of respect are encouraged. So proper dialogue on John 8 neither overlooks the harsh statements against the Jews and explains them in a setting in life of that time, nor allows misguided judgments of mean-spirited hermeneutics to pass by unchallenged, nor allows a conjunctural albeit controversial thought go by untested. The "I am" of John 8:24, is such an example. It reveals an aura of divinity by Jesus because his words, "I am the one I claim to be," can be equated with God's identity to

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<sup>18</sup>Phrase introduced by Pope John XXIII.

Moses, “I Am that I Am.”<sup>19</sup> For the Christian divine, this can be interpreted as “I Am” (God) is revealed in “I Am” (Jesus). But the text continues, “He (God) said, ‘Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel: I Am has sent me [Moses] to you.’”<sup>20</sup> This can mean that God as God not God as Jesus is the absolute and sufficient revelation of the divine pathos for the Jewish people.

The significance attached to the Name of God in the above midrashic discussion dispels illusion by illustration. The holiness, sanctity, and power of God’s call are heard equally and necessarily differently by Church and Synagogue, one by Christ and the other by Torah. However, the completeness of God’s Name, meaning His essence and plan, is hidden in this world forever,<sup>21</sup> but in the fullness of time it will be made known: “Therefore my people shall know my Name; therefore, on that day, that ‘*Ani Hu*’ (Name of God, the *shem ha-mmephorash*) is speaking: here am I.”<sup>22</sup>

It is incumbent upon Jew and Christian together in dialogue to bring that day speedily in our lifetime.

### Case for Jesus the Jew

In the final paragraph of “Reflections on Jesus,” a review essay by Zev Garber and Joshua Kulp on several books dealing with Jesus in the context of his time, the New Testament, and Talmud,<sup>23</sup> I affirmed unashamedly that the modern Jew can identify with the faith and fate of Jesus but not faith in Jesus. I have no clue what Jesus would say, but I proposed to Prof. Peter Haas, Abba Hillel Silver Professor of Jewish Studies, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, and Director of the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies at Case Western Reserve University, to convene a symposium on rediscovering the Jewish Jesus. So it was presented and so it was received. The three-day symposium on “Jesus in the Context of Judaism and the Challenge to the Church,” hosted by the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies and managed brilliantly by Linda Gilmore,<sup>24</sup> took place at Case on May 24–26, 2009.

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<sup>19</sup>Exod 3:14.

<sup>20</sup>Exod 3:14.

<sup>21</sup>In the unvocalized Hebrew of the Torah, “this is my Name *l’lm*” can be read not as “forever” but “to be hidden.” See Exod 3:15b.

<sup>22</sup>Isa 52:6.

<sup>23</sup>*Shofar*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter 2009), pp. 128–137.

<sup>24</sup>Linda Gilmore’s official title at Case is Manager of Interdisciplinary Programs and Centers, but I call her, “my Catholic angel.” My admiration for Linda’s managerial expertise

The symposium presentations have metamorphosed into the essays of this issue of *Shofar*.

Zev Garber's opening plenary address on "Imagining the Jewish Jesus" postulated that the Easter faith without its Jewish historical context is unwieldy, or worse, a proven feeding ground for centuries-old Good Friday sermons that espoused anti-Judaism (replacement theology, conversion of the Jews) and antisemitism ("perfidious Jews and Christ killers"). A critical read of the "Golden Rule," the Last Supper, and the Great Commandment in the context of Jewish exegesis showed how and why. Garber's methodology of reading Torah in the response of *na'aseh ve-nishma* ("We shall do and we shall hear [reason]"; Exod. 24:7) explained his *darshani* (interpret me) imperative in his analysis of scriptural readings.

Ziony Zevit opines that the Hebrew Bible presents God in many dichotomous ways: present-absent, visible-invisible, caring about an individual/Israel-not caring, imminent-transcendent, responsive to prayer/sacrifice-not responsive, dependable-not dependable. Not all of these fit neatly into theological categories such as omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or kind, merciful, forgiving, welcoming. After discussing theological points about God in the Persian and Greco-Roman periods, he argues that the claims of Jesus as God would not have seemed unreasonable to those whose religious politics were determined by a particular view of God in the Hebrew Bible and by a unique understanding of the Greco-Roman New Age.

James Moore maintains that New Testament Gospels and the post-Easter theology of different Christian fellowships and communities have constructed various frames which shape how Christians (and the churches) read the received narratives about Jesus. What emerges in early Church history are attempts to view Jesus as an abstracted, transcendent figure shaped mainly by the dogmatic statements of the fourth- and fifth-century councils. This history skews the Jewish persona of Jesus and is an impediment to portraying the historical Jesus. Fortunately, there are texts that give us a narrative about a believable Jesus, and these texts do give clues that Jesus, the teacher, was thoroughly in tune with various components of Judaism of his time. Moore's midrashic approach to Torah and Jesus shows why this is so.

Arguably a leading theme in New Testament scholarship is the replacement of the Torah of Sinai with the Hope from Calvary. The New Testament

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was solidified in the Spring 2005 semester when I taught at Case as the invited Rosenthal Fellow. Additionally, her Christian caring and concern that every "dot and tittle" (see Matt 5:17) of my Orthoprax Jewish ways be met is remembered with appreciation and respect.

Gospels and Pauline Letters suggest a Gentile triumphalism over the parochial ethnic religion of the Jews. Herb Basser wants to know why documents are so heavily laden with authentic Jewish idioms and concepts if their audience is so predominantly Gentile. Put another way, do the documents at all reflect anything that Jesus did or said, and if so, how much?

Eugene Fisher feels strongly that Jews misunderstand Christian Scriptures, and particularly the complementary, not contradictory, roles played by Paul of Tarsus to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. For many Jews, Pauline Christianity (bred in Hellenistic Judaism and spouting pseudo-Messianism, incarnate Son of God theology, etc.) quickly turned against Judaism and by the fourth century began persecuting Jews, singling them out for hell on earth. Fisher challenges these notions about Jesus the Christ and Jewish-Christian history.

Michael Cook suggests that if many Christian Gentile scholars who live and breathe the Jesus of faith are agnostic in their historical findings, then what can Jewish scholars, separate in faith, bring to the table without looking foolish, stupid, or condescending? He answers, "gospel dynamics," which is illustrated by four well-known Jesus episodes, namely, the Last Supper, Sanhedrin trial and so-called blasphemy charge, and pairing with Barabbas.

In much of thoughtful Jewish New Testament scholarship, there has been a long tendency to regard Paul of Tarsus as the ultimate apostate. However, plenary speaker Richard L. Rubenstein, author of *My Brother Paul*, sees a profound fraternal relation between the disciples of Paul and rabbinic Israel. Rubenstein explores this and other such issues as the Church and Synagogue, the connection between Judaism and Christianity, and sacrifice in Christianity and Judaism. He explores the complex interrelations of the two faiths and the conflicts between them.

Steve Bowman analyzes Jesus in Byzantium apologetics and polemics from the ninth to the eleventh century. He utilizes overt and covert allusions to Jesus in *Sefer Yosippon* and contemporary Byzantine midrashim to reflect on Jewish responses to shifting patterns of the discussions over Jesus in the face of the evolving international conditions affecting Jews and Christians of that time. David Flusser's treatment of Jesus is discussed within the context of his seminal work on *Sefer Yosippon*.

The horrific murder of European Jewry in the bosom of Christian Europe has altered forever how Christians and Jews religiously define themselves and relate to the other. Henry Knight's essay is an invitational challenge to Christians and Jews to do post-Shoah theology together. In the face of the murdered millions, including 1.5 million children, and in the presence of the Jew Jesus, before whom Christians stand in new ways, he sagaciously proposes that the Church and Synagogue face each other and themselves to understand

the changing landscape in the relationships between Jews and Christians due in part to silence in Heaven and indifference on Earth. Finally, Steven L. Jacobs ponders what role Jesus the Jew plays for Christians and Jews in their post-Shoah dialogical hermeneutics. His evaluative response is both positive and problematic to Christians and Jews.<sup>25</sup>

Religious beliefs and practices are often couched in religious creeds and outlooks which for many traditionalist Jews and Christians are rooted in the Bible, seen as monolithic and complete. Decades of academic biblical scholarship, however, show that the biblical canon is a product of historical, political, and social forces, in addition to contempt from the Cross at Calvary, by positioning the New Testament Jesus in the context of the Judaism of Erets Israel in first century. Viewing Jesus, as I do, as a pharisaic proto-rabbi nationalist closely aligned with the anti-Roman zealot insurrection challenges and distresses Jewish practitioners and Christian believers alike. Equally controversial is whether the continuity of the historical Jesus with the Christ of faith is found only in cultic belief or grounded in historical data. Is seeking the historical Jesus a quest (legitimate) or a con-quest (not possible)? Short view? It represents a gentle Jewish conquest of Gentile supersessionism brought about, in part, by the contemporary Church's inherent need to reconcile with its apostolic origin. The long view? Go forth, study, argue—and always with respect.

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<sup>25</sup>For a sampling of different approaches and results in recent attempts at Jewish-Christian dialogue inspired by scriptural and holocaustal concern, see Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, eds., *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); James F. Moore (with Z. Garber, S. Jacobs, and H. Knight), ed., *Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004); and Alan L. Berger and David Patterson (with D. P. Gushee, J. T. Pawlikowski, and J. K. Roth), eds., *Jewish Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008).

# The Amazing Mr. Jesus

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This essay intends to explore what a consideration of the miracle stories recorded in the Christian Gospels might contribute to an attempt to consider the Jewish context for Jesus. The miracles are often not the focus of efforts to think about a Jewish Jesus, but this essay suggests a way that they are best understood as part of a Jewish context by using a Midrashic approach to two texts: Numbers 20 and Matthew 14. The result is that the notion of God's providing for God's people is central, but that a post-Shoah reading requires that a present and not a future event is required as part of a post-Shoah ethic.

I was initially surprised by the focus of this conference—not that it was unimportant, but that it was a subject that had been treated so thoroughly already. In addition, there is the question about what is gained by thinking about a Jewish Jesus or about the Jewish context for understanding Jesus. Much of what can be said is likely to lead us where others have already gone in much more depth. That is, we would find that Jesus is rather unremarkable in many ways. He was not especially distinctive in his teaching, as best we can tell. Thus, a Jewish Jesus would be yet another Jewish teacher, perhaps with insight, but little of anything especially new.

Of course, the rationale for such a discussion hinges on the fact that as much as we recover the Jewishness of Jesus, he is remarkable for our discussion because he is the focus of Christian teaching. Re-connecting Jesus with his Jewish context is naturally a major necessary task for any Christian theologian if there is to be some hope for authentic dialogue. Even so, there is no clear benefit for Christians to do so, in terms of their theologies, other than to gain additional insight into the meaning of Jesus' teaching. Some of us have tried to move this discussion forward by thinking of Jesus in the midrashic tradition and to accept Jacobus Schooneveld's reading that Christians regard

Jesus as the “oral Torah.”<sup>1</sup> If we are not merely to return to a form of supersessionism in this claim, we must read Jesus back into context, the Jewish context, which allows him to return to the discussion on the tradition of “oral Torah.”

But then we are left with a puzzle, since Jesus fits in the Jewish history no doubt, but there is much disagreement about where he fits. Christians have variously thought of Jesus as among the Zealots, or among the Essenes, or among the Pharisees (that is, the Rabbinic Tradition). None of this is clear, and each of these possibilities produces a variety, a plurality of possibilities. Each also produces a view of Jesus that is quite different even in conflict with other alternatives. So the puzzle remains for us: What is gained by doing this?

I add yet another issue for us in that recovering the Jewish Jesus somehow forces us to think about this Jewish context in a post-Shoah framework. While Jesus fit some kind of first-century Jewish context, that story is no longer fully viable by itself, especially not for Christians. We can hardly speak of Jesus as a Jew now without realizing that the ones who have claimed Jesus as their oral Torah were the ones who fostered and/or allowed the great destruction of European Jewry in the last century. It is this problem that has captured my energies as a Christian theologian and that was at the heart of Roy Eckardt’s work, especially seen in his *Re-claiming the Jesus of History*. That work is very interesting in many ways, perhaps particularly because of his revised view of the resurrection narrative.<sup>2</sup>

So I was drawn into these various lines of thought as I began to construct an idea for this conference. In the end, I cannot actually deal with all of these questions, but I believe that I might get close to something valuable if I turn my attention to materials that have not fared well as a source for the search either for the historical Jesus or for the Jewish context of Jesus. I decided to think about the miracle stories, what I have captured somewhat lightly with the title “The Amazing Mr. Jesus.” I came to this point because of the thoughts I had regarding the many efforts that have already contributed to this literature but also because of an interesting, provocative, and profound comment made by Haim Maccoby at the first Oxford Remembering for the Future conference back in 1988.<sup>3</sup> He said as a way of opening his paper presentation that Jews

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<sup>1</sup>Jacobus Schoneveld, “Torah in the Flesh,” in *Remembering for the Future: Volume I* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988), pp. 867–878.

<sup>2</sup>A. Roy Eckardt, *Reclaiming the Jesus of History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 213–217.

<sup>3</sup>Haim Maccoby, “Antisemitism and the Christian Myth,” in *Remembering for the Future*, Vol. I, pp. 836–866.

would have little problem with Christians and Jesus in particular if Christians would just give up the resurrection. I am sure he knew that this would provoke response and that there was little likelihood that the Christians present would accept his suggestion. The remark was rather a way of pointing to the real dividing issue between us. A Jesus who is for Christians the oral Torah can be a potential bridge. A Jesus who performed miracles and was raised from the dead seems to be a major dividing line. But can we talk of a Jewish Jesus without considering this challenge? And what if we did this seriously, that is, thinking of Jesus as amazing, the miracle worker in a Jewish context. That will take some doing as we consider the history of thinking about the historical Jesus as contrasted with the Christ of faith (Martin Kaehler spoke of this in his classic text<sup>4</sup>). So this is my aim, with a full realization that this may lead us nowhere except toward knowing the line of difference. But it may lead us somewhere, even if not exactly where we might expect. I will try this as a Midrash, a post-Shoah Midrash, which surely will be different from the approaches I have attempted thus far over the years.

### The History of the Quest

It would be a challenge to recount the whole story of the various quests for the historical Jesus, but some effort to think about these attempts, especially as they link to the way scholars (mostly Christian) have thought about miracles, is needed. The initiation of thinking about historical settings for the biblical narratives coincided with the development of history as a discipline in its own right during the nineteenth century. There were those who thought that such studies could substantiate the unique, and therefore superior, status of Christianity by historical evidence. The long search through the century actually ended with a statement of fundamental failure in the classic text by Albert Schweitzer in which he claimed that the actual Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet whose vision for the world and himself ended in failure with the crucifixion.<sup>5</sup> His conclusion was that the remainder that was useful was the ethical teaching of Jesus, which meant finally the teaching that basically matched the same ongoing development of Rabbinic thought. Of course, such a judgment leaves the miracles out of this useful remainder since they were judged to be constructions of the early church designed especially to defend the credibility

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<sup>4</sup>Martin Kaehler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

<sup>5</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1954).

of Jesus in a predominantly Hellenistic world. This includes the resurrection, which would, by the writings of Rudolf Bultmann,<sup>6</sup> become a claim available only in the existential encounter of faith. It would be outside of history. In addition, this first quest set the stage for thinking about the miracles in a Hellenistic and not a Jewish context. This was surely already in the thought of both Friedrich Schleiermacher and David Strauss, who both wrote lives of Jesus in the nineteenth century, even if they were striking in their contrast.<sup>7</sup>

This treatment of the miracle stories dominates much of the work that has been done on the historical Jesus among Christian scholars. The assumption that the Hellenistic world of the early church is the proper context for understanding the meaning of the gospels breaks the connection between Jesus and the Jewish context of his life. In addition, the miracle stories are seen as “outside of history” and thus can be only symbols of meaning often taken to be affirmations of the power of Jesus or the authority of Jesus or the messianic claims connected to Jesus. All of this opens the door for the exclusivist, supersessionist views of the early church, or so it seems.

### Jewish Views

All of the above stands in stark contrast with the various views about miracles that can be found in Jewish tradition. Indeed, Jewish scholars have also participated in the historical-critical reading of sacred texts, but the tradition relating to miracles seems quite different. There seem to be three different views, perhaps related, that can be explored further, so that we can talk about a Jewish context.<sup>8</sup>

First, the Rabbinic tradition has viewed miracles as inside of history and has managed to reconcile this with reason by claiming that the central miracles of the tradition are not opposed to nature but are planned by God in creation. What seems miraculous in the telling actually can have natural explanations but are planned by God for God’s purposes in creating nature as such.

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<sup>6</sup>Bultmann’s ideas and the work of a number of other biblical scholars can be found in Stephen Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (Los Angeles: Mayfield Publishing, 1997).

<sup>7</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) and David Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>8</sup>For discussions of these issues, see the following: A. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975); Abraham Milligram, ed., *Great Jewish Ideas* (New York: B’nai B’rith, 1964); C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); and Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981).

Second, Jewish tradition, at least early Rabbinic interpretations, seems to accept that miracles are common and not unusual. Thus, they do not really need explanation and are also of minor importance. They do point to something but are much more signs of God's activity, the meaning of which can be found developed more fully in the whole narrative. Thus, miracles must be taken as part of the larger story in order to discover exactly what it is that the narratives intend to claim.

Finally, there are miracle narratives that take on special importance for Jewish tradition, most central of which are the miracles associated with the Exodus. These miracles are signs of God's power, God's authority, and God's redemptive promises. The focus shifts from the humans involved to the work of God, and when humans claim too much importance, as with Moses, they are set straight by God.

Given these three readings of miracles, the contrast with what has been a Christian view in the various quests for the historical Jesus is obviously clear. Perhaps that is the point, that Christianity becomes very different and the miracle stories are simply a good way to see that difference. However, our conference aims to think about the Jewish context for understanding Jesus, and I now move to consider what that might mean if we read the miracles in Jewish context (views that are likely to have been available to Jesus and his contemporaries.) We make a slight jump here to attempt to think not about the Hellenistic setting of the early church but the Jewish setting of Jesus and read the miracles in that light.

### **A New Kind of Midrashic Reading<sup>9</sup>**

I apologize beforehand to all those who do historical-critical work. I am not intending such a detailed and careful study of the texts as that would demand, and if I were to do this, I might find alternative conclusions than what I am prepared to suggest. I am rather approaching these texts and this question by using the Midrashic model that I have employed now for close to 20 years. This approach begins with the assumption that the Christian scriptures and particularly the words of Jesus are a Midrash on the tradition, especially on

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<sup>9</sup>For a fuller explanation of and examples of what is meant by a Midrashic reading see the following: James Moore, Zev Garber, Steven Jacobs and Henry Knight, *Post-Shoah Dialogues* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004); James Moore, *Toward a Dialogical Community* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004); and James Moore, *Christian Theology After the Shoah* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993, 2004).

the Torah. I move to a new stage of this reflection by treating not just the words of Jesus but events attributed to Jesus' life. We will see where this leads us. My assumptions include a post-Shoah Midrash in that I begin by assuming a dialogical approach that anticipates a response. In addition, we assume that any interpretation is tested by taking account of the fact that the Shoah is now a critical component of our stories, Jewish and Christian, although in different ways.

I begin the process in this paper by looking at a text from Numbers 20 and connecting this text to Matthew 14:13–21. The two stories are clearly linked, in my judgment, and we might see that the texts from Jesus' life also presume connections to stories about Elijah and Elisha as well, a point that may have some significance for our reading. I will begin with a brief reflection on Numbers 20, noting what I believe are key points for our purposes. I will then take up the narrative from Matthew (notably a narrative that appears in all four Christian gospels) which will likely lead me back to the text from Numbers. All of this will require a reflection in the end that is post-Shoah.

## Numbers 20

The account in Numbers 20 is similar to a text in Exodus 17, and a thorough reading would lead us to explore these connections. My aim, though, is to give an account of the Jewish context for Jesus, and this may only be a pattern that is suggestive. Thus, further work will be needed to explore all the possibilities. In addition, my aim has always been to create a sense of a plurality of possible meanings and not to assume that any one reading is likely to be the best. In the end we can sift through the options for what cannot possibly be acceptable to our post-Shoah dialogue. Thus, we focus on Numbers 20, which carries an interesting set of possibilities because it follows the strange text of the "Red Heifer."<sup>10</sup> Our attention is drawn here to the story of the rock at Meribah and what is said to be the context and result of what takes place there.

Briefly, I note that the text suggests a quarrel between the people and the leaders (Moses and Aaron) that is not different from the complaints of earlier episodes (such as that which brings about the discovery of the mysterious "manna" in the desert.) The people are thirsty and take the occasion to com-

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<sup>10</sup>See Joseph Edelheit, "The Messy Realities of Life: A Rereading of Numbers 19 and 20," in Steven Jacobs, ed., *Maven in Blue Jeans: A Festschrift in Honor of Zev Garber* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009) and James F. Moore, "Dialogue as Praxis: A Midrashic Reading of Numbers 19–20 and Hebrews 9," in Jacobs, ed., *Maven in Blue Jeans*.

plain about being led to such a desolate place and such a grim possible end. Troubled by this, Moses and Aaron retreat to the tent where they are met with the presence of God, who instructs them to take the rod and before the assembly to order the rock to produce water. Moses proceeds to do this, except that he says that “we shall get water for you out of this rock.” Then Moses raises his hand and strikes the rock twice with the rod, causing water to flow.

We are familiar with this story and likely with the variety of interpretations that have emerged. Above all, the story includes the anger of God, which falls on both Moses and Aaron for not trusting fully in God’s promise. Aaron dies that day, and Moses dies before he can enter the “promised land.” Those deaths are clearly connected with the passing of leadership to a new generation, just as those who enter the land are also a new generation from the one that complained in the desert and built the golden calf. All of these aspects are important for the story; yet our interest is to think about the interpretation of the miracle.

### **Returning to a Jewish Context**

The very interesting text from Numbers leaves us with so many options for further thought that I simply note that I am narrowing my approach to setting a Jewish context for the miracle stories of Jesus. I claimed above that one key Rabbinic view of miracles has been that God set these miracles at the time of creation. Thus, they cannot be outside of nature and, thus, outside of history. All of this seems to fit the Numbers text, as these are the very miracle accounts that were in the minds of the Rabbis who offered this summary interpretation. However, we note that there are basic philosophical problems that emerge with the implications of this view. The view suggests that there was a plan in creation that anticipated the occasions for miracles in history. To claim such a plan seems to suggest that God planned the historical context that set the stage for the miracles. But this would mean that the details—the quarrelsome people, the sin of Moses and Aaron such as it may have been, the death of the leaders, etc.—were all part of this plan. Otherwise the full extent of the activity of God would not have been clear. So the miracle may have been in history as part of a planned creation, but the implications say more than we might wish to claim about God (and God’s apparent control of history).

The resolution here seems to be in the way the Rabbis see nature as flexible. That is, the potential for the miracle is present in nature, but this does not mean a set pattern of historical events or some super-control of history. The Jewish context seems to view God as active in history in a planned way, but that human choices still create history that God must respond to. The meaning of this narrative then must be derived from the context of the necessity for

response and the implications for the future. I will return to this point after I consider the text from Matthew.

The second Rabbinic view, that miracles are common and do not deserve special attention, is also useful in reading the Numbers text, since the point of the text is not the miracle as such but rather the broader theme of trust in God's promises. This point will also be useful in treating the narrative from Matthew. On the other hand, the point does not discount the level of skepticism that arises from modern views of miracles and leads rather to a sense that miracles are symbolic and not historical, at least in their meaning. This point does seem to match the trend in Christian scholarship and must be considered more fully. I will do this, however, as part of a post-Shoah and not a modernist reading of the texts.

The final view, that miracles are signs of God's activity, is fitting for this text and makes sense of the whole narrative. Of course, we need to decide exactly what is signaled. Surely it is too simplistic to suggest that it is merely the idea of provision in time of need. That claim will be severely tested by a post-Shoah reading. The point must be larger and connected to the broader view of divine activity. We will see how this links to the Matthew text.

One last point may be of some value. There is at least one direct reference in Christian scripture to Numbers 20, and this can be found in I Corinthians 4:10 where the writer (Paul?) refers to the rock of Meribah as a figure of the Christ. We see that this becomes a reference to a post-resurrection view of the Christ and yet can play into our treatment of a Jewish context for this Midrash.

## Matthew 14

The text in Matthew 14 tells the story of Jesus' feeding of the 5000. I choose Matthew somewhat randomly, although there is some general consensus that Matthew may have been a Gospel written for a generally Jewish audience (that is, members of the Jesus group who were from Jewish background). This narrative follows (in Matthew) the death of John the Baptist, who represented in this Gospel a sign of God's activity calling for repentance. Thus, this is a turning point in the larger narrative. The story begins with a moment of crisis. People have followed Jesus to a "deserted place" to hear him teach. These people were not prepared to find food. The disciples are quarreling because they felt the people should be sent away, but Jesus simply instructs them to bring the food available (five loaves of bread and two fish) to him. He looks to heaven and blesses the bread, breaks the bread, and gives it to the crowds. All are described as eating, and all are satisfied, with twelve baskets left over.

There is nothing particularly unique about this narrative either in Jesus' story or in Jewish history. It is certainly no more remarkable than the water coming from the rock in Numbers 20, even though the story is told as a remarkable event. What is notable is that Jesus does not make much of this event and simply dismisses the crowds. That is, he does not intend it to be a miracle performed by him to draw attention to himself, but rather it pertains to the activity of God. In this way, the story fits well the received tradition, and much in the Gospels suggests that Jesus does not want the miracles to be seen otherwise. If we begin with an assumption that miracles are not rare, then this story is more easily understood within a Jewish context than as a way of impressing a Hellenistic world of the early Church.

The story does seem to suggest an image of the Last Supper meal and in that sense is set into a larger context of meaning. That supper was a preamble to Jesus' death, as the striking of the rock was a preamble to the death of Moses and Aaron. If we think of the Jewish understanding of God's activity as part of a plan set in creation, then we can see this story as part of history and not outside of it, not ahistorical, in so far as it is God's history. This point may help us see a Midrash on Numbers 20 to which we can return. The key point is that the Gospel will view Jesus' death as part of God's plan and not as a punishment. This will be a key for us.

Of course, the central issue is the larger meaning of these events. This now becomes critical, since I have set this as a Midrashic reading in connection with Numbers 20. The larger meaning there is surely the entry into the promised land, and in Matthew the meaning is the event of the crucifixion/resurrection. But since the story is a preamble, we can view it as a Midrash on Numbers 20. The point in both cases is redemption (and not just the immediate feeding or giving of water). The central meaning is that God will provide, a meaning that is clear in Numbers and surely also obvious in Matthew. The issue becomes how we read this provision now. This is a post-Shoah question and not merely a hermeneutical question.

Of course, we do not need the Jesus narrative to provide this meaning to the Rabbinic tradition. We can simply state that the story seems thoroughly Jewish, certainly fitting a Jewish context, and is read more authentically, I contend, as part of the inherited Jewish tradition, Jesus' proper religious context. What is important if we see this as a representation of the Jesus story is that the issue of how to move forward from a point of occupation is again a critical issue for Israel in Jesus' time. Perhaps this is a re-affirmation of the tradition at a time when Israel was under the power of the Romans and the notion that God will provide was therefore under some question. But we may gain more in

allowing Matthew to be a Midrash to seek some interpretation for Numbers 20. That is what I seek now by returning to Numbers.

### **A Midrash: Returning to Numbers 20**

We hardly need the feeding of the five thousand to interpret Numbers 20. There is an entire tradition of interpretation that offers various alternative meanings. But we can think of the story as Midrash and see where that leads us. I am particularly struck by the problem that remains a puzzle for the Rabbis. There does not seem to be a reasonable warrant for the death of Moses and Aaron in the text of Numbers 20. The text seems to say that the pride of striking the rock rather than trusting God's promise, especially failing to announce this to the people, was sufficient reason to bring on Aaron's death and to deny Moses entry to the Promised Land. However, the Rabbis do not seem convinced about this. The failure appears to be minimal, certainly not deserving such punishment. The arguments offered seem to show the struggle to accept this as a picture of the God of Israel. It seems similar to the struggle that the Rabbis had with the punishment brought on Job, the righteous one. As part of a created plan, the result seems to fail. We are left searching for a meaning in the larger purposes of God.

The striking of the rock, however, does not seem to warrant punishment if this is symbolic of God's redemptive plan, as seems to be the case in Numbers. Moses is surely unjustly treated if denied this end simply for a moment of arrogance. Perhaps we can find in Matthew a Midrash that can lead us to another conclusion. Jesus also dies as a result of his work without seeing its full fruits. This was, indeed, the sad conclusion by Albert Schweitzer when he saw the apocalyptic vision of Jesus go unfulfilled with his crucifixion. This can make sense in a Jewish context only if the death is seen as necessary for the redemption of the people.

Schweitzer could not see this in Jesus' death and thus decided that what remained was Jesus' teaching. But perhaps this is the point. The people of Israel could not move forward to claim the covenant and its promise as long as Moses and Aaron remained. The people had to accept new leadership to prepare the way for a future. Thus, the death of Moses is not punishment but is rather necessary for the redemptive future of the people. Moses clearly must step back for the full activity of God to be recognized apart from Moses. That is the full reason, perhaps, for the death of Moses. This also is the case for Jesus, who must die so that the people can fully take up his teaching and not merely be dependent on Jesus. This seems to be the point of this story, reinforced by the story that immediately follows about Peter and whether Peter has the trust to "do it on his own."

So the issue is one of continuing leadership and the capacity of the people to take on their own agency as a covenant people. This seems also to be the central point of Numbers 19–20 (see my essay in *Maven in Blue Jeans*). Such a message leads us back to the need for a post-Shoah reading that can test this interpretation in the light of our Shoah history.

### A Post-Shoah Midrash

This will have to be a preliminary reflection, since moving to such a post-Shoah interpretation requires looking at a number of details in the texts and also needs to be done in dialogue. However, I will think about the possible reading I have suggested in terms of a post-Shoah consideration. Above all, our reflections will take on the claim that any vision of the long picture begins with a trust in God's promise to provide. I will look closely at the argument that Roy Eckardt offered as to why he changed his view about the resurrection as part of this post-Shoah Midrash.

The idea that God provides, even in a long range view, comes under heavy skepticism in a post-Shoah theology. This is especially problematic for Christians who neither can claim the role of victim nor claim any real evidence of massive Christian resistance and/or rescue during the Shoah. Thus, for Christians, the idea that God provides cannot be much comfort nor can it be so easily applied to Christians as Christians. Of course, there are many Christians who do continue to live with this trust, but this surely means that it is done, for most, without any real test of the kind represented by the Nazi destruction of European Jews. For this reason, the argument that Eckardt uses in his book co-authored with Alice Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey into Day*, seems appropriately to respond to the Shoah challenge. He argues that, "No past event, however holy or divine, can ever redeem the terror of the present. Only a future event can do this."<sup>11</sup>

In his later book, Eckardt argues another point which seems to thoroughly revise his position described above. Eckardt is influenced by the writing of Paul van Buren<sup>12</sup> and is led to claim a historicity for the resurrection. The need to claim a bodily reality matches the need for Christians to affirm a relationship with Jesus while maintaining a belief in the Christ. Here we see difference

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<sup>11</sup>A. Roy Eckardt and Alice Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey Into Day* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), p. 150.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

come forward fully as he says, "For is not Jesus, the Jewish Hasid from the town of Nazareth, loose again in the social world, amidst all the anguish and all the joy of human events?"<sup>13</sup> This is surely not a future event that Eckardt spoke about in 1982. But this is precisely, despite his efforts to moderate supersessionist positions, a return to a Christian reading of Jesus and not to the Jewish Jesus. To claim that Jesus is a Jewish Hasid seems to do little to take fully seriously the Jewish context.

There is more to be worried about here. The claim that Jesus is in any sense released in the social world seems to deny that this Jesus as a Jew would surely have found himself in Auschwitz had he roamed the world of Nazi Europe, as I presume is the claim made here. This would mean that the very Christological claim for a faith rooted in the resurrection is surely undermined by the fact of Auschwitz as our story. Or do we seek a second resurrection? Surely Eckardt was correct to begin with: Only a future event will do, and this puts Jesus back into the Jewish context.

Now I have moved us in that direction already by pushing the discussion back behind the dogmas, to speak of Mr. Jesus. This means that the death of Moses and the death of Jesus as necessary for redemption for Jews and Christians, respectively, now is met with a clear pause. Can we say the same about the deaths of 6 million (indeed, even 11 million)? The miracle stories of Numbers and Matthew must now be seen in this light. This means that even more than Schweitzer would argue, morality must be seen as after Auschwitz, to use an idea developed by Peter Haas.<sup>14</sup> This morality is one in which death is no longer seen as a necessity for the redemption of the people. It is a brute fact of human history, but it is not so viable as a cornerstone of our vision. As I argued some time ago, this morality must now be seen in our agency (indeed, the agency of the people, as I argued earlier) to resist and to rescue.<sup>15</sup> This becomes the meaning of water from the rock and the feeding of the hungry. Only a present event will do.

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<sup>13</sup>Eckardt, *Reclaiming the Jesus of History*, p. 217.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Haas, *Morality After Auschwitz* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup>Moore, *Christian Theology After the Shoah*.

## Before Whom Do We Stand?

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This essay places before the reader four historic texts that raise significant questions for Jews and Christians who choose to enter into post-Holocaust examination of their respective identities and their relationships to their grounding traditions. The Kristallnacht exhibit at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum introduces museum visitors to the defaced Talmudic instruction of R. Eliezer—*Know before whom you stand*—which frames this essay. As with the story the museum recounts, more than texts are at stake in this essay, but the way forward is distinctly framed by their critical presence. In this case, the distinctive texts are faced in reconfiguring ways, asking those who face them to rethink the place of the other in their identities and life-orienting commitments. Early on, Samuel Bak's surrealistic rendering of a crucified, Jewish child provides a refracting image for exploring the questions these texts pose for post-Shoah people of faith who take their place before them, asking in recursive fashion: before whom do you stand?

Know before whom you are standing when you pray.  
(*Berachot* 28b)

And the Sovereign will answer them: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me."  
(Mt. 25:40)

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the rule and realm of heaven belongs."  
(Mt. 19: 14)

"You're wrong," Pedro said. "The way is no less important than the goal. He who thinks about God, forgetting man, runs the risk of mistaking his goal: God may be your next door neighbor."  
(Elie Wiesel, *Town Beyond the Wall*, p. 115)

Before whom do we stand? After the Holocaust that question, echoing the instructions of Rabbi Eliezer to his disciples, that they know the One before whom they stand when they pray, calls Jews *and* Christians to re-examine

their understandings of each other and of their own grounding traditions. In the reflections that follow, I will explore this question, particularly as it is refracted through artist Samuel Bak's iconic image of the Warsaw Ghetto Boy<sup>1</sup> and Elie Wiesel's character, Michael, from *Town Beyond the Wall*.<sup>2</sup> Bak has captured with his brush the image of a murdered friend's face and, in multiple renderings, portrayed it in the iconic form of the Warsaw ghetto boy. His paintings of Samek as a crucified child puts a face on Rabbi Eliezer's text that challenges both his tradition and mine. In similar fashion, Elie Wiesel's story of Michael in *Town Beyond the Wall*, approaches other implications of Rabbi Eliezer's admonition.

As I wrestle with Bak's image and Wiesel's stylized story, I am also cognizant of two other texts that represent the confessional ground on which I stand as I undertake this task. Those texts, both from the Gospel of Matthew, are familiar to Christians and non-Christians alike. One articulates how Jesus identifies with the other in his life and expresses the significance of his relationship even with the least of others in his and his followers' lives. The second text represents how Jesus perceives the significance of children in God's and our ways with the world.

I invite my readers to join me in my wrestling as I seek to make sense of these various texts, my place before them, and my place before the Jewish figure who stands at the center of my wounded world.

### A Wounded Ark and A Defaced Summons

One of the artifacts on display at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, is a disfigured lintel that once framed the ark of a synagogue in Nenterhausen, Germany. Carved across the top in Hebrew text are the words, *Da lifnei mi attah omeyd*: Know before whom you stand. The lintel and

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Bak has rendered a number of works utilizing the iconic image of a Nazi soldier holding a young child from the Warsaw ghetto at gunpoint while invoking the face of Bak's 8 year old friend, Samek Epstein, who was murdered by the Nazis. Bak's paintings were exhibited by the Pucker Art Gallery under the rubric, *Icon of Loss*, and a catalog for that show can be obtained by contacting the gallery in Boston. The painting referenced in this essay, *Study I*, 1995, is reproduced with commentary in Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary A. Phillips, "Bak's Impossible Memorials: Giving Face to the Children," in Danna Nolan Fewell, Gary A. Phillips, and Yvonne Sherwood, eds., *Representing the Irreparable: The Shoah, the Bible, and the Art of Samuel Bak* (Boston: Pucker Art Publications, 2008), pp. 95ff.

<sup>2</sup>Elie Wiesel, *Town Beyond the Wall*, trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

these words overlook a glass display case that houses Torah scrolls that were defiled during the November pogrom of *Kristallnacht*. The words are Rabbi Eliezer's instructions to his students recorded in the Talmud (*Berachoth* 28b), linking study with prayer and guiding the lives of Jews of every nationality.

Rabbi Eliezer's admonition is often carved or painted above the arks in synagogues and temples, marking the space set aside to house the sacred words of Torah. His words continue to reach out across the generations to teach new congregations. Jews face them each time they stand before or approach the ark. They greet whoever may be ascending the *bima* making his or her way to read or to take their place in the community. These words hold, like a Kiddush cup, the responsibilities human beings have to God and one another, the ties that bind us to each other and to all that we honor as sacred in our lives.

And those ties, like these words, were betrayed on *Kristallnacht*. They were desecrated, along with the trampled Torah scrolls in the facing case. Physically, the words were cut and gouged, most likely by a bayonet. Close inspection reveals that the word *lifnei*, constructed from the Hebrew word for *face*, was literally defaced. Its message, especially now when we look back using this wounded ark as our lens, is profound and tragic. Since every human being, every child of Adam, bears God's image, God and God's children have been tragically, catastrophically assaulted.

Manifestly Jewish, this text signals a broader invitation to any person of faith, or otherwise secular soul. The exhibit reframes Rabbi Eliezer's admonition to his followers and later generations of Jews into a question for those who make their way to this symbolic crossroads in the museum: Before whom do we stand? The reframing is rooted in the defaced expression of Jewish identity. To borrow terms from midrashic hermeneutics, the Jewish character of this wounded text is an essential feature of the *peshat* of the exhibit, its plain

meaning, calling out to be faced responsibly and explored respectfully by others. The wounded words of Rabbi Eliezer invite visitors to the museum to identify with those whose story it tells and to ask with them, “Before whom do you stand?”

This wounded frame—a mantle in more ways than one—is an apt metaphor for my entrance into and engagement with life lived in the shadows of the longer night of the Shoah. As the Museum’s Permanent Exhibit suggests, Eliezer’s desecrated words speak to more than just its Jewish victims, however powerfully they speak for and to them. In that added regard, they speak to and for me as a Christian who stands before a Jewish child of the covenant who is, for me and Christians like me, not just a figure of history but our burning bush. Like the burning bush of Moses, Jesus of Nazareth is not consumed by the revelatory power that he embodied and still does for his followers. Among other things, that means he remains a bar mitzvah who would have been murdered with the others who were betrayed by their fellow human beings during this twelve-year time of terror. That human being, his 6 million brothers and sisters from that time, as well as myriad other siblings past and present, stand before me as I stand before them—not unlike how all Israel stands before Sinai. I stand before this central figure in my life fully aware that he remains a bar mitzvah while I am not, or at least not in the way that he is. I am a Gentile follower of his ways, and we Gentile believers have adopted and adapted what Jesus brought and still brings in ways that distinguish us from our Jewish siblings. Tragically, some (many?) of those adoptions and adaptations have contributed to the wounding reflected in Eliezer’s defaced admonition.

### **The Crisis in Covenantal Theism**

The difficult history and the contending relations between Jews and Christians, Judaism and Christianity, are familiar. They provide the context in which I offer these reflections. As I view it, we can identify several interrelated crises present in this complex trajectory: a crisis of credibility regarding covenantal theism, a crisis of credibility regarding Christianity’s espoused values, and a crisis of integrity regarding essential features of Christianity’s historic identity. In the latter case, whether or not Christianity will face a full-blown identity crisis similar to the one it experienced in the Reformation may depend on how the Church and its representatives see and respond to this difficult history and the place of Judaism and other traditions in it.

The crisis in covenantal theism is a matter that confronts Christians as well as Jews, albeit the crisis for Jews is existentially more acute, since that crisis unfolds at their expense. Two names stand out among the Jewish teachers and scholars who have given articulate expression to this matter for me:

Elie Wiesel and Richard Rubenstein. While Wiesel and Rubenstein find very different ways of responding to this crisis, they each provide memorable articulations of it. Wiesel, in *Night*, re-enters, in midrashic fashion, the historic question of the Passover Seder, by turning it on its head. Why is this night different than any other night? The story he recounts is both his personal narrative and that of myriad others who share his identity as a Jew. It is a recounting that in stylized ways layers his personal account with that of all those who entered that night with him, forming what Lawrence Cunningham has called a negative *haggadah*. Where, after all, is the God who acts in history to sustain creation and deliver Israel? What has happened to the covenant? Where is the God of life who creates life in the divine image?

Rubenstein, in *After Auschwitz*, provides a less stylized account, as he explores the theological significance of Auschwitz for a people entrusted and burdened with representing God's covenanted ways with creation. In a 1961 conversation with Pastor Heinrich Gruber, Rubenstein captures what is acutely problematic with the logic of covenantal theism as he relates Gruber's confident belief in the providence of God as the sovereign of history active in the affairs of the world. Even though Gruber was an active resister of the Nazis and rescuer of Jews, he could not avoid concluding that the destruction of the Jews during the horror of Nazi persecution was God's will, and, therefore, that what happened to them was an expression of divine judgment. Rubenstein recognized the empathy Gruber had for the Jewish people at the same time he could not escape the consistent logic that Gruber had espoused. The crisis was clearly framed, and Rubenstein in an act of theological and personal integrity<sup>3</sup> rejected the logic of covenantal theism that Gruber embraced. Wiesel, on the other hand, followed a logic of resistance rooted in the hasidic traditions of his world, as well as in his mystical appropriation of midrash offering a way of expressing the theological contradictions he faced without having to give in to them. Though with great respect, Rubenstein saw Wiesel's path as problematic and charted a more radical course, known now to many of us. Regardless of their very different strategies, their questions continue to haunt any person of faith who allows the beliefs and assumptions of covenantal theism to engage the realities of the Shoah, especially what happened to the 1.5 million children who were executed for the singular crime of being born a Jew.

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<sup>3</sup>See Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, Second Edition, 1992), pp. 3–13, 157–209.

### Children Defiled

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, a prominent Holocaust scholar and theologian, has captured the implications of this post-Shoah knowing with his now familiar criterion for post-Holocaust faithfulness: "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children."<sup>4</sup> Greenberg's words have been instructive for me. As a post-Holocaust Christian, I have learned to pray with the psalmist: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God, my rock and my redeemer (Ps. 19: 14). And, then, to add, May they be credible in the presence of the burning children. To say *Amen* to that amended and compounded prayer is one way I attempt to *know before whom I stand*.

Artist Samuel Bak has given this summons visual expression using the figure of the iconic Warsaw ghetto boy as a base text. The image of that child is familiar.

A young boy, perhaps 8 or 9, is standing in a crowd as a nearby soldier holds the child at gunpoint. The little boy, wearing shorts, knee-high socks, a hat, and a fine, buttoned coat has both his hands raised in surrender, as if he were a criminal under arrest. Bak renders a version of this child in numerous paintings, often depicting his upraised hands with nails piercing his palms. The symbolism is inescapable. A Jewish child is being crucified.

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<sup>4</sup>Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz? Beginning of a New Era* (New York: KTAV, 1977), p. 23.



Samuel Bak, *Study I*, 1995. Oil on linen, 18 x 21¾. Pucker Gallery.

To stand before Bak's little boy is another version of Rabbi Eliezer's summons: Know before whom we stand. Indeed!

But we have to be careful in this regard. It would be easy for Christians like me to project the image of Christ onto crucified Jewish children. However, that would be another violation of those children and an inversion of Greenberg's searing hermeneutical principle. Instead, the power of these juxtaposed images works in the other direction. Over a million children under twelve were murdered by the Nazis or by their collaborators. Thousands were tortured. None were given a choice about how they might live their lives. Their suffering challenges any assertion Christians might make about the scope of what Jesus experienced. He chose his cross, or at least he chose to risk it. He offered up his life. The children did not. Emil Fackenheim's thoughtful commentary underscores the importance of this distinction:

Christians have always known how to acknowledge sin, including the sin of crucifying Christ all over again. However, the crucifixion of Christ-in-general is one thing; quite another is the crucifixion-in-particular of six million human

beings, among them the helpless children, their weeping mothers, and the silent *Muselmänner*.<sup>5</sup>

When we Christians free ourselves from imposing messianic meaning on Bak's iconic child, we are able to grasp that crucifixion is a form of state-sanctioned cruelty. Bak's crucified child, like myriad others, was an instrument in state policy. His execution was a horrifying message to communicate terror to other potential victims. To be sure, this image and what it represents places us before another covenantal crisis—this one with our assumptions about civilization and our obligations to those for whom Jesus said the rule and realm of heaven were given. We who lift high the cross stand in the presence of a heinous act that we cannot diminish by forcing the suffering of others into our interpretive needs.

How we treat every human being takes on added significance in this light. In one sense, nothing has changed. We have, as Rabbi Eliezer's words challenge us to understand, always stood in God's presence when we face another human being. Jewish teachers—and my Christian teachers—have taught us all this truth. Each human being is a reflection of the One who gives us life. That truth has not changed. On the other hand, everything has changed: how we understand God, our bonds to each other, the urgency of what lies at stake in every relationship—in our politics, in every dimension of our lives, in Christianity's relationship to the people Israel; how we understand suffering; how we understand choice. All of it has changed. We live *after*. Charlotte Delbo, a French, gentile survivor of the camps put it profoundly: "I know the difference between *before* and *after*."<sup>6</sup> We live *after*. Life, the world in which we live, the face of the other before us—they can never be the same.

### Faces Beyond the Wall

I first came to confront this truth reading *Town Beyond the Wall*, by Elie Wiesel. Its story begins in the confines of an interrogation room in which a Holocaust survivor by the name of Michael is being tortured and questioned. Michael has returned, some twenty years after the end of World War II, to his hometown of Szerencseváros, which now lies behind the Iron Curtain. His goal: to confront a bystander whose impassive face has haunted Michael

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<sup>5</sup>Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 281.

<sup>6</sup>Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 258.

ever since a so-called neighbor who lived across the street from the synagogue failed to register any response to the removal of Michael and his family along with the entire Jewish community of the town from their homes.

A number of themes interact in this richly constructed story as the reader enters the chaos of Michael's confinement and pain. The tale unfolds in the midst of Michael's ordeal and shifts through various flashbacks to assorted times before his capture, recalling encounters between Michael and important people in his life, including Pedro, a gentile smuggler who helped Michael return illegally to his home town before being caught. To the authorities, Michael is an intruder and is being interrogated to find out why he had sneaked into their city. Even though the authorities claim otherwise, Michael is clearly undergoing torture. His captors have devised a means of questioning that forces a prisoner to stand facing a wall without moving for hours and days without end, except for those occasions when they take the prisoner to a place to relieve himself.

In a cruel act of irony his captors have named each segment of this activity a prayer. The physical pain is caused by the accumulated effect of continuous standing. Blood gathers and pools in Michael's legs. Slowly Michael is being reduced to the pain in his legs. To endure, he commits himself to standing firm just long enough for his friend Pedro, a non-religious Communist and criminal, to have time to escape. That act, a commitment to friendship with a person whom all his social conventions would identify as an outsider to be shunned, enables Michael to hold out, to stand the pain, long enough to save his friend's life. What could be a traditional stumbling block for Michael has become his cornerstone—but not in the Christological form familiar to Christians, or in any other conventional sense.

Eventually, Michael passes out and is subsequently placed in a cell with three other prisoners. Like him, his cellmates are each wounded persons. One, a pious, young Jew named Menahem, engages Michael in probing dialogue about himself and the meaning of his commitment to Pedro. Another, a disturbed and frantic individual is constantly searching for a missing letter that exists only in the man's imagination. And the other, a silent, unresponsive young man, is nearly beyond reach. Each one inhabits a corner of the circumscribed world of their cell, dwelling as far from the others as he can manage. Though no longer physically undergoing torture, Michael faces another ordeal and yet another wall—this one less visible, separating him from the others in the cell. Knowing that his sanity, indeed his soul, may be at stake, Michael turns his attention to those with whom he shares this situation. He makes connection with Menahem, but eventually Menachem is removed from the cell. So Michael turns to the Impatient One, as he calls him. Before he

can establish meaningful contact, he too is taken away leaving only the silent one, indifferent to life and any self-initiated presence whatsoever. To retain his sense of relational wholeness, Michael must find a way to reach out and make contact with the unresponsive other in his cell.

As Michael struggles to penetrate the wall of silence his cellmate has erected, he reflects on what is at stake: When we reach out and pass on our stories to another, we establish a chain of testimony. We enlarge memory and our worlds; we extend life and pass on our names. Pedro had passed his name and story on to Michael. Michael passed his on to Menahem, and tried to do so with his other cellmate. And now Michael hopes to reach the silent one with whom he shares his cell. The story draws to an end as Michael and the reader discover the name of the silent one who shares the cell with him: Eliezer, which the narrator explains, means *God has granted my prayer*; and which we know is the given name of the author.

Before whom do we stand? It is not only Michael who must discover how to respond to that question. In retelling this tale in this brief recounting, I give voice to Michael's story and bear witness to it, giving the silent presence of Eliezer (and myself, as the reader) a voice and role in that story as well. The richly, stylized narrative of *Town Beyond the Wall* places me before Wiesel, before other survivors for whom prayer may very well be like torture. Such testimony helps me take my place before any who struggle to survive overwhelming trauma by reaching out to others to break through the solitariness—their walls—and to tell their story to someone who will listen. In this case, Wiesel's story invites me to take my place before others who dare to listen as I share this tale and challenge the indifference of those who, for whatever reason, avoid caring.

When I first read *Town*, I was profoundly moved and wanted to know the one before whom I sat when I read Wiesel's words. So I turned, as one would expect, to his memoir, *Night*. I've read and reread those words many times. With each reading Wiesel helps me see more about myself, more about the world in which we live, more about what happened during that night that was different than any other night, and more about the people before whom I stand when I stand as a Christian before a Jew named Jesus.

Clearly, sitting with a text can be a way of standing respectfully before the other. It need not be the dedicated study of scripture, though most assuredly, it can be that. For me it has often happened with the stylized text of parable and fiction—as in *Town Beyond the Wall*. Standing before the other is a world-making matter, even in the solitude of study and prayer—but equally so in any setting, especially those in which we face our adversaries. Standing before the other is world-bearing and reveals rather poignantly whatever holiness we may

honor in the world we face. As Wiesel's Michael reports, according to Pedro, "God may be your next door neighbor."<sup>7</sup>

### The Promise and Danger of Midrashic Dialogue

Rightly, it is my personal responsibility to initiate this kind of exploration. But it is an exploration I cannot do alone. Nor is it enough to have one or two mentors I know and read. Equally so, it is not enough just to rebuild a positive image of Jews and Judaism from selected sources, no matter how authentic they might be. J. B. Metz is right. For Christians, seeking to do theology with post-Shoah integrity requires doing it with Jewish others.<sup>8</sup> And if that work is going to repair the damage done by stereotype and caricature, it must be done with numerous others, individuals and communities, and in situations that are truly dialogical.

In this regard, I have been helped by good and generous friends who have made similar commitments to the repair of our worlds. The *Jesus Symposium* at Case brings several of us together and links us with other communities of dialogue in which I have learned about myself and our often contending traditions. Several of us have found friendship and respect across confessional boundaries and deepened our understandings of our own traditions in the process. For the last 18 years, Zev Garber, Steve Jacobs, Jim Moore, and I have shared a midrashic dialogue in which we have taken Emil Fackenheim's observation that the way forward through the theological crisis of post-Shoah faith must be midrashic, holding our root experiences in creative tension with the unassimilated anguish of the Shoah. Indeed, as Fackenheim observes, the midrashic framework insists on a fully dialectical, yet creative tension between our grounding traditions and forms of human suffering that cannot be assimilated into them. That dialectic could just as easily be reversed to read that we interpret our worlds holding our interpretations of them, even midrashic ones, accountable to our root experiences of human anguish.

Our midrashic partnership has added the dimension of dialogue to that interpretive activity, and our tents of occasional meetings have added an additional other before whom I stand in their presence—the text or texts we face together. In our wrestling with them, the words of Scripture have become orchards of life entrusted to our care for the sake of others. I have learned to

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<sup>7</sup>Wiesel, *Town Beyond the Wall*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup>Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 17–33, esp. 18, 30.

read on behalf of not only my own community of faith but also another that is more often taken for granted or buried in hidden assumptions that need to be unearthed and resisted, if not discarded, when I face these texts. Reading midrashically, we have learned to enter the textual domains before us alert to ways they might speak to us as we wrestle with them while guarding against foreclosure and domestication of their otherness. Engaging in dialogue across confessional boundaries deepens our understandings of ourselves and of the ones with whom we engage in that searching exploration. Each holding the other responsible in the light of their sacred texts illumines both the human other and the other's sacred texts we face together. Likewise, the Holy Other whom each tradition knows in and through the texts being discussed is disclosed in ways appropriate to those traditions. Not surprisingly, Eliezer's words reach into such richly textured settings as ours with life-shaping power.

But the midrashic imagination is not restricted to facing and interpreting scripture nor limited to extraordinary painters, biblical scholars or professors of religious studies. For Church and Synagogue alike, the primary texts of ministry are often the situations of human anguish and trauma that call us out of ourselves into presence for and with the other before us. The midrashic imagination offers a way of holding fast to the very grounding traditions that are often shattered in these kinds of circumstances when we give ourselves wholly to the other before us who has dared to trust us with the loss of his or her world. The midrashic way can distinguish ministry with families traumatized with the death of young children when their suffering simply does not fit into any framework of meaning. It can guide pastors and rabbis sitting with victims of violent crime or caring for families who have had a loved one murdered. The human anguish and the trust of those who fear being alone become the *peshat* of that ministry. Just as a midrashic framework is not limited to reading written texts, neither is it restricted to reading only experience laden with Shoah-determined issues. Midrash's logic of plenitude along with its dialectical commitments to root experiences and the full anguish of our wounding world can be utilized in ministry, teaching, and many forms of public dialogue. Paul Ricoeur explored the matter of interpreting significant social actions as texts in his reflections on practical hermeneutics several decades ago in his essay "The Model of the Text."<sup>9</sup> Applying his insights to the herme-

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<sup>9</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered As Text," trans. John B. Thompson, in Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1986, 1991), pp. 144–167.

neutics of midrash and using them to engage the challenges of responding to meaningless suffering provides a way of doing ministry that takes human anguish with great seriousness. Both Church and Synagogue can benefit from an interpretive model that sacrifices neither the root experiences of one's tradition nor honest encounter with the kind of trauma that resists domestication of any kind.

To be sure, the associative logic of the midrashic imagination can also be misused. Its power to utilize figurative ways of seeing and thinking the other can draw on the mythic power of stereotypes and prejudice as well. A great deal of Nazi propaganda tapped this potential in the public media of the time. Here, the stories of historic Midrash reveal Judaism's wisdom in reserving communal judgment regarding the legitimacy of any particular interpretation, even those with apparent power to evoke a sense of the holy. The story of the *bas kol* (heavenly echo) makes just this point and records the community's role in hearing and judging the credibility of any interpretation—even in the face of others that are ordained by Heaven itself.<sup>10</sup>

There is another, seductive danger in my turn to the midrashic imagination. As with Bak's use of crucifixion to frame the tragedy of his friend Samek, and all other Sameks with him, there is the risk of theological theft when Christians like me embrace the hermeneutics of our Jewish siblings. Granted, I argue that the dynamics of midrash are present in my own sacred texts. More significantly, many key passages in my own scriptures could and should be understood as midrashic constructions. Still, the danger, to put it midrashically, is that of the younger brother once again usurping the birthright and blessing of the older sibling.

Any talk of adopting—and adapting—the terms of study and prayer of others to speak of one's own vocation is bound to evoke the deep memories of prior acts of theological theft that punctuates the historic relationships of Jews and Christians. Much too often Christians have co-opted the heritage of their covenantal siblings with little or no regard for how it is understood nor lived by the other members of their Abrahamic family. When Christians seek to come to terms with these matters, they inevitably evoke a dark and difficult history that from its earliest days has treated Jews and Judaism with disdain and contempt. Even when the intent is otherwise, that troubling legacy will be present. Facing that history and its tender dynamics will be a necessary part of the dialogue. If I am going to be faithful to the midrashic way, I must acknowledge this danger and guard against the misappropriation of it.

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<sup>10</sup>See *Talmud, Bava Metzia*, 59b.

### The Displaced Other

The way forward brings Christians like me face-to-face with a history that from its earliest days has treated Jews and Judaism with disdain. The beginnings of that contention are rooted in the intense competition between two rival Jewish sects seeking to gain leverage and influence among competing forms of Judaism, and later to assure survival and fidelity in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and its sacred city. With the influx of Gentile believers the conflict between the sects became acute. Polemics grew stronger and worsened. On the Christian side the disdain was often vitriolic. Eventually even theological positions were adopted to justify, on the Christian side, Jews' negative role in the overall make up of Christian identity and purpose. Christian preaching and teaching promulgated disdain in mythic proportions, and anti-Jewish sentiment grew deeper and stronger. The story continues, of course, in ways most of us know well. Christians who face this history confront issues much like those who have grown up in the southern United States with its history of racism and segregation. The reality of antisemitism, like the reality of racism, is bigger and deeper than individual prejudice. The violence is also structural and often covert, hidden in plain sight. Of course, like racism, antisemitism can be expressed behaviorally in very dramatic and dangerous ways. Yet, its attitudes are more than behavioral and have to do with how non-Jews, especially Christians, relate to others who challenge, for whatever reasons, their place in the world. For Christians like me, facing up to this thread in our identities is a matter of coming to terms with ourselves, and how we structure our worlds of meaning and value. We who claim to love our neighbors as we love ourselves must ask if that really means we can only love our neighbors if and when they are like us. That is a question of integrity and the doorway through is more often shame than guilt.<sup>11</sup>

I have learned through dialogue with Jewish colleagues to recognize an underlying question that I am confident I would have overlooked without their help: whether or not Christianity requires a Jewish other over against whom Christian truth is triumphant or deemed more adequate. This question came to vivid clarity at a previous dialogical gathering a few years ago. Then, as now, my colleague, Peter Haas, was hosting a discussion of Jewish and Christian scholars who were exploring these very issues. Peter had drafted

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<sup>11</sup>See my essay, "From Shame to Responsibility and Christian Identity: The Dynamics of Shame and Confession Regarding the Shoah," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Winter 1998): 41–62.

an essay in which he reviewed three Protestant theologians and their attempts to construct a positive Christian theology of Judaism. I was a respondent.<sup>12</sup> Peter's analysis probed how even the most irenic attempts to portray Jews and Judaism in a reconstructed Christian theology faced two major tasks: how to portray Jews in positive regard without turning them into monolithic or unrealistic constructs and how to develop a form of Christianity that provided a legitimate place for Jews and Judaism in its world without losing what is distinctive about Christian identity. In the process of offering his critique, Haas made the observation that he did not think that Christianity could be non-supersessionary without giving up what is distinctive about being Christian. Later, in a different context altogether, I encountered David Novak making a similar case in one of his essays—that Christianity was inherently supersessionary and that the real issue was to distinguish between what he called “hard” and “soft” forms of supersessionism.<sup>13</sup> The core question they each raise is whether or not Christian identity is essentially supersessionary.

Among other things, supersessionism is a belief or attitude that one's relationship or identity as the people of God builds on and surpasses the claims and foundations shared with others in this regard. According to Regina Schwartz, the problem underlying supersessionism is a fundamental mindset that Christianity, as a monotheistic religion, shares with Judaism and Islam. In her book, *The Curse of Cain*, Schwartz identifies two primary ways of construing the world, what she calls “logics” of interpretation. Each of the three monotheistic traditions of Abraham, she observes, tends toward the excluding logic of scarcity in contrast to a present, but often obscured, logic of plenitude.<sup>14</sup> Schwartz posits that a hermeneutic of scarcity is employed by each of the monotheistic traditions to protect fundamental truth claims. If God is one and Truth is one with God, then the revelation of that Truth should be one. The alternative lens, what she calls a logic of plenitude, is rooted in a sense of the richness of creation and its abundant gift of life. Accessible through such practices as midrash for Judaism, parables for Christianity, and Sufism for Is-

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<sup>12</sup>See Peter Haas, “Judaism in Protestant Encounters with the Shoah,” in David Patterson and John K. Roth, eds., *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil and the Holocaust* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 59–70.

<sup>13</sup>See David Novak, “The Covenant in Rabbinic Thought,” in Eugene B. Korn & John T. Pawlikowski, eds., *Two Faiths, One Covenant?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), pp. 66 ff.

<sup>14</sup>Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 1–13.

lam,<sup>15</sup> the logic of plenitude provides an alternative mindset that may also be encountered in each of the traditions. To complicate the matter, Schwartz describes the resultant identity produced by scarcity thinking as being agonistic. That is, such an identity is constructed over against a competing other who contends for the identity or truth that cannot be shared. If Schwartz is right, and I think she makes a strong case, then underlying attitudes of Christian contempt are rooted in using a construct of Jewish identity as a negative significant other against whom one interprets his or her mission, purpose, truths, or identity. Supersessionist thinking, therefore, depends on an other whom it displaces and discounts for its sense of self.

As Regina Schwartz makes clear, facing the displaced other with post-Shoah responsibility calls for coming to terms with the agonistic history in which one's own identity is constructed. Until we learn to face the signifying others in our lives in their otherness, they will remain less than who they are. They will be projections of our own interpretive needs even if or when we convert disdain to honor.<sup>16</sup> That is, the matter is thoroughly hermeneutical at the same time it is deeply personal and thoroughly relational. Of course, the power dynamics among the three and between Judaism and Christianity have made a frightening difference in how these choices have been made and embodied over the centuries. And in the secularized eyes of the Third Reich, supersessionism reappears in the guise of Social Darwinism. That simple observation should give pause to any who would leave the matter with either Haas's or Novak's observations about the inevitability of supersessionism.

When we face the displaced other with renewed respect, we confront our own agonistic history of displacement and supersessionism, coming to terms with how we have used this other as a negative signifier in our lives. In other settings<sup>17</sup> I have focused on the chastening character of this extended encounter, likening it to Jacob's encounter with the *ish* at the River Jabbok—the other before whom he stood, with whom he wrestled, as he returned from his twenty-year exile. He faced himself, his history with an estranged brother and his deceptive relationships with his parents. And in all that he also faced the God

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<sup>15</sup>The interpretive role of these distinctive hermeneutical practices reflects my own reading of these rhetorical strategies. In various ways they express a logic of plenitude or abundance.

<sup>16</sup>I am profoundly indebted to Peter Haas for helping me see the significance of this matter. I am convinced that Schwartz's distinction between the logics of scarcity and plenitude provide helpful guidance in moving forward in this regard.

<sup>17</sup>See Knight, "From Shame to Responsibility," among others.

of his forebears. We know the outcome of that struggle—a new name and a limp thereafter. That deep confrontation was a wounding affair that marked his walk in the aftermath with humility. To move forward with positive regard we pass through a similar struggle and, certainly in my case, are wounded by what we learn about ourselves and the identity we have constructed with our Jewish siblings, not to mention myriad others. Reconfiguring that identity in a non-agonistic way means making room for this essential other in our lives that allows for and embraces the other's full difference. That is, we must learn to incorporate a fundamental sense of hospitality to and for the other at the heart of who we are.

### Sacrament of the Other

In the aftermath of the Shoah, Irving Greenberg reminds us that the dignity of every human being is rooted in God's regard for the other.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, each act whereby we stand respectfully before another person is a sacred act. When we face the other, who reflects in his or her image the loving presence of God, we stand before the One who gives us life. In the aftermath of the Shoah, Rabbi Eliezer's words are therefore *limned*, charged with meaning. Know before whom you stand. Indeed.

According to Emmanuel Levinas, the human face is the fundamental datum of our embodied existence. Levinas, a survivor and witness to the atrocity that befell his people, tells us that the human face speaks to each of us through its presence calling us to be present in response. Its appearance can be a theophanic moment, a burning bush, as it were, declaring, "Here I am," and asking at the same time, "Where are you?" But we have to have the eyes to see and the heart to comprehend such a moment—a moment that is as true in the beginning as it is *in extremis*. In other words, the human other is a sacramental presence, to use a more Christian metaphor, if we dare to pay attention.

To represent this turn and responsibility in our lives I propose that post-Holocaust Christian communities consider adopting a new, Levinasian sacrament, the Sacrament of the Other. However, unlike Baptism or the Eucharist, this sacrament cannot be administered by the Church, as Church. Indeed, such a sacrament can only be administered to it, received in and through the recognition of its otherness. While most often offered outside its boundaries, this gift can, nevertheless, be received inside its own house of faith and at its doors, if the hosts in such houses embrace the other's presence with hospitality and respect for his or her otherness—even when that other is the figure

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<sup>18</sup>Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," pp. 42ff.

who stands at the center of our worship. In other words, whenever such a sacrament is converted into a veiled understanding of Christ in our midst, it ceases to represent the otherness of the other. Still, it can be an expression of the otherness of Jesus that remains undomesticated by the Church. That otherness is surely embodied in his Jewishness as Christians recognize that his place in the Shoah would have been with other Jewish victims. The distinctiveness of his identity would have been subsumed in the Nazi need to eradicate the challenging otherness of this child of the covenant. Indeed, Christianity has known this kind of logic before and glimpsed it in Kierkegaard's meticulous unpacking of the command to love the stranger in *Works of Love*.<sup>19</sup> In that extended meditation, Kierkegaard explained that when Christians love the stranger *as a stranger* they do so because they were commanded to, and in doing what is commanded, they honor Christ. But if they do so because they wish to love Christ in disguise, they do not love the stranger at all. They reach out to one they think they know, loving the one they know, not the one who is unknown and other. Consequently, they fall short of the *command* to love. After the Shoah, this careful and differentiating logic becomes radically significant.<sup>20</sup>

So, here we stand before the other represented by the pluriform presence of Samuel Bak's crucified child, Wiesel's narrative of a Holocaust survivor's attempt to return home to a town that remains beyond reach on the other side of an historically constructed wall, and Jesus' admonitions about the significance of children and others who stand before him and his followers. Their distinctive features pose for us a deepened understanding of Rabbi Eliezer's admonition, *Know before whom you stand*. Their individuated presence turns Eliezer's words into an embodied question before which we stand whether as Christians before a Jewish figure at the heart of our confessional lives, or as Jews before the Holy One of Israel, or as confused souls confined to a world of strangers. To explore that question is the urgent task we face together. Before whom do we stand?

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<sup>19</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 34–57, 153–196.

<sup>20</sup>We could add a final link to Jesus by recalling his interaction with the Canaanite woman whom he saw as other until she challenged his perception of her dignity and worth. (Mt. 15: 22–28) He responded with renewed and positive regard for her and her faith. So might we. Though only a closing note in these remarks, this text might invite further exploration in midrashic dialogue.



These reflections develop and expand an earlier exploration of these issues published in Carol Rittner and Stephen D. Smith, eds., *No Going Back: Letters to Pope Benedict XVI on the Holocaust, Jewish-Christian Relations & Israel* (London: Quill Press, 2009), pp. 28–31. The expanded reflections were first offered in a lecture given at Elms College in Chicopee, MA during the fall of 2008, prepared in honor of Elie Wiesel's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. They were later re-worked and expanded further into the present form for the conference at Case Western Reserve University.

## "Can We Talk?" The Jewish Jesus in a Dialogue between Jews and Christians

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That Jesus was a Jew during the troubled Roman oppression in Palestine is a fact. That his "messiahship" remains a fundamental stumbling block between Jews and Christians and has been so for 2,000 years is fact. Can Jews somehow import him into Jewish thinking and open doors to conversations with Christians? Can Christians somehow revisit their thinking about him in ways that will open doors to conversations with Jews? Is there truly anything new we can say to each other in this twenty-first century about Jesus the Jew? Is there any hope of any present and future dialogue whatsoever without this conversation? This paper is a "preliminary" attempt to explore these and other questions in a dialogical context.

"... truth must be distinguished from fiction and agendas (ecclesiastical, conspiratorial, feminist), realized or fantasized."

Zev Garber, "Reflections on Jesus," *Shofar* 27.2  
(Winter 2009), p. 129

"Scholars not only need to recognize that they view Jesus through their own particular set of eyes but also to be on guard for how their interpretations might be (mis)perceived by others."

Gary Gilbert, Review of Brian LeBeau, et. al., *The Historical Jesus through Catholic and Jewish Eyes*, *Review of Biblical Literature* online, 2002.

### Introduction: A Vignette

In my previous career as a full-time congregational rabbi and part-time academic (what I now tell my students was my "second incarnation," my first being that of a high school teacher of English literature), I used to have any number of church groups (men's clubs, ladies guilds, youth groups, etc.) visit and sit

in our sanctuary during an afternoon or early evening for an “Everything you always wanted to know about Judaism but never got around to asking” talk, with plenty of time left for questions and answers, and sometimes the “Q & A” lasted more than the original presentation. I distinctly remember one such visit by a ladies’ guild, though I no longer remember the particular Christian denomination, when one of the elderly ladies, quite tiny (or is it now more politically correct to say “petite”?) summed up the entire visit with the statement, “Now after all, Rabbi, isn’t Judaism simply that branch of Christianity that doesn’t believe in Jesus!?” (It continues to remain one of my fondest recollections of that part of my career.)

There is no question that “out there”—in the so-called “real world” beyond the academy—the one question asked by genuinely interested Christian religious persons more than any others is, “Why don’t you Jews believe in Jesus?” And no matter what or how we choose to answer, the question remains and forms a foundational underpinning to all Jewish-Christian dialogical encounters. (Parenthetically, the Holocaust/Shoah and the State of Israel are equally foundational to all such contemporary dialogues.)

Let me, therefore, tell you how I used to answer that question and use that answer as the base on which to move the dialogue forward. I used to tell my guests:

“We need to draw a distinction here, for we are talking both history and theology at the same time. If we are talking history, then the Jesus of the New Testament, our primary source of data, appears to be one born of Jewish parents (Yosef and Miryam) during the period of Roman oppression in Palestine at the turn of the millennium, seems to have had a reasonably good Jewish education, cared enough about his people to travel around both teaching and giving comfort to his fellow Jews who suffered, was arrested by the Roman authorities who saw his ability to attract increasingly larger crowds as potentially dangerous to their ability to maintain their control, and put him to death as was their way (with the support of a collaborationist Jewish leadership unrepresentative of the people). He was *not* a ‘rabbi’ in the sense of receiving *s’micha*/ordination, despite the textual references, *and*, as a committed Jew and a rabbi, I have no difficulty in regarding him as a welcome teacher among many.

“But, truthfully, this is *not* the question being asked. For as a question of theological belief, it is your understanding that, whoever else he was and is, Jesus as the Christ is the merger of both the divine and the human into one being, and whose very willingness to offer up his own life in place of humanity “spared it further degradation in the sight of God and redeemed it from sin

and death forever and all time."<sup>1</sup> That understanding I cannot accept as consistent with Jewish theological thinking regarding a fully human Jewish Messiah, and expressed in the writings of its greatest thinker Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), whose seven-fold summary of messianic responsibilities were neither completely fulfilled (word purposefully chosen) nor fully actualized during the life of Jesus, namely (1) be a descendent of King David (NT claim which may or may not be accurate), (2) gain sovereignty over the land of Israel (no), (3) gather the Jews from the four corners of the earth and restore Jewish political sovereignty (no), (4) restore the Jews to the full observance of Torah law through his own example (a possible journey in progress, granted, but problematic especially regarding the question of his self-affirmed authority<sup>2</sup>), (5) bring peace to the whole world (no),<sup>3</sup> (6) vanquish Israel's enemies (no, including the Romans, i.e. "fight the Lord's wars," not spiritual but physical and military), and (7) restore a destroyed Temple (not applicable during his life, nor since)."<sup>4</sup>

And while I did often quote from Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Faith*—"Ani Ma'amin: I believe in the coming of the Messiah and though he may tarry, I will wait for him on any day that he may come," I always closed with the following:

"When the Messiah comes, you and I together will go and ask him, 'Is this your first visit or is it a return visit?' Then we will know. Until then, however, let us respectfully agree to disagree. But let us also work together to create a

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<sup>1</sup>Steven Leonard Jacobs, "Jewish-Christian Relations after the Shoah," in Donald W. Musser and Dixon D. Sutherland, eds., *War or Words? Interreligious Dialogue as an Instrument of Peace* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>For an interesting "conversation" on this very point, see Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus: An Intermillennial Interfaith Exchange* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 18–36.

<sup>3</sup>See "The Messiah," [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org). Accessed 5 May 2009.

<sup>4</sup>Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Section *Hilkhot Melakhim Umilchamoteichem*, Chapters 11 & 12:

"And if a king shall arise from the House of David, studying Torah and indulging in commandments like his father David, according to the written and oral Torah, and he will impel all of Israel to follow it and to strengthen its breaches in its observances, and will fight the Lord's wars, this one is to be treated as if he were the anointed one. If he succeeded and built a Holy Temple in its proper place and gathered the dispersed ones of Israel together, this is indeed the anointed one for certain, and he will mend the entire world to worship the Lord together, as it is stated 'For then I shall turn for the nations a clear tongue, to call all in the Name of the Lord and to worship Him with one shoulder' (Zephaniah 3:9)."

world—free from hunger, free from poverty, free from want, free from war—of which he and we will be proud.”

### Taking the Dialogue to the Next Level: Four Questions

There is no question that *Nostre Aetate* (Latin, “In Our Age,” and affirmed 28 October 1965<sup>5</sup>) signaled a true “sea change” in Catholic-, and later Protestant-, Jewish relations based especially on two operative paragraphs:

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (John 19:6); still, *what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.* Although the Church is the new people of God, *the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God*, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, *decries hatred, persecution, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.*<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent Church documents—e.g. *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* (1984) and *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in the Teaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church* (1985)—have furthered the process of dialogue, as have other denominational documents manifesting that same spirit, for example, the 1983 Resolution of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod repudiating Martin Luther’s (1483–1546) antisemitism and distancing themselves from it.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, despite all the progress that has been made over the last more than four decades of Jewish-Christian relations through the vehicle of dialogue (1965–2009)—and that progress *is* substantial, though not without recurring minefields both political (e.g. the Middle East/Arab-Israeli-Palestinian

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<sup>5</sup>Somewhat jocularly perhaps, but not wholly without merit, Eugene Fisher, retired Associated Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the (United States) National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, in his own presentation at this Conference, suggested another Jewishly meaningful translation for *Nostre Aetate*, “It’s About Time!”

<sup>6</sup>Taken from the *official* Vatican translation at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Accessed 5 October 2009. Emphases added.—SLJ

<sup>7</sup>See [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org).

conflict) and theological (e.g. restoration of certain Good Friday prayers to the Catholic liturgy)—there yet remain questions regarding this Christ which have not been fully addressed, to which I began giving voice in Berlin in 1994,<sup>8</sup> and to which I now return in this forum:

- ♦ Is Jesus the Christ, the one and only begotten son of God, only for those who accept him as such?
- ♦ Or, is Jesus the Christ, the one and only begotten son of God, for all humanity—including those who do not accept him as such?
- ♦ What, then, about those who neither accept him as such, nor reject him outright, but stand in ignorance of him?
- ♦ What then is the proper Christian response, first to the Jews and also to the Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and others?<sup>9</sup>

## Questions 1 and 2

Theologically, and thus I would argue of dialogical necessity between Jews and Christians, these first two questions revolve around both the centrality of the question of "Christology" in Matthew—"But who do *you* say that I am?"—and the universality of the Christian understanding of this same Christ as reflected in John—"For God so *loved* the world..."

As regards the first, we read in Matthew 16:

13. When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
14. And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah; others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."
15. He asked them, "*But who do you say that I am?*"
16. And Simon Peter answered, "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*"
17. And Jesus responded, "Simon, son of Jonah, blessed are you, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father which is in heaven." (Emphases added.—SLJ)

Thus, within this circle of those who affirm him, Jesus is *their* Messiah, *their* Son of God, and *their* knowledge, especially that of Simon Peter is gleaned, at least according to Jesus himself, through a (direct) encounter with God. Might this not present, then, a point about which Jews and Christians can enter into conversation: That for those who either have already had an experience of this Christ, or those who wish to do so, that Christ is indeed

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<sup>8</sup>"Remembering for the Future II," Second International Holocaust Conference, Berlin, Germany, March 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Jacobs, "Jewish-Christian Relations after the Shoah," pp. 67–68.

*their* Messiah, *their* Son of God? But for those who have not yet had such an experience, or who have no desire to have such an experience, this same Christ is *not* or *not yet* their Messiah, and while others may acclaim or proclaim him as *their* Son of God, respectful disagreement—the very heart of Jewish-Christian dialogue—remains in place.<sup>10</sup>

More difficult and more uncomfortable, to be sure, would be the possibility of a conversation, a dialogue, around John 3:16—the affirmation at the heart of Christianity—that “God so *loved* the world that he gave his one and only Son [alt. “his only begotten Son”] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Here, too, conversation *is* possible, provided both come to the table comfortable enough in the other’s presence and open to hearing what the other is saying. (Such openness and presence is, of course, the result of a whole series of prior meetings, prior readings, prior discussions, and prior conversations.)

A place to begin might be the following: Never in my growing up did I ever truly doubt that both my parents genuinely and truly loved me, and went out of their way to provide me with many, many opportunities—expressions of their love—to maximize my own potential. Of some I took advantage, others, for a whole host of reasons, I chose not to accept, though some, even now, remain and may still present themselves in my future. For religiously devout Christians and religiously devout Jews, thinking theologically about this Christ, the analogy remains: Christians are those who have already accepted this gift given in love and, while Jews choose not to do so (more on this in a

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<sup>10</sup>Further fruitful discussion might also possibly ensue regarding the different understandings Torahitically, but post-textually as well, of the Hebrew phrase “son of God” (Hebrew, *ben Elohim*) and its reading as “human being” by Jews and “more than human being” by Christians. The whole notion of variant readings, interpretations, and understandings of the same texts has a long and, at times, less than noble history, but it is equally worth exploring in a dialogical context. See, for example, among many, Andrew M. Greeley and Jacob Neusner, *Common Ground: A Priest and a Rabbi Read Scripture Together* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997); Fredrich C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman, eds., *Preaching Biblical Texts: Expositions by Jewish and Christian Scholars* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995); Melody D. Knowles, Esther Menn, John Pawlikowski, and Timothy J. Sandoval, eds., *Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); and James F. Moore, ed., *Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004).

moment, though I can already feel the Jewish *angst* beginning to surface), the gift remains available.<sup>11</sup>

Does such openness thus not open the door to conversionary efforts on the part of Christians to Jews? Yes *and* no—but only towards those who own the door and are willing to let others in. As I have previously written:

Thus, religiously-sensitive and knowledgeable Christians, morally and ethically aware of the Shoah and its effect upon Jews, must rethink and, ultimately, reject any form of missionizing whatsoever toward Jews. If the experience of the Christ . . . is *potentially redemptive* for all humanity, then Christianity is *potentially available* to all those who would choose to elect it, willing to explore its possibilities and come to it without coercion. To aggressively promote its proselytizing and conversionary activities as the only and exclusive way to experience the Divine-human encounter, however understood and interpreted, is to express no love or caring for Jews, to build no bridges between the two.<sup>12</sup>

Missionizing and proselytizing and openly sharing the Christian faith with Jews, non-aggressively and non-threateningly, is *not* an act of antisemitism, though given the sad and tragic history of these past two thousand plus years, it remains extremely difficult to engage in such a conversation especially within the organized Jewish communities on this very issue. I do now find myself in agreement, however, with Amy-Jill Levine who writes in her (2006) text *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*:

Christian missionaries who seek to bring Jews "the good news of Jesus" do not do so because they hate Jews; they do so because they love Jews . . . Jews and Christians need to listen with each other's ears. Jews need to hear the sincerity in the Christians' message; Christians need to respect the integrity of the Jewish position. . . . For Christians who feel compelled to evangelize—as they are commanded to do in Matthew 28:10, to "make disciples of all the nations"—the best

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<sup>11</sup>Jacob Neusner, pre-eminent Judaic scholar, articulates this same point in his Jack Chester Memorial Lecture celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami, FL, delivered 5 March 2009, and entitled "Transcending 'The Jewish Roots of Jesus'—From Dialogue to Trialogue in Interfaith Relations," when he said:

But because in the Hebrew Scriptures, Christianity reveres the same Scriptures as does Judaism, I can learn from Christianity other ways of reading Scripture. Christianity and Islam reveal choices available to Judaism—roads not taken but logically available for consideration."

*The National Jewish Post & Opinion* (Indianapolis), 29 April 2009: 9.

<sup>12</sup>Steven Leonard Jacobs, "Jewish Christian Relations after the Shoah," p. 69. [Emphases added.—SLJ]

means of evangelizing is to act, rather than to preach or go door-to-door [as I have already indicated—SLJ].<sup>13</sup>

### Questions 3 and 4

If what I am proposing in terms of moving the Jewish-Christian dialogue forward has any merit whatsoever, and the template suggested does indeed place these conversations about this Christ into an environment where Jews and Christians can truly talk to each other openly and respectfully about the very central thing which will always divide us—both communities fully realizing and understanding that there can, ultimately, be no resolution whatsoever of the divide (i.e., Christians cannot surrender any aspects of Christ's divinity while emphasizing his humanity any more than Jews can acknowledge or accept his divinity while de-emphasizing his humanity<sup>14</sup>; mathematically  $+1 + -1 = 0$  and thus creating the null arena)—then, indeed, conversation is possible.

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<sup>13</sup>Levine, Amy-Jill, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 224. Her entire Chapter Seven, "Quo Vadis?," contains an explanation of twenty-six suggestions designed to enhance rather than retard Jewish-Christian dialogue.

<sup>14</sup>Some scholars have suggested that, perhaps, there may very well be room within the world of Judaic thought to incorporate Jesus' teachings and messages as well as those of Paul himself. See, for example, Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus: Exploring Theological Differences for Mutual Understanding* (Woodstock: Skylights Publishing, 2006); Richard L. Rubenstein, *My Brother Paul* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975). Particularly interesting was Byron L. Sherwin's essay, "Who Do You Say That I Am? (Mark 8:29): A New Jewish View of Jesus," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3–4 (1994): 255–267; and my own response, "A Jewish Response to Byron L. Sherwin's 'A New Jewish View of Jesus,'" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1995): 263–267. Such scholarly rethinking, hardly filtering down into the pew, seems to me to parallel the work now being done to "re-embrace" the excommunicated but nonetheless important philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). See, for example, Rebecca Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Saved Modernity* (New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2006) [NOTE: The series in which this volume is published is entitled "Jewish Encounters"]; Margaret Gullan-Whur, *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibnitz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York & London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006); Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989,

And, thus, in a parallel manner, the door now opens via Questions 3 and 4 both to those who have neither known of this Christ nor read the New Testament texts, as well as to those already set within their own communities of faith. This door opens with respectful conversations on the part of those who come with a message to those who are themselves open to hearing the message—and respectful, too, of those happily embedded within their own faith communities with no desire to chart a new direction for themselves. Better to thus demonstrate commitment to one's own faith-perspective through selfless action rather than further demonstrating again a too-real past history of callous disregard for the humanity of others, their religio-cultural systems and values, and coupled with colonialist political, military, and economic agendas which bring honor to none and dishonor to all.

Such work as I have outlined it would, of necessity, require a revisiting of those New Testament texts associated with both the so-called "Great Commission" and the so-called "lesser commission," namely Matthew 28:16–20, Mark 16:14–18, Luke 24:44–49, Acts 1:4–8, John 20:19–23, and Matthew 10:5–42, this last text addressed specifically to Jesus' fellow Jews. Whether or not the scholarly community weighs in on the issue of whether such missionizing obligations were indeed the actual words of this Christ or reflect the various Christian communities wherein these texts were first written is of secondary import to life outside the academy. They have been understood by millions of adherents throughout the last two thousand years by all manner of Christian denominationalists as legitimating their efforts to bring others under the banner of Christianity as well as behave badly towards those unwilling to come inside.

Thus, I would now suggest that such renewed textual work be done in the presence of Jews (and not without a certain degree of chutzpah!, not solely with Judaic scholars familiar with and conversant with these texts but Judaic scholars themselves comfortable with their own positive Jewish religious affirmations), following the insights of both Catholic thinker Johannes Baptist Metz (b. 1928) of Germany and the late Emmanuel Levinas of France

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Volume 1: "The Marrano of Reason" and Volume II: The Adventures of Immanence"; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cleveland: Word Publishing Company, 1961). Interestingly enough, I studied Spinoza as part of the graduate program in Rabbinics at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH (1969–1974) and today teach a course entitled "Modern Jewish Thinkers and Thoughts" examining the works of both Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) and Spinoza as foundational to all understandings of present-day Jewish thought.

(1906–1995), both of whom have strongly articulated and argued that after Auschwitz this work requires a Jewish presence. Such dialogical interactions at the highest levels of solid scholarship are themselves a modeling of how such things may very well be accomplished.

### Enter Irving Greenberg and Jesus as “Failed Messiah”

Of late, at least in dialogical circles, much has been made of Irving Greenberg’s (b. 1933) concept of Jesus as “failed messiah” (in the subsequent tradition of other failed messiahs) and as more fully explicated in his welcome collection of revised essays *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity*.<sup>15</sup>

In two essays, Greenberg spells out what he means by a “failed messiah.” In the first, “Toward an Organic Model of the Relationship” (145-161), he writes:

A failed messiah is one who has the right values and upholds the covenant, but does not attain the final goal. . . . The concept of the Second Coming, in a way, is a tacit admission that if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.<sup>16</sup>

While I fully appreciate what Greenberg is attempting to do, not only in this essay but throughout this text, and not only with this idea but, what is perhaps even more important, with his concept of “Covenantal Pluralism” in moving the dialogical encounter forward, I stand with others who have chided him for his word choice, and, as the second sentence quoted above indicates, a bit of flippancy which is decidedly unhelpful. Returning to Gary Gilbert’s initial caveat that we scholars must be aware of how our interpretations *and our words* might be “(mis)perceived,” it seems that Greenberg himself has fallen into that very trap, not theologically, but linguistically. If our intended Christian conversation partner hears “failed” with reference to Jesus, again outside the academy, based on my own observations and experiences, I am firmly convinced that the dialogue cannot proceed, for the word itself carries with it the idea of critique of the Christ (not necessarily Greenberg’s contention, although certainly a possibility), and, by extension, of the very God to whom both religious Jews and religious Christians pay obeisance.

Before offering an alternative, however, let us turn to the second essay, “The Respective Roles of the Two Faiths in the Strategy of Redemption” (pp.

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<sup>15</sup>Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

<sup>16</sup>Irving Greenberg, “Toward an Organic Model of the Relationship,” in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth*, p. 153.

162–184) for a somewhat lengthier comment which draws the distinction between "false messiah" and "failed messiah," and is truly the essence of Greenberg's thinking:

The general Jewish position has been that Jesus was a false messiah. Why? Would it not be more precise to say that a false messiah is one who teaches the wrong values and who turns sin into holiness? A more accurate description, from a Jewish perspective, would be that Jesus was not a "false" but a "failed" messiah. He has not finished the job but his work is not in vain.<sup>17</sup>

In his own note to this paragraph, he states:

Since the religion in his name persecuted Jews, spread hatred, and degraded Judaism, then the term *false* messiah was well earned. The term *failed* messiah recognizes that for hundreds of millions, Christianity was, and is, a religion of love and consolation, i.e. the right values. Use of the term also presupposes that the religion in his name stops teaching hatred of the Jews, and becomes a source of healing support for the Jewish people and a purveyor of respect for Judaism. If it continues to nurture stereotypes and hatred of Jews—or if it misuses these more positive views of Christianity in order to missionize Jews—then it proves that Jesus was a false messiah after all.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to the body of the essay, he goes on:

Of course, Christians will hesitate to accept this definition—as will Jews, perhaps more so. Christians will be deeply concerned: Is this a dismissal of Jesus? Does this term demean classic Christian affirmations of Jesus' messiahship and the Incarnation? Jews will be concerned: Is this a betrayal of the classic Jewish insistence that the Messiah has not yet come? Does this term breach Judaism's self-respecting boundary that excludes Christian claims?

I believe that none of these fears are warranted. The term "failed messiah" is an example of the kind of theological language we should be seeking to develop in the dialogue, for it allows for a variety of Christian and Jewish self-understandings.<sup>19</sup>

Let me suggest to you—and to Greenberg—that such fears are not so easily dismissed or unwarranted. As noted, our English-language use of the word "failed" carries within it a conclusive critique that whatever energies had been extended in the past to accomplish whatever actions were desired, the actor has not accomplished them due to internal flaws and/or personal failures or the result of others' efforts. Either way, the mission was not accomplished,

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<sup>17</sup>Greenberg, "Toward an Organic Model," p. 177.

<sup>18</sup>Greenberg, "Toward an Organic Model." Emphases in original.—SLJ

<sup>19</sup>Greenberg, "Toward an Organic Model," p. 178.

and failure remains a viable option even when considering another go-round. Not the best use of words to move the dialogue forward.

Thus, I would suggest—and have suggested—a far richer understanding would be to consider this Christ as a “potentially redemptive messiah,” still here, still there, waiting for those either to experience him (I leave that concept purposefully open-ended) or to enter into relationship with him. To wit:

Theologically, is it logical to say that the world was, indeed, “redeemed” by the death of the Christ, but that the world, humanity, continues to ignore its own redemption? Or, is it more logical to say that the world was potentially redeemed by the death of the Christ on the cross, a potential that continues to exist for the world which, up to now, has refused to welcome that potential into its midst? A corollary to this alternative is that Christ represents, for those who choose him, the paradigmatic model of the very best of which humanity is capable. To surrender one’s life out of love for another is an act which is found also among “righteous gentiles” and Jews of the Shoah. From my perspective, the actual death of the Christ has not, either at that moment, or up to this moment, redeemed our world, but only opened the door to that possibility. But it was not then, nor is it now, the only possibility.

This understanding between Jew and Christian avoids what, historically, have been three of the most tragically difficult obstacles to such dialogue: (1) a rank ordering of the death of the Christ as the supreme event in all human history, all other deaths being of far less significance; (2) a kind of arrogant triumphalism which gives credence to this death and this death alone; and (3) a Jewish difficulty, given Jewish history, equating this death with world redemption and the realities of the Jewish experience.

To maintain the potentially redemptive death of the Christ allows for two possibilities essential to any fruitful Jewish-Christian dialogue: (1) that those who wish to consider themselves Christians are now free to draw from this moment that which gives meaning to their own lives, and (2) that those who do not wish to draw from this moment, in particular the Jewish people, are equally free not to do so....

Again, the potentially redemptive possibilities of the “Christ event” would seem best to address these questions for both Jews and Christians, as well as others. For those who accept Jesus as the Christ, there is no problem; for those who choose not to accept him as such, there is, equally, no problem. For those whose experience does not include even the most limited of encounters with Christianity and Christians, there is no problem.

Morally and ethically, post-Shoah, it is one thing to accept the limited and limiting experience of the Christ, letting it serve as a bridge to dialogue. It is quite another to profess the universality of the Christ for all humanity and the “arrogant

triumphalism" noted earlier which, all-too-readily, historically (and contemporarily) has accompanied it and act in accord with that understanding.<sup>20</sup>

And thus I would suggest that it is possible for Jews and Christians to talk within the context of Judaism and dialogue fruitfully and positively about this Christ, the heart of that which divides us, and that the challenge to this Church is three-fold: (1) to listen to what we elder brothers and sisters are saying about this Christ, and (2) to shore up the very foundations of Christianity which, like Judaism, remain in need of repair, and (3) that this dialogue poses no threat whatsoever to the faith and practice of either religious tradition, but may very well serve as the new way by which we go forward together.

### In Conclusion: A Final Quotation

I began this conversation with two quotations, that of our mentor Zev Garber, and that of Professor Gary Gilbert of Claremont-McKenna College, Claremont, CA. I close with a third, that of Yossi Klein Halevi (b. 1953), American-born Israeli author and journalist and author of a recent essay entitled "The Cross and the Crescent: Divergent Responses to Antisemitism in Contemporary Islam." Halevi writes:

A penitent Christianity enables Jews to stop blaming Jesus for the persecutions of the past and appreciate his role in transforming humanity. Obviously, those of us who embrace Jesus as a long-lost brother relate to him in a particular Jewish way. For Christians, Jesus is the sacrificial redeemer who took upon himself the sins of humanity; for Jews like me, Jesus is a prophetic figure through whom faith in the God of Israel was [and is—SLJ] spread among the nations.<sup>21</sup>

And for Jews like me, he is worth talking about with those Christians for whom I am their brother.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Jacobs, "Jewish-Christian Relations after the Shoah," pp. 66–68. See also Steven L. Jacobs, *Rethinking Jewish Faith: The Child of a Survivor Responds* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 92–93. The whole of Chapter 8, "Rethinking Christianity: An Outsider's Perspective" (pp. 89–97) address a number of issues pertinent to any fruitful Jewish-Christian dialogue

<sup>21</sup>Yossi Klein Halevi, "The Cross and the Crescent: Divergent Response to Antisemitism in Contemporary Islam," in Michael Berenbaum, ed., *Not Your Father's Antisemitism: Hatred of the Jews in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008), p. 157.

<sup>22</sup>In response to this presentation, Professor of Judaic Studies Steven B. Bowman, University of Cincinnati, made two significant points: (1) Christians understand the act of Christ's death as that of redemption and resurrection as an act of affirmation (concepts about which Judaism has much to say, to be sure); and (2) the papers themselves, as well as

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the sources cited, in the aggregate reflect a Western Christian approach, and, therefore, to more fully enter into a dialogical encounter, one needs the benefit of an Eastern and Orthodox perspective as well. Both points are well-taken and much appreciated.