

EPILOGUE

Where do we go from here? The editors invited George Lindbeck, one of the foremost Christian theologians devoted to fostering Jewish–Christian dialogue, to offer his response to this volume. Professor Lindbeck's insights, with which this epilogue begins, serve as the stimulus for our own thoughts about the promises and challenges of this new era of Jewish–Christian relations.

What of the Future? A Christian Response (by George Lindbeck)

In parts of this book, Christians display new attitudes toward Judaism. What is the future of these attitudes? Will they spread and endure, or will they weaken and perhaps disappear as guilt-inducing memories such as those of the Holocaust fade away? Isn't anti-Judaism part of Christianity's DNA, undetachable from what have historically been the major sources of its vitality and identity? These are questions that call for a Christian response.

A Proposal

The answers I propose depend on whether supersessionism, the belief that the church replaces Israel, can be eliminated even as the understanding of the church as Israel is regained. Both developments are necessary. Eliminating supersessionism severs the taproot of Christian anti-Judaism, but if that is all that happens, modern Christianity becomes even more detached than it already is from the Old Testament portion of its heritage. That heritage can flourish without anti-Judaism, so my argument goes, only if the premodern understanding of the church as in some sense Israel is retrieved and joined with the long-forgotten New Testament conviction that the covenant with the Jews has never been revoked.

The anti-supersessionist part of this proposal is familiar. Almost everyone agrees that the understanding of the church as the replacement of Israel is the major ecclesiological source of Christian anti-Judaism. Roman Catholic authorities, among others, have now publicly declared that the covenant with Israel has not been revoked and that the Jews remain God's chosen people (though, needless to say, not exclusively such). The general impression is that this declaration implies that the church cannot be Israel, for that would be supersessionist. The opposite proposal is so unfamiliar and so little discussed that I must make it tentatively. I shall perhaps sound more confident than I am when I suggest that, stripped of its supersessionism, the understanding of the church as Israel can and should be recovered, together with the reading of what Christians call the Old Testament as genuinely and centrally the church's book (which does not deny that the same text, read as Tanach, is also Judaism's property).

Expropriating Israel

The fundamental obstacle to this proposal is the deeply embedded conviction that the linkage between the church as Israel and supersessionism is unbreakable. This link is assumed even by those who know that it was not true for Paul, the earliest and, many would say, the most authoritative of New Testament writers. For Paul, as has been noted more than once in this book, Gentile Christians are wild olive branches grafted into the olive tree that is Israel; and of unbelieving Jewry, Paul says, "The gifts and call of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). Paul did not espouse supersessionism. Yet, so the argument goes, there are indications of supersessionism in other New Testament writings, most notoriously in Matthew 21:43, which says, in contrast to the other versions of the parable of the wicked tenants, that the vineyard will

be given to another *ethnos* (people). Almost all Christians, from the immediate post-New Testament period until around the middle of this century, have taken such passages to be definitive statements of supersessionism. Early on, Christianity was thought of as such a complete replacement of Judaism that, more or less simultaneously with the expulsion of Jesus-believing Jews from the synagogue, Jews as well as Gentiles who were Christian were forbidden by the "great church" (as it has come to be called) to engage in distinctively Jewish practices. Jewish Christians thus lost their group identity and become indistinguishable from their Gentile fellow believers. That the first Christians had remained Torah-observant was explained away, in a blatant instance of Gentile special pleading, as a temporary permission that had been rescinded.

On this view, the church, and the church alone, is Israel. Old Testament promises and prophecies are fulfilled not only in Jesus (an assertion essential to mainstream Christian identity), but also in the church—and in such a way that it replaces Israel. The church is the "New" Israel (an expression not found in the New Testament) and has become the sole heir to the entirety of Israel's heritage. Since Christ came, Israel's prophecies, promises, prerogatives, and scriptures do not belong to unbelieving Jews but only to Christians. Because Jews are no longer the people of the Bible, they cannot read it rightly. The Oral Torah and its midrashic, talmudic, and other rabbinic elaborations are thus condemned *unseen and a priori* as not simply false but as deliberately misleading. Rabbinic Judaism was for some Christians an illegitimate option worse than paganism or even atheism. The latter options could be honest errors, but the former was a deliberately deceitful simulacrum of the truth. It is as if Esau (the Jews) pretended not to have sold his birthright and sought to steal it back from Jacob (the Christians), who had rightfully dispossessed him. Expropriation, as this might be called, is not the only kind of supersessionism, but it is the one linked to the church as Israel.

The conceptual linkage, however, is one of possibility, not necessity. If Paul is right, then, as we have seen, thinking of the church as Israel does not require the exclusive claim that after Christ only the church is Israel. Ascribing Israelhood to the church, in other words, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for expropriation; it is thus logically possible to retrieve Israelhood for Christians without denying it to the Jews. The counterargument, however, is that what is logically possible may, in the course of time, become historically necessary. Because Christian claims to Israelhood have been supersessionist almost from the start, it seems evident to many that Israelhood without supersession is not now available in practice. Before taking this consideration into account, however, we need to look at the converse relation, supersession without Israelhood, which has been the normal situation for the last several hundred years.

Discarding Israel

In the modern period, emphasis on the church as Israel disappeared, partly as a result of the sixteenth-century controversies over how and when the church was founded. The papacy could best be defended, Roman Catholics believed, by placing the church's origins in Jesus' statement to Peter, "On this rock I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18). The various Protestant groups countered in terms of their own ecclesial self-interest by claiming that the beginnings of the church were in Jesus' baptism, in the call of the apostles, or in Pentecost. An unintended consequence of these debates was that the resultant pictures of the church were marked by

discontinuity rather than continuity with Israel.¹ In addition, as a consequence of the Enlightenment attention shifted from the church and Israel as bodies of people to Judaism and Christianity conceived of as religions that individuals believed in and/or practiced.

In time, these shifts of attention brought on by the Reformation and the Enlightenment gave way to the now prevailing theologies of replacement, which do more than neglect the church as Israel: they discard it. Liturgy and hymnody abound with scriptural, especially psalmic, references to Israel, Jerusalem, and Zion, and these

references, as in the past, are applied to the church, but they have become dead metaphors devoid of the powerful typological realism they once possessed. The notion of fulfillment continues to be realistically affirmed, but with a radically different meaning. Fulfillment is no longer conceptualized in terms of the biblical narratives of God keeping and confirming promises and prophecies to persons and groups, but in terms of the impersonal patterns of evolutionary progress according to which one religion provides the conditions for the emergence of a better and higher one. Fulfillment now applies to religions, not peoples.

The less objectionable versions of this outlook could be said to liken Judaism to a flourishing vineyard that, although climactically fulfilled in the best of its harvests (that is, in Christianity), has retained enough fertility to bear new fruit down through the millennia, though of a less succulent kind. More commonly, however, the condescension implicit in these patterns of thought has been less benign. Judaism has been construed in terms of the progressivist axiom that the good becomes a drag on the best once it gives birth to the better. For Arnold Toynbee, to take a typical though not theological example, rabbinic Judaism seems to resemble the remains of a burned-out booster rocket whose role was to launch a space ship toward the stars. The nadir of such views was reached by the *deutsche Christen*, fellow travelers of the Nazis, for whom the Jews and their religion were a cancer in the flesh of the future.

All of these modern supersessionisms, from the least offensive to the most vicious, vehemently repudiate the Israel-likeness of the church. They grant that Christianity originated in Judaism but hold that it has mutated into a radically new reality. Countries, to be sure, have been thought of as Israel in modern times. Christians—ranging from British Israelites to Dutch, Swedes, and Poles, and, outside Europe, from South African Boers to Americans—have represented their nations, but not the church, as somehow Israel-like.

The Covenant Unrevoked

The discarding of ecclesial Israelhood has not diminished supersessionism. Perhaps, then, the retrieval of the premodern understanding of the church as Israel will accomplish what modern, progressivist theologies have not. And yet the horrors of premodern theologies of replacement were no less than those of modern progressivist ones (except for those perpetrated by Nazism, which, in any case, was a Manichaean dualism rather than a Christian supersessionist heresy: instead of viewing the Jews as a once helpful but now discarded stepping stone to higher goods, the Nazis regarded them as *ab initio* evil). Eleventh-century Rhineland massacres at the time of the First Crusade may have been perpetrated, as standard histories put it, by ecclesiastically disapproved wild bands of illiterate peasants stirred to fury by false rumors that it was Jews who had betrayed Jerusalem (which the peasants had set out to rescue) to the Turks, but even if such accounts are true, the church's ecclesiology was responsible. The massacres took place in a culture saturated iconographically as well as verbally from the highest to the lowest levels with the idea that the church alone is Israel. Given this history, even toying with the retrieval of the idea that the church is Israel—minus the "alone"—is indecent unless there are good reasons for believing that it will not again be misused to deny the Jews their birthright, as it always has been in post-New Testament times.

Historical criticism is a main source of assurance that the idea will not be so misused. Even conservative Vatican church leaders, not to mention Protestant ones, are persuaded, sometimes reluctantly, by the consensus in modern biblical, historical, and theological studies that the New Testament taken as a whole does not teach supersessionism. The emotions that have motivated the rejection of supersessionism in our day may well have come mostly from horror at the Holocaust, but this rejection would not have been possible without historical-critical ground-clearing.

This consensus can be expected to survive as long as modern modes of critical inquiry persist. Critical interpreters disagree endlessly on what the Bible affirms about the church with or without Israel, but they join unanimously in the negative judgment that, taken as a whole, the Bible does not teach supersessionism in either its premodern or modern form. This scholarly consensus allows Christians to recover their historic belief in God's election of the Jews and to reject replacement theology: the covenant with Israel has not been revoked, which means that the church's effort to identify itself with Israel need not lead to supersessionism. Not only individuals but whole communions are beginning to affirm that the covenant with Israel remains in force and extends to contemporary Jews and Judaism. To the degree this trend continues, it becomes safe, so to speak, to affirm that the church is also Israel. Breaking the tie with supersessionism makes the church's effort to identify itself with Israel into an innocent rather than menacing enterprise.

Appropriation: Sharing Israelhood

Innocence, however, is not a sufficient reason for embarking on this difficult undertaking; the effort will have to benefit Christians, and not simply be harmless to Jews. To see what Christians gain, recall the general benefits of taking the church as Israel that I have described earlier in this book. First, if the church is Israel, then the whole Old Testament is as essential as the New for Christian communal self-understanding. Thus the church cannot be thought of in modern fashion as a religious instance of a limited liability corporation formed by individuals freely contracting together for the furtherance of their personal projects. On the contrary, the church is a people that God has gathered out of many nations to bear corporate witness along with Israel to the promise made to Abraham and Sarah that their seed would bless all humankind. Second, such an Old Testament understanding of the church challenges the Christian tendency to polarize collectivism and individualism, this-worldliness and other-worldliness, extramural concern for humanity as a whole and intramural attention to the elect community. Finally, and most decisively, the Old Testament emphasis on Israel's unconditional corporate election is vital in the struggle against Christian claims that Israel's election was merely conditional, was abrogated, and was replaced by the church's own election. Such are the general benefits of understanding the church as Israel; now let me turn to specific contemporary examples.

The use of the Old Testament, on which Christianity's vitality has in large part depended, tends to go awry when something other than the church is thought of as Israel. Admittedly, sometimes associating Israel with something other than the church has good, but ultimately limited, consequences, as when the social gospellers identified themselves with the Hebrew prophets or when blacks in the United States and liberation movements in Latin America appropriated the Exodus story. More often, however, such appropriations of Israelhood end up being simply disastrous, as when it is predicated of "Christendom," or of a "Christian" nation, or, worst of all, of a race, as in the case of the apartheid Boers in South Africa.

One odd but currently urgent example of this peril is supplied by the fundamentalist "dispensationalists," as they are called, found mainly but not entirely in North America. They interpret the Old Testament not with the typological imaginativeness still found in black preaching, for example, but in an intensely modern, literalistic fashion. They repudiate for themselves every trace of Israelhood, even of the emptily metaphorical kind, and insist that all Jews and only Jews are Israel, the sole visible corporate body elected by God to be his chosen people both in the past and present. In this scenario, the mainline Christian churches have no role because the true church is invisible, and it is the Jews who in the last days, after their conversion to Christ, will reign on a higher level than even Gentile believers in the

visible messianic kingdom. Dispensationalists are often, though not always, Zionist in politics, but they are always supersessionists who have expropriated the Old Testament for their Christian purposes. The picture of the future they have concocted seems mad to all Jews and most Christians, and yet attracts millions. The Old Testament read without a church-as-Israel outlook is a dangerous book.

A second contemporary example of a problem related to disassociating the church from Israel is an inversion of the triumphalism from which Christianity has historically suffered. In some circles, self-flagellation has acquired the aura of a virtue. Talk of what is wrong with Christianity is acceptable and praiseworthy, whereas the positive aspects of Christianity are passed over in silence. These attacks on real evils such as the church's long-standing Eurocentrism, patriarchalism, anti-Semitism, and general oppressiveness regularly lose their effectiveness because of the holier-than-thou lovelessness with which they are made. Judgment is rendered in terms of alien standards rather than indigenous or scriptural ones, and the alienation of both critics and the criticized from historic communities of faith (or, to use the ordinary phrase, from "organized religion") is a common consequence.

In the face of such criticisms of Christianity, Christians need to be reminded that biblical denunciations of God's people in both Testaments were voiced, unlike most contemporary ones, by prophets unshakably committed to the community. To understand the church as Israel is to recover such critical voices. The prophets constituted a loyal opposition, not an adversarial one. As watchmen, they did not desert their God-appointed posts but continued to plead at the risk of their lives with those who were deaf or opposed to their warnings. In contrast, so it seems to this observer, contemporary Christian protesters tend to disengage from their opponents, and they thereby lapse readily into communal self-abuse. What Christians need is an Israel-like sense of common peoplehood sufficient to sustain the loyal oppositions that make possible the persistence through time of those continuing and often bitter arguments without which otherwise divided communities do not survive.

One final example of what Christians can gain from understanding the church as Israel in nonsupersessionist terms is that it frees them to hear God speak not only through Old Testament Israelites, but also through postbiblical Jews; this freedom follows from the belief that the covenant with Israel has not been revoked. The Jews remain God's chosen people and are thus a primary source for Christian understandings of God's intentions. With the passing of Christendom that is now taking place it is increasingly important for the churches to turn for instruction to Judaism. Jews learned much about faithful survival in hostile societies during the long *galut*; Christians need comparable lessons now that they are themselves becoming a worldwide diaspora and are seeking, via the ecumenical movement, to end their own dispersion by creating an institutionally decentralized common universe of discourse and, it is hoped, witness.

Of course the church cannot and should not resemble rabbinic Judaism any more than the latter resembles the Judaism of the First or Second Temple, but some of the strategies that the rabbis devised, not least the hermeneutical ones, are instructive for post-Christendom churches. Consider, for example, the talmudic practice of juxtaposing contrary opinions as authoritative instead of blandly harmonizing or brutally rejecting one or another as Christians have usually done. More comprehensively, the roles of the two Torahs and of rabbinic commentaries in Judaism are not without value for resolving church-dividing Christian differences

over the interrelationships of the two Testaments and church tradition.² How much Christians will learn from such Jewish community-building practices is an open question, but to the extent that they learn to learn, contempt for Judaism will be enduringly banished from Christianity. Yet would such a development be good for Jews? In closing, let me consider that question.

Naysayers could argue that the more Israel-like and the less anti-Judaic the church is, the greater the

assimilationist threat it poses. Dissimilarity spiced with a bit of hostility, some will say, contributes more to the survival of Judaism than does resemblance and friendliness. A very different scenario, however, is also plausible. The major challenge to minority identity is no longer from established Enlightenment and Christian majorities but from a pervasive pluralistic consumerism destructive of all enduring traditions and communities. Christians no less than Jews are engulfed by this assimilationist wave, and the best resistance Christians can offer is the reappropriation without expropriation of the church's roots in Israel and Israel's scriptures. For this task, Christians need the help of the original proprietors, and both parties will find that both the distinctiveness and the depth of their respective roots in the shared sacred text are increased rather than diminished by their collaboration. There is no danger of syncretism here, since each tradition is rooted in this shared text in its own particular way. Sibling-like quarrels are the greater danger, and Jews and Christians will need God's grace to carry on the conversations that have now begun. They must do so for the sake of the communities of faith they are called to serve, and they can do so because they share a common hope for the coming of the Messiah round whom all their disagreements circle and in whom all their divisions will be overcome. It is this second scenario that faith calls Christians to prefer, but without forgetting assimilationist dangers. Whether this is also the future for which Jews should strive is for them to decide.

1. Only in the work of John Calvin and in Calvinism did talk of "the church in the Old Testament" survive as a standard practice, but little of this talk continued into the Enlightenment, except in isolated pockets such as New England.

2. For an account of the role of the two Torahs and of rabbinic commentaries in Judaism, see David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).

What of the Future? A Jewish Response (by the Editors)

Beyond Supersessionism

MICHAEL SIGNER: During the past fifty years, after serious soul searching, many Christians have concluded that their supersessionist attitudes toward Jews and Judaism have led them away from the deepest demands of their faith. For more than thirty years since the Second Vatican Council (1965), many Christians from all over the world have reached out in friendship to the Jewish people. Pope John Paul II has reiterated, in many speeches, that God's covenant with the Jewish people continues and that Jews have an abiding relationship with the Land of Israel. Pope John Paul has called upon Christians to engage in *teshuvah*—he used the Hebrew word for "repentance"—for the harsh treatment that Jews have received at the hands of Christians during the past two millennia. Other Christian groups have expressed similar initiatives toward friendship and dialogue with Jews.

Why the Change?

DAVID SANDMEL: The Shoah, as an event with significance both for Jewish–Christian relations and for humanity, has provided a moral imperative for Jews and Christians to move beyond traditional antagonisms. It has made intercommunal dialogue a necessity; we must talk to our neighbors. That Jews and Christians are talking to one another and learning from each other is not new. What *is* new is that we actively seek each other out for shared goals: tolerance and respect, certainly, but also a deepening of our own religious experience and self-understanding. More than an intellectual endeavor, this dialogue might also lay the

foundation for a new kind of creative cooperation between traditions within the changing religious environment of contemporary society.

DAVID NOVAK: The world that Jews and Christians now inhabit is neither Jewish nor Christian. For that reason, Jews and Christians interested in surviving in this world need to become more genuinely religious for the sake of their own identity. The changes in Jewish–Christian relations must also be seen against the background of a more startling fact: in the latter half of this past century, the political power of Jews had grown at the same time that the political power of Christians has shrunk. The political power of Christians has diminished insofar as our society and culture, which formerly were considered "Christian," no longer look to Christianity for their justification in any significant way. This diminished power has come as a great shock to many Christians, and it largely explains why Christians cannot relate to Jews as they have done in the past.

Despite the Holocaust, Jewish power in the secular world has grown enormously. The Jewish people survived the Holocaust with a greater determination to be more active and less vulnerable in this world. Jews have become not only equal but also leading citizens in Western democracies. And, of course, the reestablishment of the State of Israel has given Jews a political presence in the world they have not had since biblical times. Many Jews have looked to the increasing secularity of the world as the source of their newly won power. Jews of this mind set are usually anti-Christian since they regard Christians as the prime group wanting our return to the Ghetto—or worse.

An increasing number of Jews, however, now realize that looking to secularity as the source of our success means making it our god. But since secularity has no need for Judaism, it has no need for what makes Jews Jewish in the first place. As such, it is a recipe for our disappearance—either with a bang or a whimper. An awareness of the dangers of secularity has caused more and more Jews to turn inward to the religious content of the Jewish tradition to justify their continued identity. And, although some of these returning Jews look at Christianity and Christians as an ancient foe, others are beginning to realize that Christians are facing challenges similar to those facing us, and for the same reasons. In this age of secularism, *both* Christians and Jews must learn how to sing the song of the Lord God of Israel in the new exile (*galut*) in the strange land of contemporary society. Our relationship is therefore more than "interreligious" in the usual sense of that term. For better or for worse, we have never really been without each other. And, now, we need each other in new and surprising ways.

The New Jewish–Christian Dialogue

DAVID NOVAK: Because of the long history of Christian power over Jews, the new Jewish–Christian dialogue had to be initiated by Christians. This Christian initiative has been good for Jews and for Judaism, just as it has been good for Christians and Christianity. The initiative has been good for both Jews and Christians because it has lessened Christian participation in anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is bad for Jews because it harms us politically and even physically; anti-Semitism is bad for Christians because it is immoral and thus spiritually destructive. This Christian initiative has been good for both Judaism and Christianity because it has renewed the Jewish roots of Christianity. Forgetting these roots has been bad for Christians because it has led them to be tempted by various idolatries; it has been bad for Jews because it has obscured our unique historical relationship with Christianity. So far this new dialogue has taken place largely between Christian and Jewish scholars. Jewish scholars, nurturing long and close contact with Christian scholars during the course of

their scholarly work, are eager and qualified to engage in this religious and theological exchange. Nothing less than such an exchange will serve the needs of Jews to recover their Jewish identity in a secular world; and nothing less is worthy of the intellectual depth of the Jewish tradition.

DAVID SANDMEL: But I am also keenly aware—and continually reminded—that this new dialogue is taking place among a relatively small group of Jews and Christians. Traditional mistrust and misunderstanding are still very much alive within each community. As important as this pioneering theological exploration is—and I believe it is very important—expanding the circle of dialogue is equally important. This expansion will not be easy, for our traditional wariness of Christians and Christianity and our current struggle to preserve both Jewish numbers and Jewish vitality make it difficult to appreciate the value of expending limited communal resources on an endeavor that engages people we have feared and avoided for so long. More "intrafaith" dialogue among Jews should lead to increased understanding that dialogue with Christianity is "good for the Jews."

Christians who have rejected supersessionism and are anxious for a deep exchange may be frustrated with the pace of the dialogue and surprised that Jews they encounter do not share—and, indeed, feel threatened by—their enthusiasm. This frustration is another indication of the newness of the endeavor. Although individuals within both communities may have achieved a new understanding and can address one another with mutuality and integrity, this is not the norm in either community. As long as the old antagonisms persist—and in both communities they are the rule, not the exception—those who see the promise of moving forward into this uncharted territory must have the patience and the commitment to bring the rest of their respective community along.

TIKVA FRYMER–KENSKY: Serious dialogue has been growing, involving many religiously committed Jews from all walks of Judaism. Today, when our ethical imperative towards *tikkun olam* impels us to remove inequality wherever possible and inequity based on inequality everywhere else, both Jews and Christians experience the tension between past and future that is so important to each religion's life. Responsible change demands that we magnify our perspectives. Internally, this magnification requires that we carefully study the many resources of the past: biblical texts independent of the rabbinic voice, the kabbalistic texts, and the remnants of folk tradition. Externally, serious engagement with Christianity gives us yet another perspective, not quite our own and yet not so far away that it is an Other of contrasts. Sometimes, this close engagement helps illuminate our mutual dilemmas. For example, to those of us involved in reforming the gender system of Judaism, it is illuminating to discover that rabbinic ideas about what men and women should be are often quite different from either Christian or contemporary ideas about gender. Exploring Judaism and Christianity together brings home the extent to which our religions have been influenced by cultural conventions and thus enables us to be flexible and dynamic in our own approach.

PETER OCHS: Dialogue can also enrich those not seeking change. About fifteen years ago, I heard Michael Wyschogrod, the Orthodox Jewish theologian, participate in a Jewish–Christian dialogue. Professor Wyschogrod gave a wonderful talk about ways in which their overlapping, biblical faiths make religious Jews and Christians closer, and about how his observance of the commandments (*mitzvot*) enrich his dialogue with Christians. In the question-and-answer period, a secular colleague protested that Professor Wyschogrod's orthodoxy was in fact an obstacle to dialogue, as were comparable Christian orthodoxies: these "outdated" faiths, he argued, draw people farther apart, not closer, by making them loyal to competing systems of belief and practice. "Your complaint," Professor Wyschogrod answered (as I recall, with some paraphrasing), "reminds me of the folktale of the bee that couldn't fly. Observing this robust creature with tiny wings, the doctors and scientists of the insect world, armed with their measuring sticks and compasses and all sorts of

equations, concluded that 'this bee can't fly.' But, of course, it could fly, more powerfully than most of the others. The proof was in the flying! So, too, in this case. The most profound and mutually caring dialogues I have engaged in were between orthodox Catholics and Jews (meeting in conjunction with Vatican-sponsored events) and between Orthodox Jewish scholars and Christian Barthians. These dialogues succeeded, where many liberal efforts fail, because there is no effort in these cases for the two sides to become one and because each side saw in the other a witness to God, rather than to some concepts about God, even though these were different witnesses to God. True dialogue is dialogue that respects difference and is animated by it."

TIKVA FRYMER–KENSKY: Dialogue between Jews and Christians makes sense, for we share significant things. As monotheists, we see the world as a dialogue between God and humanity. Both our religions are "religious humanisms" that embrace the significance of human beings as "the image of God" and that seek to understand who and what we are supposed to be. We are biblically based religions that "triangulate" our lived experience with a sacred scripture and with a long tradition. We have much to learn by looking at how we each have lived over our long histories. Jews have excelled at communal text study and the practice of everyday law. Christians have, over hundreds of years, achieved great sophistication in theological reflection. Stimulated by the other, we can all increase the scope of our own understanding.

PETER OCHS: Here is one example. Several years ago, a group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars founded the Society for Scriptural Reasoning, dedicated to integrating the academic *and* the practical dimensions of this kind of dialogue. After sharing essays during the year through a common Website, forty to fifty scholars gather annually to study scriptural texts together in a setting that is both religious and academic. One of the society's goals is academic: to deepen each participant's own tradition of scriptural study, to deepen familiarity with the other biblical traditions, and to share insights on contemporary scholarship. Another goal is both academic and practical. Although acts of religious intolerance often make international headlines, most folks are not aware of how much religious Muslims, Jews, and Christians suffer from the antireligious prejudices of modern secular society. The secular university is often an oppressive place for academics who consider the biblical traditions as worthy of broad scholarly study as the Greco-Roman and modern European traditions. One of the society's goals is to work against this prejudice by fostering a pluralistic environment in which religious Jews, Christians, and Muslims study of all aspects of the humanities. In the future, this mode of study may stand as a model for a more tolerant university, where generations of students will learn to study our traditions of religious wisdom and ethics with the respect and care they now devote primarily and often exclusively to nonbiblical traditions.¹

TIKVA FRYMER–KENSKY: Sometimes dialogue with a close sister can shed a transformative light on our own tradition. Jewish writers are used to contrasting the Jewish system of "obligation" with the "rights" approach of the Western legal tradition, stressing that "obligation" has a communal thrust and an important sense of moral commitment. Dialogue with Christianity may bring us to stress also the "privilege" of having the opportunity to do something. This is not a radically new idea, for rabbinic thought considers it a privilege to be obligated to perform commandments. But since Christianity does not have the language of commandments and does not often speak of "obligations," it uses other language to explain its moral demands, sometimes stressing the privilege of having the opportunity to do something or the "principle" of such deeds laid down by God's own actions. For example, on the relations of humans to ecology, Jews stress that we are obligated to protect the earth. Christians may state that we are privileged to care for the world according to the principle of hospitality, for we are guests on God's earth. On one level, the difference in language is irrelevant: either way, humans are to care for the earth. But linguistic variety shows us another facet of our mandate, giving us a fuller sense of the nature of "commandment" and enriching our view of the

relationship between humanity, God, and the earth.

DAVID NOVAK: I think Jewish–Christian relations in this new century will grow in breadth and depth if Jews and Christians accept the truth that neither community can or should control the secular realm and, thus, the other. Christians cannot and should not regain a world they have lost, and Jews cannot and should not try to gain a world we have never had. As Jews and Christians are able to say more and more "I am a stranger on earth, do not hide for me Your commandments" (Ps. 119:19), they find how much they need each other to be able to keep these commandments here and now. In the presently unredeemed world, we are all strangers. Those who recognize this fact and accept its responsibilities will thereby become less strange to each other.

MICHAEL SIGNER: Serious interreligious dialogue is not assimilation. When Christians and Jews engage in dialogue, they come together to discuss how their particular religions and its practices enrich their experience of life. They describe the rituals in church and synagogue that sustain them in moments of trial and that transmit their heritage from one generation to another. In dialogue we search for common ground that is based on our difference.

In the coming years, Jews and Christians should engage in a mutual search for respect, justice, and love. We should begin this dialogue with a different framework than previous conversations. Both communities should face each other with the idea that we are groups of people who have spent our histories trying to live by the words, deeds, and message of the Hebrew Bible. Each community has found its unique way to live out that message. Over the centuries, both communities have enjoyed the teaching of brilliant minds and the actions of ordinary people. We need to share these experiences and teachings with one another. We should admit from the very beginning that there are elements in each tradition that the other side can never fully comprehend. We should enjoy the fact that we are different from one another. We should understand that the sweetness of agreement and the disappointment of disagreement are part of a relationship of caring about one another and the world that the Creator has put in our trust. There is no compromise in this encounter because there is no victory for one community or the other. There is only life together. It will be a life of "yes" and "no," of community and alienation, and of continued searching. The comfort and joy of our common and separate searches will provide the continuing motivation for our changed framework. We need not know everything that awaits us on the road ahead. The mystery of surprise will surely bring greater joy than the pessimism that growth and understanding are beyond our grasp.

PETER OCHS: Together we can celebrate what is most sacred, precious, and singular in our scriptural faiths. Such dialogue will benefit us and the world around us. Jews are about to discover how much that world needs us, how much the secular world needs to rehear the Teachings that we carry with us as a blessing to the nations and how much Christians and Muslims have to gain from studying those Teachings with us. Discovering that need, Jews are bound to rediscover their place among the nations. With the self-respect and sense of responsibility that comes from this rediscovery, Jews are also bound to reexperience the majesty and preciousness of their own religious heritage. We will find that the social and political influence of this heritage grows even stronger when we work closely with like-minded Christians on issues of shared concern. And we should be warmed to see how this shared work deepens and sweetens the religious lives of both dialogue partners.