

PURSUING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: FROM SECURITY TO REDEMPTION

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Delivered 21 June 2009
Council of Christians and Jews (Vic)

My remarks this afternoon are motivated by two events.

The first is the 25th anniversary of my rabbinic ordination, which I shall be marking in two weeks. This AGM is a unique opportunity for me to review the course of interfaith dialogue over past 25 years.

During my years as Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Bristol in England, I learned to apply a non-judgmental approach to the study of religions known as the phenomenological approach. Essentially, this approach involves 'bracketing' the truth claims that are so much a feature of religion, so that the scholar can look at the ways that belief functions in the life of the believer without testing its truth-value against anyone else's beliefs. In keeping with this approach I start from the assumption that, when people say they believe something, as peculiar and uncongenial as I personally may find their belief, it is meaningful to them. I don't immediately jump to the defense and look for reasons why what they're saying is mistaken, or inconceivable, or evidence that they are deluded. In short, I wasn't used to the 'binary' approach, which concludes that if I am right, you must be wrong.

When I was invited to address my first Church group, I didn't know exactly what to say about Judaism. So I did what for a rabbi is probably an odd thing to do. I asked my congregation. I asked them, What would you like me to say about Judaism? They said three things (in the form of a rabbinic aphorism!): Judaism is distinct, it is complete as a religion, and it is fulfilling for Jews; that is, it is a separate religion (not to be viewed in relation to Christianity), it doesn't stand in need of anything else (e.g., a saviour, or Jesus), and it offers a full life-style for its adherents. I duly delivered this message, peppered with illustrations and funny stories. Afterwards the group asked a few polite questions. Then one of them said, Why do I as a Jew continue to be "stiff-necked"? Why do I continue to deny that Jesus is Christ?

This was my introduction, if not to 'interfaith dialogue', then to 'interfaith cross-purpose conversation'. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to review developments since then.

My second motivation for this talk is more substantial. It arises from the recent 'Operation Cast Lead', the conflict between the Israelis and Hamas in Gaza. This military activity led to powerful misunderstandings, or different appreciations of what was at stake, between the Jewish participants in dialogue and their Christian (and Muslim) partners. The misunderstandings were complex and are worthy of a lecture on their own. It suffices for me to say here that, for the Jewish community, the matter came to a head with number of letters in the *Australian Jewish News (AJN)* questioning whether there is any value to interfaith dialogue at all, if after so many years there is still so little understanding of the Jewish position.¹ The debate even led to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV), for the first time that I know of, holding a forum to set common aims for dialogue.

It is in response to these two motivations that I share my thoughts this afternoon.

But first, an opening observation: dialogue as we know it does not arise from within the Jewish and Christian religions themselves, but from our shared experience of the Enlightenment. It is thanks to the Enlightenment's stress on values of citizenship, democracy, equality and human rights that inter-religious dialogue has become possible. However, the Enlightenment has led to dialogue in both positive and negative ways. The greatest failure of Enlightenment thinking, the moral vacuum that resulted in the Holocaust, has also had a profound impact on Jewish-Christian and now Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. Interestingly, an Orthodox rabbi and British scholar of dialogue, Norman Solomon, identified secularism, the Enlightenment's child, as the third, invisible partner in Jewish-Christian dialogue, since secularism often sets the hidden agenda for both Jews and Christians and it cannot be ignored as a force in creating the kind of world in which we are dialoguing today.²

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, in a recent essay exploring Christian-Jewish cross-currents in liturgy surrounding the Pesach Seder, identifies three stages in Jewish-Christian interaction over the past millennium, which we can refer to as **disputation**, **diplomacy** and **the new dialogue**.³ It is helpful to see the progress in Jewish-Christian relations in this way.

In pre-Enlightenment times, as far back as the Middle Ages, the common form of Jewish-Christian relations was through **disputations**.⁴ These intellectual contests were generally initiated by Christian monarchs or priests and weighted heavily against the Jewish disputants. The 13th century Barcelona Disputation is a good case in point: the Jewish disputant, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (called Nachmanides) won the disputation but was forced to flee Barcelona for his life as result. As an aside, a teacher of mine at the Leo Baeck College in London, the late Hyam Maccoby, some years ago produced a scholarly translation of the Barcelona Disputation⁵ and then wrote a play based on his translation. The play was screened on TV, and for that purpose Hyam managed to build in a romantic

component. For the female part they employed a singer who was trying to establish herself as actress: her name, Uma Thurman. Perhaps it is not such a great leap of the imagination from the Barcelona Disputation to *Kill Bill*.

Diplomacy came with modernity. It involves treating the other with civility because you are both citizens within a broader commonwealth, whatever your religious differences. The early Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) was an attempt to give this civility, or tolerance under the law, a new depth. Just as the Enlightenment values of citizenship and equal rights made this new style of dialogue possible, so through the Enlightenment's evil genius, the Holocaust, it also supplied dialogue with its direction. One of the lessons of the Holocaust is that the fervour of religious doctrines, transmuted by secularism into absolutist ideologies, can be used to dehumanize the Other to the extent that all the technology of an age can be harnessed to a genocidal end.⁶

Even the best people could not resist the evil spawned by the age of Enlightenment. Geoffrey Wigoder, in his magisterial survey of Jewish-Christian relations from the Second World War until 1988, refers to Christian teachings about Jews in Germany in the 1930s.⁷ For example, "The Church of Christ has never lost sight of the thought that the "Chosen People" who nailed the redeemer of the world to the cross must bear the curse for its action through a long history of suffering. The final return of the people of Israel can only take place through the conversion of Israel to Christ." The author of this passage was none other than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. From a sermon from 1937: "The gospel lesson for the day throws light upon the dark and sinister history of this people that can neither live nor die because it is under a curse which forbids it to do either. Until the end of its days, the Jewish people must go its way under the burden which Jesus' decree has laid upon it." The sermon was delivered by Pastor Neimoller; the same Pastor Neimoller who later said, famously, "They came for the Communists/ trades unionists/ Jews, but I wasn't a Communist/ trades unionist/ Jew, so I didn't speak out. Then they came for me, but there was no-one left to speak out." It is no surprise that, when people of the quality of Bonhoeffer or Neimoller felt no hesitation in condemning the Jews with such theological vigour, the scene was set for the Shoah to occur.

World War II and the Holocaust were a turning-point. Within a couple of decades severe guilt set in among certain sections of Christian community, with a recognition that something in Christianity had gone horribly wrong. The reaction – reflected in the founding of the CCJ – resulted in a remarkable and completely unforeseen shift in the balance of power between Christians and Jews. When I joined the CCJ near beginning of my career, about 20 years after the 2nd Vatican Council and *Nostra Aetate*, the shift in the balance of power was well underway. In the green and pleasant land of Surrey, where I served as rabbi – as gentrified and polite a setting as one could imagine – we used to gather around our cups of tea in drafty Church halls in Guildford or Dorking, trying to work out an agenda that would mean something in the post-modern world. There were lots of

informative lectures and the occasional joint Bible-study, in the course of which the Christian participants sought to recover an authentic Christian message by delving into Christianity's Jewish roots, while the Jewish partners in 'dialogue' took delight in promoting Jewish tradition as the original source of the best that Christianity had to offer.

The CCJ in Britain had a strict rule regarding joint worship: it simply was not allowed. This basically reflected an *halakhic* decision by Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, the doyen of Orthodox thinkers in America, about the nature of interfaith relations: 'religious' matters were not open to discussion with non-Jews, but common efforts to promote social justice, combat racism and create a more equitable society were allowed.⁸

Ignorant of Soloveitchik's *halakhic* dictum at the time, I blithely went ahead and organized with a local minister a 'joint seder.' The activity was placed well away from both Pesach and Easter, but it incorporated elements, prayers and songs/psalms, from both the Jewish and Christian traditions. The actual event was a hybrid, neither milk nor meat (as we Jews say); as a result, it had its awkward moments, but it was invigorating at the same time, spiritually as well as socially. It helped me a great deal to increase my appreciation of my own seders as Jewish experiences and probably freed me years later to lead a 'model' seder in Prahran for the Building Bridges program run by B'nai B'rith. This program was designed to show Jews and Muslims something of each others' faiths. The 'model' seder – in reality, a mere taste of the real thing - was written up in *The Age* and thence in the *AJN*, and as a result I was excoriated by some Jews and praised by others for my efforts on behalf of the group (which included among its Jewish participants a range of positions, from secular to observant Orthodox). I had unwittingly trespassed on one of the invisible lines that dialogue commonly threatens to cross. In the process, I discovered that *dialogue requires vulnerability to work*. If we continually protect ourselves against crossing the lines, we can never truly engage in dialogue. We are engaged in diplomacy, which is a different thing.

The Jewish resistance to making ourselves vulnerable is linked to the often observed fact that many Jews still retain a ghetto mentality, even though we live fully within the world that we have adopted and that has adopted us.⁹ Our main concerns are self-orientated and self-motivated. As far as we are concerned, the aim of dialogue is to convince others to leave us alone to *daven* (pray) in peace. In the early days of diplomatic dialogue this was achieved by listening to the Christian partners in dialogue express their guilt at centuries of anti-Semitism and their ill-defined but assumed complicity in the Shoah.¹⁰ The Jewish partners would then occupy the high moral ground, accepting Christian expressions of responsibility for Jewish suffering. In the course of their self-examination, Christians had to re-evaluate some pretty central beliefs, including supercessionism and evangelism. This rendered them very vulnerable. But the vulnerability was all on one side, the Christian side. The Jewish participants,

myself included, risked little of value; in keeping with Rav Soloveitchik's prohibition on worshipping together. But this resulted in an extraordinary shift of power from the Christians to the Jews.¹¹

Christian vulnerability was possibly exacerbated by the fact that Christian denominations were still uncertain about their stance vis-à-vis the Jews. They were occupied for several years in formulating their platforms and statements. Vatican II produced *Nostra Aetate* in the mid-1960s; the Uniting Church of Victoria has yet to present its statement on Jewish-Christian relations – it will do so in July 2009, 45 years after the Catholic document. The CCJ (Vic) produced its first booklet, "Rightly explaining the word of truth", as recently as the mid-1990s, and only after a leading Melbourne lawyer spotted an offending description of the martyrdom of Stephen on a classroom board and set off a three-year-long investigation into the teaching of the New Testament in relation to the Jews (the facts are documented in the August 1991 edition of the now-defunct *Generation* magazine – a collector's item!).¹²

The denominational statements variously record the churches' gradual withdrawal from Jewish evangelism and mission, the discovery of Jesus the Jew, and the romance of learning about the ancient rabbis and hearing their stories (a romance I can certainly appreciate). All these theological maneuverings left a vacuum in Jewish-Christian relations which allowed the Jewish community to become more and more vociferous about its own concerns. The Jewish concerns were decidedly non-theological. They centered on anti-Semitism, the integrity of the land of Israel and the inviolability of the State of Israel – all matters bearing on security and safety for Jews in Australia, Israel and world-wide.¹³ These concerns were, and continue to be, inflamed by the trauma of the Holocaust. And with good reason: the Holocaust was not caused by the Jewish people, who were the victims; it was caused by everyone else – perpetrators, fellow-travelers and those who stood by and did nothing. As a result, what happened was that the experience of the Jewish partners set the dialogue agenda for the Christians.¹⁴

What is now clear is that many on the Jewish side of the dialogue have never moved beyond seeking security through interfaith engagement. For them, interfaith work is another avenue to self-protection. There is little mutuality, respect for difference, or appreciation of a belief system that is different from our own. Even as Christian participants generally show respect for the Other in dialogue, the Jewish participants are still deeply wary. And even Christian participants get the script wrong sometimes, precisely because they fail to take into account the security concerns of the Jewish contingent.

This became abundantly clear during the Gaza conflict. Israel had been suffering for years from rocket attacks on Sderot and other border towns. That these attacks caused few deaths was entirely a matter of Israel's good fortune, not Hamas' intention. Several media correspondents from the Christian and Muslim

communities revealed a lack of understanding for the dilemma that Israel faced as well as for Israel's military response to this bombardment. Given that some of the correspondents who were one-sidedly critical of Israel are active in interfaith work, the *AJN* published letters and articles questioning the value of interfaith dialogue. As one regular *AJN* letter-writer put it to me in a private meeting, has dialogue resulted in fewer security men protecting Jewish schools? Do we feel any safer because of it? Indeed, a sizeable proportion of the Jewish leadership evidently asks the same questions. This was clear from the comments at the JCCV forum I mentioned earlier. They asked, What are the practical benefits of dialogue?; but what they mean is, Is it good for the Jews? Does it make us feel safer, more secure? They would measure dialogue against quantifiable aims that are of value to the community – specifically the *Jewish* community, not the wider community or the community of Australia. This again reveals the insularity of the Jewish world.

As understandable, and in some cases justifiable, as this insularity may be, it is ultimately self-defeating. We can never truly be secure as long as we feel insecure outside the shtetl; and without greater self-confidence our dialogue cannot do its most productive work. This is where we are at the moment; but the winds of change, they are a-blowing. To adopt Lawrence Hoffman's terms, we are moving from the diplomacy stage of Jewish-Christian relations to the true dialogue stage.

In this stage, Jews and Christians are equal partners in dialogue. Just as the Christian community has sought to open up to Jews (whether they have gone the full route or not is inconsequential, what is important is that the will is there), so the Jewish community must open up to the Christians. What this means is that *the Jewish community must make itself vulnerable to Christian teachings just as the Christian community has made itself vulnerable to Jewish teachings.* But this can work only if we approach dialogue from a position of strength. The Jewish participants need to feel strong in their own Jewish traditions, knowledge, practices and outlook. In short, we Jews have to have a clear sense of our starting-point, what it is we hold dear. We can then appreciate what others have to teach us (in keeping with the dictum from *Mishnah Avot*: "Who is wise? He is wise who learns from every person").¹⁵

There are signs already of this happening. The call within our own CCJ (Vic) to explore Christian roots even as we have explored rabbinic Jewish roots and to hear more about Christian values alongside Jewish values is a sign of something new.¹⁶ Either that, or it is a sign of evangelical revisionism; and I'd personally prefer to think of it as something new!

There have been a few notable expressions of this movement to the new style of dialogue in the scholarly community. In 2000 four distinguished Jewish scholars published *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, in the manner of Christian statements on Judaism.¹⁷ This was the first such statement

to appear over Jewish signatures, and it acknowledged that Christian vulnerability “merit(s) a thoughtful Jewish response.... We believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity.”

Dabru Emet offers eight brief statements “about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another:” we worship the same God; we seek authority from the same book, the Bible (and our differences in interpretation are to be respected); Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel (the Jewish claim to the land of Israel is often interpreted as compromising the doctrine of supercessionism and the integrity of the Christian message); we both accept the moral principles of Torah including the dignity of all human beings; “Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon” (“We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors”); “the humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture;” “a new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice” (a reaction to Rav Soloveitchik’s prohibition on interfaith dialogue); finally, we can work together for justice, to redeem the world.

Three books that have followed *Dabru Emet* typify the new, more equitable approach to dialogue:

1. A commentary on *Dabru Emet*, entitled *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, was published in 2000, the same year that *Dabru Emet* appeared.¹⁸ It comprises a series of sections on key, often problematic, religious doctrines and concepts, e.g., God, Scripture, Israel, suffering, embodiment (incarnation), sin and repentance, image of God (anthropology), each section including a Jewish essay followed by a Jewish and a Christian response. The Christian responses are sometimes quite critical of the Jewish understanding of Christian concepts.
2. An author of one of the essays in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* is the radical Orthodox Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg. His book *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: the new encounter between Judaism and Christianity*, appeared in 2004.¹⁹ This is a collection of Greenberg’s essays on Jewish-Christian dialogue over four decades, with two written especially for the volume. It gives a wonderful insight into the growth and transformations in Greenberg’s thinking over the years of his involvement with Christian scholars. It portrays the manner in which he gradually comes to acknowledge the integrity and power of Christian message, and perceives this message through the lens of Judaism. He follows the approach to other monotheistic religions first worked out by Maimonides in the 12th century, an approach that sees Christianity (and Islam, also) as instruments of God, “covenantal partners,” to purvey morals and values originally expressed through Torah and intended for all humanity.

Greenberg's most original, and most controversial, contention is with regard to status of Jesus, whom he describes not as a "false Messiah" but as a "failed Messiah" along the lines of other failed Messiahs in Jewish history, people whose redemptive, covenantal message was misunderstood and corrupted over time. It is clear that Greenberg's aim is to find a place for Christianity within Jewish thinking, to accept the integrity of the Christian narrative without sacrificing the integrity of the Jewish narrative, to find a place for Christian experience within the Jewish theology of history and of the covenant – in short, to treat Christianity seriously in a theological sense. But this is a radical departure for Jewish thought. It requires the Jewish community to view God's plan as incorporating everything in human experience, not just what happens to the Jewish community as a distinct ('ghettoised') group, but the destiny of all religious (and indeed non-religious) communities. This approach fits well with Greenberg's acceptance of religious pluralism, even within the Jewish world. Not surprisingly, the reactions to his views have been very mixed.

3. So, too, with the third book I would like to put forward as evidence for the 'new dialogue': Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' *The Dignity of Difference*, first published in 2002, recalled and republished in 2002.²⁰ The reason for the recall and pulping of the first print run has become a *cause celebre* within the community, and it is linked directly to my contention about the new style of dialogue. According to other Jewish authorities to his religious right, Sacks went too far in being agnostic about the truth-claims of religions other than Judaism; in effect, he suggested, there are many paths up the mountain, but the summit is one and the same for all. Sacks felt compelled by the criticisms from his own constituency to tone down his message.

Yet, the message remains and it makes *The Dignity of Difference* a central text in the new dialogue. What strikes the reader is that the book is very Jewish, and yet it is directed to humanity at large; it presents a Jewish reading of religious diversity. In effect, the book is a *midrash* or rabbinic gloss on the story of the Tower of Babel. In a highly original reading, Sacks interprets the Tower of Babel story as God's deliberate creation of a diverse humanity in order to overcome the evil of totalitarianism, a 'one-ness' which is in reality a particularly pernicious form of idolatry (or rather what we might call "anthropolatry," worship of human power). According to this reading of the story, the scattering of humanity with its diverse languages, cultures and religious beliefs and practices is a positive, deliberate act on God's part; not a punishment but an act of redemption from totalitarianism, from human idolatry. Sacks recognises in Nazism and Communism actual examples of totalitarian idolatry. As an Oxford philosopher whose hero is Isaiah Berlin, Sacks is particularly astute in political theory.

But this act of divine redemption comes with a caveat, a proviso. For it to succeed human beings must learn to live with *difference* – to accept and, even more, respect the differences that make us "Other," alien or strange, to one another; hence, Sacks' phrase the "dignity of difference". The challenge for the

new dialogue is to come to accept the Other with dignity, that is, to acknowledge what is precious and unique to the Other and their way of thinking and seeing the world. This means entering into dialogue in a manner which is open and prepared to receive understanding, in order to hear from the Other what motivates and invigorates their faith.

Complete openness, a willingness really to hear the Other without one's own agenda intervening in the process, is the essence of the new dialogue that I have been describing. And, like Sacks, I believe that this is a redemptive process. If, as I believe, conflict is caused by a 'closed-in-ness', filtering the insights and beliefs of the Other only through the preconceived categories and experiences of our own religion, then the new dialogue is precisely the means to overcome conflict and achieve *shalom/ salaam/ peace*. For the Jewish community, this means moving beyond a pragmatic, politically motivated focus on security, to let go of judging the success of dialogue on the basis of the safety of the Jewish community. In place of security, it means looking to a higher goal – the religious goal of redemption, which we achieve by encountering the presence of God through an experience of the difference of Others, no strings attached.

For me, after 25 years and more of interfaith engagement, that is what true dialogue is about.

¹ For example, Peter Kohn, "Faith in Interfaith", *The Australian Jewish News (AJN)* February 13, 2009; Dvir Abramovich, "The Challenge of Interfaith", *AJN* February 20, 2009.

² See Norman Solomon, "The Third Presence: Reflections on the Dialogue", in Tony Bayfield and Marcus Braybrooke, ed., *Dialogue with a Difference: The Manor House Group Experience* (SCM Press, 1992), pp.147ff. See also Norman Solomon, "Pluralism from a Jewish Perspective", in Norman Solomon, Richard Harries and Tim Winter, ed., *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation* (T & T Clark, 2005).

³ Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *My People's Passover Haggadah* (Jewish Lights, 2008), Vol.I "This Bread: Christianity and the Seder", pp.21ff. For the three stages of dialogue, see p.34. Hoffman's comment on his own interfaith work is worth noting: "That a Jew can even write an essay like this ["This Bread"] should not be taken for granted. Until relatively recently, no Jew would even want to, let alone be able to, without fear of retaliation. We have come a long way."

⁴ The notion of disputation between Christians and Jews is not new to the Middle Ages; it is found already in the Babylonian Talmud, for example *Avodah Zarah* 4a, in which *minim* (generally "sectarians", but here Christians with Jewish background) challenge Rav Safra over the interpretation of a verse from Amos. The sage is unable to respond to the challenge, but this is because – as we learn from another rabbi – being a Babylonian and not a Judean, he is an expert in Tannaitic teaching (the Oral Torah), not in Scripture (the Written Torah).

⁵ Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 1982).

⁶ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Polity Press, 1989).

⁷ Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christian Relations since the Second World War* (Manchester University Press, 1988). For the quotations from Bonhoeffer and Neimoller see pp.2f.

⁸ Joseph Soloveitchik, "Confrontation", in the Orthodox journal *Tradition* 6 (1964), pp.5ff.

⁹ See the introductory comments by the editors in Michael Fagenblat, Melanie Landau, Nathan Wolski, ed., *New Under the Sun: Jewish Australians on Religion, Politics & Culture* (Black Inc., 2006), “Will the Centre Hold?”, pp.3ff.

¹⁰ See David Berger, “Jewish-Christian Relations: A Jewish Perspective”, in Naomi W. Cohen, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish-Christian Relations in the United States: Imagery and Reality* (New York University Press, 1990), pp.346f, on this theme.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.333: “...there is an uncomfortable imbalance in the structure of Jewish-Christian discussion, and one can only admire those Christian participants who are genuinely interested in revising certain elements of Christian theology without expecting much change on the Jewish side.... Often Jews are simply responding to Christian questions about the effect of certain doctrines, and on such occasions they are acting as what one prominent rabbi has described as a resource for the Christian community.”

¹² *Generation 2:2* (August 1991), p.24 “Christian-Jewish Dialogue? An Exchange”, and contributions by Mark Leibler, John Foster, John Levi, Franklin Littell, Ronald Lubofsky, Shirley Sedawie, David Rosen, Robert Anderson and Blu Greenberg (named as in the Table of Contents, without titles).

¹³ See David Berger, “Jewish Christian Relations”, *op.cit.*, pp.352f, and also the encouraging approach of Peta Jones Pellach, “Interfaith Dialogue and the State of Israel”, in Fagenblat *et al*, *New Under the Sun*, pp.130ff.

¹⁴ David Berger, *op cit.*, citing a classic article by Henry Siegman, “A Decade of Catholic-Jewish Relations – A Reassessment”, in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 15 (1978), pp.243ff. Following Siegman, Berger says, “Jews and Christians bring different agendas to what is essentially an asymmetrical discussion” (p.330). He goes on to clarify the asymmetry: the Jewish agenda is historical, the Christian agenda is theological.

I experienced this in a vivid manner some years ago, as a member of an interfaith group in Weybridge, Surrey. The group consisted of four Jews and four Catholics. We would meet regularly to discuss themes such as festivals, life rituals and so forth. At one of these meetings, when considering the theme for the next meeting one of the Catholic participants said, Why don't we talk about the symbolism of the Cross? A heavy silence immediately fell on the group. It transpired afterwards that the four Jewish participants had all had the same reaction; for each of us, the Cross represented persecution and prejudice. For the Catholics, of course, it represented salvation and redemption through suffering.

¹⁵ Quoting Ben Zoma in Mishnah *Avot* 4:1.

¹⁶ The comment was made several times at the launch of the CCJ (Victoria) booklet *Judaism in Transition* at Monash University, June 2008.

¹⁷ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, Michael Signer, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*. Available on line at www.dialog.org/dialog/dabru-emet.htm. Dated September 10, 2000.

¹⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, Michael A. Signer, ed., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Westview Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: the New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), especially “Covenantal Partners in a Postmodern World”, pp.49ff.

²⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilisations* (Continuum, 2002).