

THE AGENDA OF *DABRU EMET**

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One of the most remarkable cultural developments over the past half-century has been the growth of interreligious dialogue. Members of religious communities that had, on principle, long avoided courteous communication with each other are now in regular discussion characterized by mutual respect, and the discussions not infrequently involve precisely the points of theological difference that had so long precluded dialogue. These conversations are, of course, symptomatic of a new understanding of religious identity characteristic of modernity, at least in democratic lands. But they have also played a major role in bringing that new relationship into existence and strengthening it, as the participating bodies have spread the new insights and revised images to their memberships through liturgical reform, preaching, and teaching.

Inter-religious dialogue, needless to say, is not without inner tensions. The most important of these concerns the very goal of the enterprise. Given the history of religiously inspired animosity and contempt to be overcome if dialogue is to develop and continue—a history that includes unspeakable acts of violence from some parties—it is tempting to adopt a model of conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation as the basis for the conversations. The goal in this case would be to come to agreement, rather in the manner of two countries seeking to bury the hatchet or of a couple going into marriage counseling in hopes of replacing a contentious relationship with one

* A shorter variant of this essay appeared as “How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Commentary* 112:5 (December, 2001), pp. 31-37. I thank the editors of *Commentary* for permission to republish sections of that article here. An extended discussion with critics and supporters of the article appears as “Controversy: Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Commentary* 113:4 (2002), pp. 8, 10, 12, 14, 16-21. A largely *ad hominem* response, based on a misquotation, appears in David Novak, “Instinctive Repugnance,” in *First Things* 123 (May, 2002), pp. 12-14. See the ensuing letters in *First Things* 125 (August/September, 2002), pp. 8-11. Dr. Novak declined to respond here.

characterized by empathy and mutual support. When this is the model, the commonalities will be stressed and the differences minimized, neglected, or denied altogether. For the latter are correctly seen as sources of division, and division is then viewed as dangerous. Transposed into the world of religion, Rodney King's plea, "Can't we all just get along?" can thus (at least in the minds of the less subtle or the less theologically committed) quickly become "Aren't we all just saying the same thing?"

When the answer is affirmative, the dialogue may seem to have reached its goal, but the expense is deceptively great, so great that the whole enterprise is, in fact, imperiled. For dialogue on these terms quickly turns into a monologue, as each side simply phrases in its distinctive idiom what is, in fact, the common belief of all involved. Religious difference, once a matter of the deepest beliefs about the most important and universal truths, is thus rapidly downgraded to a matter of mere vocabulary. In this way, conflicting truths can all be held to be valid, only for different communities, so that everybody is right, no mutual critique is possible, and good relations will obtain—at the expense, of course, of the theological core of each community. This assumption is rarely articulated, to be sure, but it does underlie the practice of inter-faith dialogue in more than a few instances.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to this self-defeating model based on conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation.¹ The alternative, too, seeks good relations and requires each community to confront its misunderstandings of the other and the often-grievous results that these have had. At the same time, however, it also insists on the importance of the theological core of each tradition and requires both dialogue partners to reckon with the full import of the other's theology, even when it not only contradicts but also critiques one's own. In this model, in other words, the differences, no less than the commonalities, must be brought to the fore, for without them the full truth of the individual religious traditions and the relationship between them will remain concealed. In this more traditional and

¹ The theory of dialogue to which I adhere is laid out excellently in Leora Batnitzky, "Dialogue as Judgment, Not Mutual Affirmation: A New Look at Franz Rosenzweig's Dialogical Philosophy," in *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999), pp. 523-544, esp. 537-540. Contrary to what she suggests, however, I do not adhere to the position that "it is best not to engage in dialogue on theological issues" (p. 540). My view, rather, is that we deeply compromise such dialogue when we make reconciliation or mutual affirmation its objective.

more theological understanding of dialogue, failure to come to an agreement need not mean the dialogue has failed. It may mean that it has succeeded.

I

Most Christians and nearly all Jews accept that one of the most positive consequences of interreligious dialogue has been a dramatic reversal in Christian teaching about Judaism and the Jews over the past several decades. The classical view, which has roots in the New Testament, portrayed Judaism as, at best, a preparation for the full and final truth that is the Christian gospel. In rejecting the gospel, the Jews proved unable to recognize the import of their own scripture and took upon themselves the role of enemies of the God who authored it. The ultimate example of this enmity was the Jews' unjust killing of their own messiah, a crime for which they must pay throughout their generations. "His blood be on us, and on our children," cries the Jewish crowd to Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, in the Gospel according to Matthew (27:25). Their payment entailed not only the loss of God's favor (and their corollary replacement by the new chosen people, the Church), but also the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (held to have been prophesied by Jesus himself) and exile from the promised land into the realms of the gentile nations. Indeed, at least from the time of St. Augustine (early fifth century C.E.), the continued existence of the Jews in a state of degradation served as a proof of Christianity. "The Jews, against whom the blood of Jesus Christ calls out," Pope Innocent III wrote in 1208, "although they ought not to be killed, lest the Christian people forget the Divine Law, yet as wanderers they ought to remain upon the earth, until their countenance be filled with shame."²

In the process, Judaism, so the classical Christian view would have it, had become obsolete, superseded by the Christianity to which it had always pointed. Its adherents, missing the meaning of their own practices, concentrated fruitlessly upon external rituals that had lost whatever efficaciousness they had once had, at the expense of the

² Quoted in Malcolm Hay, *Europe and the Jews: The Pressure of Christendom on the People of Israel for 1900 Years* (Boston, 1950), p. 81.

genuine faith of their ancestors. Seeking salvation in their own works rather than in the mysterious grace of God, they became ever more deeply entangled in petty legalism and lacked the means to draw closer to the God who had sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, for their salvation—and the salvation of the entire world. The Jews read their scripture according to its literal, that is, carnal sense and persistently failed even to glimpse the spiritual sense, the sense altogether fulfilled in Jesus and the Church.

The relationship between the theological teachings only roughly sketched above and the treatment of the Jews in Christendom over the centuries is highly complex. On the one hand, the Church generally took a dim view of violence against the Jews, as suggested by Pope Innocent III's remarks. On the other hand, persistent accusation, recrimination, and defamation took their toll, one paid, in this case, in blood. The bridge between theology and violence is chillingly evident in Martin Luther's pamphlet, *Of the Jews and Their Lies* (1543):

First, their synagogues or Churches should be set on fire, and whatever does not burn up should be covered or spread over with dirt so that no one may ever be able to see a cinder or stone of it. And this ought to be done for the honour of God and of Christianity . . . Secondly, their homes should likewise be broken down and destroyed. For they perpetrate the same things there that they do in their synagogue. For this reason they ought to be put under one roof or in a stable, like gypsies. . . .³

The difference between what Luther here advocates and what his German compatriots put into action in the Holocaust four centuries later (with considerable success) must not be overlooked. Whereas traditional Christian theology inspired the Protestant Reformer's remarks, so that the hoped-for result was violent religious persecution, modern racism motivated the Nazis, so they sought not conversion as the punishment of the Jews, but their unqualified annihilation. The intended victims' beliefs were irrelevant to the genocidal campaign, and it would be simplistic in the extreme to refer to the Holocaust as religious persecution. But it would also strain the historical imagination to claim that nearly two millennia of Christian demonization of Jews and Judaism played no role in laying the groundwork for the Final Solution.

In the wake of the Holocaust, many (but not all) Christian com-

³ Quoted from Martin Gilbert, *Exile and Return: The Emergence of Jewish Statehood* (Philadelphia and New York, 1978), p. 20.

munions have engaged in a soul-searching reexamination of the teaching of contempt that was so long dominant in their thinking about the Jews. The result has been a series of statements that reverse, or at least severely limit the classic theology. In most cases, these statements affirm the family connection of Judaism and Christianity, graciously acknowledging both the Church's indebtedness to Judaism (especially for the set of scriptures it received from the Jews) and the continuing validity of the older tradition even after Jesus. In some instances, apologies are proffered for the history of persecutions, including, explicitly or implicitly, the Holocaust. Especially moving was the image of Pope John Paul II—who stood in line of succession to Innocent III and a long line of ancient, medieval, and modern despisers of the Jews—politely visiting the Great Synagogue of Rome and praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

It was inevitable that the changes in Christian attitudes toward Judaism would alter the very fabric of relations between the two communities. To the extent that Jewish attitudes toward Christianity were premised upon Christian animosity, these attitudes could not but be affected by the new situation (except, of course, among those Jews who live in self-enclosed communities opposed to change as a point of religious principle). Furthermore, it is understandable that Christians, having undergone a painful critical reevaluation of their own traditions (including their scriptures and even the presentation of Jesus in them), would want to know the Jews' reactions to all this. Are the regrets accepted, or do the Jews still hold them responsible for past persecutions? Do Jews acknowledge that the two communities are members of the same larger spiritual grouping, or do they see Christians as a religiously alien group, no closer to them in belief and practice than Hindus and Buddhists? And for those Christians for whom interfaith dialogue is an important part of their missionary agenda, it would be eminently important to learn whether any softening in Jewish attitudes toward the Church and its gospel were taking place.

II

In the early 1990s, the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore assembled a group of professors of Jewish Studies to pursue the question of a Jewish understanding of Christianity (the same organization had already been involved in the reverse project, the

reassessment of Judaism by Christian scholars). Out of these consultations there emerged in September, 2000, “A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity” entitled *Dabru Emet* (“Speak the truth,” after the words of the prophet Zechariah [8:16], “Speak the truth to one another.”). Four able and highly regarded academics authored the statement,⁴ and hundreds other scholars and rabbis have signed it. Published in the *New York Times* and numerous other venues, it has since attracted vast attention, most of it extremely positive.⁵

Dabru Emet essentially consists of eight theses of one sentence apiece (each of which is then followed by a brief explanatory paragraph):

- *Jews and Christians worship the same God.*
- *Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book—the Bible (what Jews call “Tanakh” and Christians call the “Old Testament”).*
- *Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.*
- *Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.*
- *Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.*
- *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.*
- *Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.*⁶

The claim that “Jews and Christians worship the same God” is more daring and more innovative than appears at first glance. Historically, it would not, to be sure, have met with much dissent among Christians. However much they have believed Jewish modes of worship to be literal, carnal, and obsolete, Christian orthodoxy early on anathematized the belief that theirs was a higher (and thus different) God from that of the Jews and their scriptures. But here—as generally in Jewish-Christian relations—asymmetry reigns, and simple reciprocity is a dangerous course indeed. For historically, Jews have not always been convinced that Christians worship their God. Maimonides,

⁴ Tikva Frymer-Kensky (University of Chicago); David Novak (University of Toronto); Peter Ochs (University of Virginia); and Michael Signer (University of Notre Dame).

⁵ Not long after the statement was issued, there appeared a supporting volume edited by its four authors and David Fox Sandmel, *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, 2000).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xx. All citations from *Dabru Emet* in this article are taken from these pages.

for example, the great Sephardic legal authority and philosopher of the twelfth century, explicitly classifies Christianity as idolatry, thus forbidding contact with Christians of the sort permitted with practitioners of other, non-idolatrous religions.⁷ In the medieval Ashkenazic world as well, some authorities interpreted the monotheistic affirmation of the *Shema*, the mandatory daily declaration of Jewish faith, as an outright denial of the Christianity doctrine of the Trinity.⁸

Here, the issue is even more basic than the familiar questions of whether Jesus was the messiah and of whether the Torah is still in effect or superseded by the gospel: It is a question of the identity of God himself. For Orthodox Christianity sees Jesus not only as a spokesman for God, in the manner of a Jewish prophet, but also and more importantly as an incarnation—nay, the definitive and unsurpassable incarnation—of the God of Israel. In the words of the Nicene Creed (recited liturgically in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and many Protestant Churches to this day), Jesus is “true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made.” *Dabru Emet*, like most participants in Jewish-Christian dialogue, speaks as if Jews and Christians agree about God, but disagree about Jesus. It overlooks the key fact that in one very real sense, orthodox Christians think Jesus *is* God. For in the traditional Christian theology, God was *always* trinitarian, three-personed from all eternity to all eternity, and did not become so when the Second Person (the Son) became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

One would never guess this from *Dabru Emet*, which lacks any reference to the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation. In an essay in the supporting volume, however, one of its authors, Peter Ochs, does address the issue. In essence, he argues that Christianity overlaps with Judaism but also adds to it elements that “belong to a religion other than Judaism and are incompatible with what it means for a Jew to live according to the dictates of Jewish tradition.” These additions do not, in his judgment, have “behavioral consequences that would violate Jewish beliefs or the Noahide laws [which Judaism expects all gentiles to obey].”⁹

⁷ Commentary on the M. A.Z. 1:1.

⁸ See Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Springfield, 1961), pp. 18-19.

⁹ Peter Ochs, “The God of Jews and Christians,” in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, et al., eds., *Judaism*, pp. 60-61.

Even if we concede Ochs' point, however, we still must ask about the ensuing implications for the unqualified claim that "Jews and Christians worship the same God." Surely, if God is known from his biblical story, those who want to understand the God of Christians can never relegate the New Testament (which is also unmentioned in *Dabru Emet*) to the status of a set of harmless superfluities.¹⁰ Rather, they must openly acknowledge that the additions that that testament makes to Jewish tradition are indispensable to the Christian concept of God, for, without them, God is less fully known—or so the logic of Christian belief dictates. To do that, however, *Dabru Emet* would have to reckon openly and honestly with the key doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity that it studiously neglects.

As it happens, it is precisely that traditional Christian theology that enabled some Jewish authorities already in the Middle Ages to exonerate Christians of the accusation of idolatry that others had preferred against them. Thus, twelfth century French authorities ruled that a Jew could accept the validity of the oath of Christians because even though the latter mention Jesus, this is not the name of an idolatrous god:

For they mean the Maker of Heaven, and although they associate the Name of Heaven [i.e., God] and something else, we do not find it is forbidden to Gentiles to make such an association.¹¹

Like *Dabru Emet*, this position (which grew in influence over the centuries, generally eclipsing the alternative) acknowledges "Jews and Christians worship the same God." But unlike *Dabru Emet*, it takes seriously the aspects of Christian theology that had led other authorities to classify Christianity as idolatry, and, what is more, it explains why, in the words of *Dabru Emet*, "Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews." The explanation lies precisely in the whiff of idolatry to which *Dabru Emet*, with its unqualified and a-historical affirmation of "the same God," makes no allusion. The issue is not about a viable choice versus one that is less viable. It is about religious truth. It is about the nature of the God of Israel.¹²

¹⁰ See Michael Goldberg, "God, Action, Narrative: Which Narrative, Action, God?" in *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988), pp. 39-56. Note also his book *Jews and Christians, Getting our Stories Straight: The Exodus and the Passion-Resurrection* (Nashville, 1985).

¹¹ Tos. to B. San. 63b. See also Katz, *Exclusiveness*, pp. 34-36, and David Ellenson, "A Jewish View of the Christian God: Some Cautionary and Hopeful Remarks," in Frymer-Kensky, *Judaism*, pp. 72-75.

¹² It is significant that Tosaphot here does not use the term "God of Israel," as

The eminent Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg sees in the first thesis of *Dabru Emet* a repudiation of the traditional Jewish theology of the “association” (*shittuf*) and a welcome (to him) concession on the part of the Jews that “the trinitarian doctrine of God is no longer considered a violation of biblical monotheism.”¹³ In my view, he correctly identifies the tendency but gives the statement too much credit, since, as I have been at pains to point out, it nowhere mentions the doctrines that Pannenberg finds it to repudiate boldly. A statement that either faithfully upheld the traditional idea of the *shittuf* or explicitly opposed it would have been more defensible than the studied ambiguity of *Dabru Emet*. Either alternative would have taken Christianity more seriously.

Partial and misleading as *Dabru Emet* is on God/Jesus, it altogether neglects to mention the personage whom hundreds of millions of those orthodox Christians (principally in the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church) call the “Mother of God”—the Virgin Mary. Indeed, the divinity of the human Jesus was so important to the fathers of the Third Ecumenical Council (431) that they placed an anathema on anyone who failed to confess that “the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God.”¹⁴ One can see why *Dabru Emet* avoids Mary altogether: If “Jews and Christians worship the same God,” then why do the Jews neglect his mother when so many Christians venerate and serve her? And if the Jews are right that in no sense whatsoever does God have a mother, what does *that* say about the doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation, and Mary that the early Church councils were so careful to define and protect? Again, it will not do to say that Jews and orthodox Christians worship the same God but respectfully disagree about Mary. For, according to the orthodox Christian theology, what is unique about Mary is precisely that she is the Mother of God.

What, then, are we to make of the fact that “A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity,” as *Dabru Emet* is subtitled, takes no account of doctrines central to historic Christianity and very much alive among hundreds of millions of contemporary Christians as well?

Dabru Emet does, but restricts its language to the term “Maker of Heaven.” I thank Rabbi Joel Poupko for bringing this to my attention.

¹³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, in “A Symposium on *Dabru Emet*,” in *Pro Ecclesia* 11:1 (Winter 2002), p. 8.

¹⁴ Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis and London, 1957), p. 50.

Whatever its authors' and signatories' intentions, the statement leaves the clear impression that it is directed only at those Christians for whom (whatever their ecclesial affiliations) the classical creedal statements about Christology and Mariology have lost their theological centrality, perhaps even their fundamental credibility. Christians for whom the ancient doctrines are not so important or an outright embarrassment are hardly likely to protest their omission. Indeed, they are likely to be happy to see an external group, rabbis and Jewish scholars to boot, confirming that their version of Christianity really is authentic. As for Christians for whom the classic doctrines remain important, many of them seem happy to find that the Jews have, without the slightest hint of reservation, at last accepted a claim that orthodox Christians have made for millennia, "Jews and Christians worship the same God."

A similar partiality of vision, a similar tendency to neglect rather than reassess historic points of discord, informs the second thesis of *Dabru Emet*:

Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book—the Bible (what Jews call "Tanakh" and Christians call the "Old Testament").

The awkward parenthetical gloss already points to the problem. Jews do not consider the New Testament to be the "Bible," and Christians do not refer to the Old Testament alone as the "Bible."¹⁵ In fact, the very equation the gloss makes between the "Tanakh" and the "Old Testament" is a half-truth. The Old Testament of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches includes Jewish books that never attained canonical status in Rabbinic Judaism (and, in one case, a book that the rabbis seemed to have removed from the canon). The order of the Tanakh and the Old Testament is also different in revealing ways. The Tanakh in its current form (the order of some biblical books was notoriously unstable into Talmudic times) ends, for example, with the Persian emperor Cyrus' decree in Chronicles that Jews may return to their homeland, where God has charged him to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. This is an unmistakable anticipation of the passion for return to the Land of Israel that has characterized Jewish thought. The Old Testament, in con-

¹⁵ On the theological import of the terminology, see Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, 1993), especially pp. 1-32.

trast, ends with the prophet Malachi's prediction that God will send the prophet Elijah "before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord." The latter arrangement makes a nice bridge to John the Baptist's heralding of Jesus in the New Testament.¹⁶

We must also reckon with the different priorities with which Judaism and Christianity have traditionally interpreted those scriptures that they hold in common. From the onset, Christians have been especially attentive to two books in particular, Psalms and Isaiah, priorities that can still be detected to this day.¹⁷ In traditional Jewish thought, however, everything after the Pentateuch results from a lower order of revelation and exercises a lesser authority, so that Leviticus, for example, commands more attention than Psalms and Isaiah combined. (Even when the rabbis turn their exegetical skills toward the non-Pentateuchal books, they often interpret them as commenting on the Pentateuch). This, too, renders the claim that "Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book" highly problematic.

But even if we assume that Jews and Christians have "the same book," the second thesis of *Dabru Emet* still skirts over essential points. For the Tanakh and the Old Testament are, in major ways, subordinated to other elements in their respective traditions. In Christianity, there is, as we have noted, a tradition, extending back to the origins of the new faith itself, that the true meaning of the Jewish scriptures is revealed in and by Jesus, and the Jews thus misread their own Bible. Paul could not be more explicit:

Therefore, since we have such hope, we act very boldly and not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites could not look intently at the cessation of what was fading. Rather, their thoughts were rendered dull, for to the present day the same veil remains unlifted when they read the old covenant, because through Christ it was taken away. To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed.¹⁸

Paul does indeed cast his argument as an exegesis of the Jewish scriptures, but he does not simply "interpret the Bible differently," as *Dabru Emet* blandly puts it. Rather, he delivers a broadside against the very

¹⁶ See especially Luke 1:8-17.

¹⁷ See Jon D. Levenson, "Is Brueggemann Really a Pluralist?" in *Harvard Theological Review* 93 (July, 2000), pp. 292.

¹⁸ 2 Cor. 3:12-16. Unless otherwise noted, all references to the New Testament are from the New American Bible.

way the Jews (and perhaps their Christian sympathizers) read that Bible, that is, non-christologically. The supporting assertion of *Dabru Emet* that “we each take away similar lessons” from our Tanakh/Old Testament is not false. It simply omits to mention that on certain fundamental points, the lessons we take away are not only different, but also mutually exclusive. To be sure, it can be salutary to draw attention to the similarities between religious traditions, for this can help diminish misunderstandings, some of them potentially fatal. But it is the differences, indeed the mutually exclusive truth claims, that are the challenge for interreligious conversation, and it is the differences that *Dabru Emet* consistently neglects. Its respect for Christianity is directly proportional to the extent to which Christianity can be made to look like Judaism.

In its paragraph about the Bible, *Dabru Emet* also passed up an opportunity to correct one of the most common Christian misconceptions about Judaism, that its sole authority is the Old Testament. Had the statement taken a different and more accurate tack, however, pointing to the importance of the Oral Torah (i.e., Mishnaic and subsequent Rabbinic teaching), it would have undermined its claim that the two communities have “the same book,” from which they “take away similar lessons.” In fact, some affirmations of the importance of the Oral Torah parallel Christian claims for the greater importance of the gospel:

When the Holy One (blessed be He) said to Moses, “Write down [these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and Israel],” Moses asked that the Mishnah be put into writing. Since the Holy One (blessed be He) foresaw that the nations of the world would translate the Torah, read it in Greek, and say, “We are Israel,” and up to this point the scales are equally balanced [between the Jewish and the Gentile claimants to the status of Israel], the Holy One (blessed be He) said to the nations, “You say that you are My children. What I know is that those who have My secret with them—They are My children. And what is it? It is the Mishnah [i.e., teaching] which was given orally.”¹⁹

Here, the key element is not the common scripture, but the element that is *not* shared, God’s “secret,” the means, that is, for arbitrating between the different readings of the same text. In sum, much of what Judaism and Christianity share in the matter of their common scrip-

¹⁹ Tanh. *ki-tissa*’ 33.

tures is a rivalry over how they should be read and who is now the “Israel” that is central to them and bears the indefectible promise they repeatedly make. Were it not for the commonality, the rivalry could not develop. But to speak only of commonalities, ignoring the rivalry or degrading it to the level of mere “differences,”²⁰ is to miss essential aspects of scriptural reading and interpretation in the two related traditions.

Consider as an illustration one of the “similar lessons” that *Dabru Emet* thinks Jews and Christians derive from their common “Bible:” “God established a covenant with the people Israel.” That covenant is first announced to Abraham in Genesis 15, following a report that the childless future patriarch trusted in God’s unlikely promise to grant him innumerable progeny. The key verse here reads, “And because he put his trust in the Lord, He reckoned it to his merit.”²¹ Two chapters later, God again announces the covenant with Abraham, only this time ordaining that it shall have a sign, the mandatory circumcision of males of the covenant people. And only several generations later is a covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai under the leadership of Moses.

Early in his career, Paul, the “apostle to the Gentiles,” who had never known Jesus personally, found himself confronted by Jewish adherents of the new religion who had, and who insisted that Gentile men entering it must undergo circumcision and carry out other commandments of the Torah—not an unreasonable demand, given the example of Jesus himself, a Torah-observant Jew. For Paul, seeking to oppose this position, the chronology of covenants in the Torah was a godsend. He understood Gen. 15:6 to mean that God reckoned Abraham as righteous purely on the basis of his faith, even before he became circumcised. Faith, in other words, could substitute for the commandments of the Torah, or, in Paul’s own words at the end of his career, “It was not through the Law that the promise was made to Abraham and his descendants that he would inherit the world, but through the righteousness that comes from faith.”²²

²⁰ Thus *Dabru Emet*: “Jews and Christians interpret the Bible differently on many points. Such differences must always be respected.” See also Ellenson, “A Jewish,” p. 76, who counsels Jews to “search . . . to affirm elements of commonality that mark these two faith traditions.”

²¹ Gen. 15:6. Unless otherwise noted, all Hebrew Bible translations are from the *Tanakh* (Philadelphia, 5748/1988).

²² Rom. 4:13. Departing from the New American Bible, I have capitalized “Law” to bring out the fact that Paul is speaking about the Torah.

At first glance, this may look like an intramural Christian quarrel of only peripheral relevance to Judaism, since the immediate issue concerns circumcision and Torah-observance, neither of which Judaism requires of outsiders. On this reading, we simply see two different religions, related, to be sure, and with a common origin—even “the same book”—but with no need to critique each other or to challenge the other’s reading of the shared scriptures. And just so have some New Testament scholars interpreted the situation. The rub is that in Paul’s theology, Abraham serves as a model not only for Gentiles, or for Christians but also for all who wish to belong to Israel:

For not all who are of Israel are Israel, nor are they all children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but “It is through Isaac that descendants shall bear your name” (Gen. 21:12). This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.²³

Just as it is faith rather than circumcision that enables a man to attain the lofty status of Abrahamic descent, so it is faith rather than birth that determines who truly belongs to Israel (Paul sometimes vacillates on this). And the faith of which Paul speaks is not some vague existential stance, but precisely the faith in Jesus, the very thing that his Jewish kinsmen, to his great disappointment and annoyance, have not accepted, preferring instead their Torah and its commandments:

What then shall we say? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have achieved it, that is, righteousness that comes from faith; but that Israel, who pursued the law of righteousness, did not attain to that law? Why not? Because they did it not by faith, but as if it could be done by works. They stumbled over the stone that causes stumbling, as it is written:

“Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion
that will make people stumble
and a rock that will make them fall,
and whoever believes in him shall not be put to shame.”²⁴

Here Abraham, today often called the common father of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, serves a key role in advancing the claim that the gospels have replaced the Torah (which, properly interpreted,

²³ Rom. 9:6-8, quoting Gen. 21:12.

²⁴ Rom. 9:30-33, quoting Is. 28:16. I have retained the New American Bible translation of the latter verse, which fits better with Paul’s particular exegesis.

always pointed to it and partook of its nature) and that the Church has replaced the Jewish people, the natural descendants of Abraham. This is, to be sure, a theology from which Paul backs away in a few places and one that Christians involved in dialogue with Jews are usually (but not always) exceedingly eager to renounce. For to the extent that the main outlines of Paul's theology remain in force, Christianity and Judaism become not simply different members of the same family (as *Dabru Emet* would have it), but rather, in the words of the late historian Jacob Katz, "conflicting exponents of the same tradition"—a tradition correctly interpreted by the Christians and profoundly misinterpreted by the Jews.²⁵

Not surprisingly, much of the traditional Jewish theology of Abraham moves in a very different—in fact, opposite—direction. Two centuries before the emergence of Christianity, the idea had already appeared that Abraham observed norms only disclosed later, in the time of Moses, thus practicing Sinaitic religion even before Sinai.²⁶ As an addendum to a tractate in the Mishnah (compiled about 200 C.E.), would later put it, "We find that our father Abraham carried out the whole Torah before it had been given."²⁷ Whether by design or not, this view undercuts the Pauline use of Abraham as an object lesson in the sufficiency of faith at the expense of the specific norms of the Torah (Paul was not opposed to good works in general or reluctant to characterize those he thought lacking in them). For in this interpretation of the first Jew, the very difference between the Abrahamic and Mosaic dispensations dissolves. Elsewhere in Rabbinic literature, we find the idea that Abraham did not observe all 613 commandments that the rabbis found in the Torah, but only the seven basic norms known to Noah (and incumbent upon all humanity, Jewish and Gentile), as well as the commandment of circumcision enjoined upon him in Genesis.²⁸ In this case, however, the point is that the Mosaic is the highest dispensation, higher than the Noahide and higher than the Abrahamic upon which Paul (and later Christians) built so much. In making this evaluation, Rabbinic thought inverts the Pauline model, giving fullest praise to the Mosaic or Sinaitic mode of spirituality and placing the observance of commandments (rather

²⁵ Katz, *Exclusiveness*, p. 4.

²⁶ See Jubilees 21, e.g.

²⁷ M. Qid. 4:14.

²⁸ See B. Yoma 28b and Pes. Rab. Kah. 12:1.

than faith, grace, spirit, or the like) first in importance. Given this move, the total absence in *Dabru Emet* of the words “law” and “commandment” is deeply disappointing, but, as we shall see, not without explanation.

But what does all this say about the claim in *Dabru Emet* that among the “similar lessons” that Jews and Christians derive from their common “Bible” is the idea that “God established a covenant with the people Israel”? We have already seen that the classic Christological pronouncements render the Christian concept of “God” problematic for Jews in ways of which *Dabru Emet* seems unaware. As for “covenant,” the two traditions differ markedly even on so fundamental a question as to what commandments, if any, that relationship requires. They also differ on the worth and viability of that covenant (the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews claims Jesus mediated a “new covenant” vastly superior to the old one, which was of only temporary duration anyway).²⁹ And what of “Israel”? Surely, we must take note that for all their striking similarities, the two sets of ancient normative books, the New Testament and the Oral Torah, often present diametrically opposed understandings of that all-important term. For the Church early on claimed (with very few exceptions) not to share the status of Israel with the Jews, but to have supplanted the Jews in the role of God’s chosen people, and, until rather recently, Christian tradition was all but unanimous in seconding (and even hardening) that ominous judgment. Similarly, Rabbinic Judaism was adamant that whatever spiritual dignity the nations could achieve (and many rabbis thought they could achieve much indeed), “Israel” comprised only the Jews—an extended natural family whose males, whether born or converted into that people, are marked by the covenantal sign of circumcision. Gentiles who “have a place in the world-to-come,” to use the Rabbinic terminology, are still gentiles and not “Israel.”

This dispute between Christianity and Judaism in antiquity could take place only because the two communities worked from common scriptures that reported that “God established a covenant with the people Israel,” in the words of *Dabru Emet*. The commonality served, however, not to minimize opposition, but to make dispute possible, and it now serves—and appropriately serves—to make Jewish dialogue with Christians vastly more encompassing and interesting than the dialogue with adherents of other religions with which Jews have

²⁹ Heb. 8:6, 8, 13.

less in common and therefore also less to challenge. Much of what is at stake theologically in a dialogue grounded in these ancient sources disappears when the two disputants are depicted as simply different and therefore out of each other's way. When *Dabru Emet* affirms in a later paragraph that "Christians know and serve God through Jesus Christ and the Christian tradition. Jews know and serve God through Torah and the Jewish tradition," it achieves the desired comity by a kind of demarcation of spheres of influence: Jesus Christ for the Christians, Torah for the Jews. In the process, however, it has radically changed the meaning of both "Jesus Christ" and "Torah."

In the decades since the Holocaust, to be sure, many Christians have been courageously reassessing and even altering their theology so as to give a positive evaluation to Judaism and Jewish survival. In some instances, the result has been a theology of two covenants of equal worth, one for Jews and one for Christians, and this seems to be the model for *Dabru Emet's* bold affirmation of both "Jesus Christ" and "Torah" as ways to "know and serve God." The affirmation is, however, in serious tension with the prior affirmation of a common "Bible." For however else they may differ, the Tanakh and the Old Testament know of only one Israel, only one chosen people in covenant with God, or to put it in more biblical language, only one son with the status of the firstborn. Ironically, to the extent that the two traditions turn either to their putatively common Bible or their distinctive post-biblical traditions, they raise problems for the dual covenant theology. So, for all the appeal to common roots, the paramount and governing claim of *Dabru Emet* is on behalf of a modern theology that relativizes Judaism and Christianity in ways that those ancient sources do not accept.

The third of the eight affirmations of *Dabru Emet* tells us that "Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel." No surprise there: Since many Christians respect the Jewish claim (as the paragraph later states), who would deny they "can"? Rather, it looks as though the statement really wants to tell Christians that they *should* do so. Thus the supporting paragraph states that "[a]s members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised—and given—to Jews," and it applauds those "who support the State of Israel for reasons more profound than mere politics." The alternative position—that the Jews forfeited the land promise by not accepting the Church's claims about Jesus—is,

as we have seen, the traditional one. It is also very much alive and well today, even in some evangelical quarters. Here is an excerpt from a recent statement issued by Knox Theological Seminary and signed by hundreds of evangelicals:

The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the "Holy Land" cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel were fulfilled under Joshua. The New Testament speaks clearly and prophetically about the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70. No New Testament writer foresees a regathering of ethnic Israel in the land, as did the prophets of the Old Testament after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C. Moreover the land promises of the Old Covenant are consistently and deliberately expanded in the New Testament to show the universal dominion of Jesus. . . .³⁰

As biblical exegesis, this contemporary restatement of the classic supersessionist theology is not without its problems, of course. After all, the God of the Old Testament does repeatedly assign the land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel "to possess forever," as Exod. 32:13 puts it, and not only until the time of Joshua or some still later dispensation. But so to argue is to miss the larger claim of the Christian theology underlying the Knox statement, the claim that the New Testament supersedes the Old, fulfilling and reassigning its promises. It stands to reason that Jews would object to this move, and, in fact, much Jewish-Christian dialogue has long consisted of Jews' trying to persuade their Christian interlocutors to give more weight to the Old Testament and less to the New. And such an entry into an intramural argument among Christians is precisely what *Dabru Emet*, for all its rhetoric about "a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations," is undertaking here: It is taking a stand in favor of one Christian theology over another. The favored theology is, to be sure, both much more congenial to Judaism and upheld by millions of Christians, evangelical and other. But does *Dabru Emet* really maintain that Religion A should change its theology simply because members of Religion B find it unworthy of belief or offensive? If so, what should Jews do with Hindu or

³⁰ Cited in Richard John Neuhaus, "The Public Square," in *First Things* 134 (June/July, 2003), p. 66. Knox Theological Seminary is associated with the Presbyterian Church in American (not to be confused with the Presbyterian Church USA).

Buddhist reservations about Jewish monotheism, to give only two of dozens of similar cases facing *them*?

It must not be missed that supersessionist theology is not necessarily incompatible with the belief that God's gift of the Land of Israel to the Jews is still in effect (which the Knox statement denies). In this connection, I think of those Christians (hardly few in number) who support Israel because they see the ingathering of the Jewish exiles as a necessary prelude to the second coming of Jesus and the conversion of all Israel to Christianity. Should Jews applaud these Christians for "support[ing] the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics," or is there something deeply problematic in their theology that Jews (and Christians as well) need to face? On this, *Dabru Emet* is strangely silent.

It is on more secure ground when, in its next thesis, it affirms that "*Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.*" All one has to do to see the degree of moral commonality of Jews and Christians in bold relief is to compare the traditional ethic of the two religions to the materialism and egocentrism, not to mention the narcissistic body culture, of secular America. But "the moral principles of Torah" is an odd phrase in this context, since Judaism has not maintained that Torah obligates non-Jews or that Torah (as opposed to wisdom) is found among them. The phrase is similarly problematic from the other side, for exceedingly few are the Christians who ask of themselves, "Are my morals in line with Torah?" Instead, they are more likely to ask, "What would Jesus do?" (hence "WWJD" on bracelets, pens, bumper-stickers, T-shirts, etc). Indeed, a tradition of Christian thought that goes back nearly two thousand years sees Jesus' moral principles as higher and better than those of the Torah, an improvement or a radicalization and not just a restatement.³¹ What this indicates is that there is a moral debate alongside the theological debate between Jesus and Christians, and that historically Christians have usually seen Jesus as instituting a new ethic at odds to one degree or another with that of the Old Testament. In addition, they have not infrequently been critical of commandments themselves as the vehicles of moral imagination, preferring love or the Spirit in their stead, the laws written upon heart, as the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it (following

³¹ E.g., Matt. 5:21-48.

Jeremiah),³² over those written in the Torah. And so, even when the substantive morality is the same, the principle of derivation often is not, again rendering the last two words in the phrase “the moral principles of Torah” in *Dabru Emet* highly problematic.

A more appropriately worded thesis would have invoked the “seven commandments of the descendants of Noah,” those basic norms that the Talmudic rabbis thought incumbent upon Jews and Gentiles alike.³³ To the extent that Christianity promotes adherence to those commandments, a longstanding Jewish tradition maintains it aids its believers in attaining a proper relationship with God (which is very much open to Gentiles and not just to Jews).³⁴ Or in Rabbinic parlance, it helps them merit “a share in the world-to-come.” Amazingly, “the seven commandments of the descendants of Noah” go unmentioned in *Dabru Emet* (unless the “moral principles of Torah” is a garbled reference to them). Had the statement followed a traditional line of thinking, it could have powerfully affirmed the spiritual and moral integrity of Christianity while simultaneously avoiding the (Jewishly) highly inappropriate affirmation of “Jesus Christ” as a way “to know and serve God,” alongside Torah. In so doing, it could have built on a long history of medieval and early modern Jewish authorities who rendered highly positive evaluations of Christianity without subscribing to Christian beliefs, resorting to a two-covenant theology that has no basis in the classical Jewish sources (whatever the case in Christianity), or falling into outright relativism.

A similar refusal to face the full measure of difference between Jews and Christians appear even in the finely crafted and definitely balanced statement on the Holocaust, which merits quotation in full:

Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out. Too many Christians participated in, or were sympathetic to, Nazi atrocities against Jews. Other Christians did not protest sufficiently against these atrocities. But Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity. If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians. We recognize with gratitude those Christians who risked or sacrificed their

³² Heb. 8:10, after Jer. 31:33.

³³ B. San. 56a-56b.

³⁴ See David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (New York, 1983).

lives to save Jews during the Nazi regime. With that in mind, we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people. We applaud those Christians who reject this teaching of contempt, and we do not blame them for the sins committed by their ancestors.

On the one hand, we here find a forthright acknowledgement that not only individual Christians, but also Christianity itself played a role in making the Holocaust possible. On the other, we see an ungrudging recognition that some Christians resisted the Nazis at the time and many since then, both as individuals and as churches, have repudiated the traditional anti-Semitism out of which Nazism, for all its romanticization of Nordic paganism, partly grew. The problem, rather, comes with the speculation, reported as something much more certain, that, "If the Nazi extermination of the Jews had been fully successful, it would have turned its murderous rage more directly to Christians." Here again, the statement assimilates Jews and Christians much too readily.

The intended "Nazi extermination of the Jews" was, as we have noted, based in racism. Whether the victims believed in Judaism in any sense was not pertinent to their murderers' plan. People of Jewish ancestry who were altogether secular or who had converted to Christianity were sent to their deaths alongside their more observant kinsmen. In the case of Christians without Jewish ancestors, no such motivation obtained, and it was possible to stay out of the Nazis' way and even (if one's convictions allowed) to support them in full vigor.

Had *Dabru Emet* acknowledged this critical difference, it would have touched upon the subject of a major Christian critique of Judaism. Here, I refer to the fact that Judaism, though it accepts converts, is in the first instance the religion of a kin-group. According to traditional Jewish theology, the Jews are a natural family with a supernatural mission. They are not in the first instance a church, that is, an association of unrelated persons who join together on the basis of shared theology. Especially since the Enlightenment, Christians have often thought of this difference as that between tribalism (Judaism) and universalism (Christianity) and have not been shy about citing Paul's words that "in Christ Jesus . . . there is neither Jew nor Greek"³⁵ against Judaism. That this is a misreading of Paul, and of the whole

³⁵ Gal. 3:26, 28.

question of universalism and particularism,³⁶ need not detain us here. The point is that by assimilating the nature of membership in the Jewish people to the nature of membership in the Church, *Dabru Emet* once again purchases a false commonality at the expense of an honest and frank confrontation of the differences and what they mean.

Dabru Emet not only fails to acknowledge the racist character of the Nazi understanding of the Jews; it compounds the problem by imagining that the Nazis planned a Holocaust-like fate for Christians as well once they succeeded with the Jews. This would, of course, have entailed annihilating about 95% of the European population, something that the Nazis, in fact, never contemplated. It is also to miss the well-known fact that the Nazis had support aplenty in the churches, especially in university theology departments, including a number of influential scholars.³⁷ The effect of *Dabru Emet's* unsupported claim is to make Christians, too, victims of the Holocaust. It presents the Nazi failure to sponsor anti-Christian violence (except in the case of those few believers who spoke out against the regime) as accidental. In short, the Nazis were not, in the first instance, anti-Semitic: They were *anti-religious*. In the face of the historical record, *Dabru Emet* once again conveniently puts Jews and Christians in the same boat—or, to be more precise, on the same train to Auschwitz.

A similar flaw can be seen in the next thesis: “The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.” In this case, the effect is to make Christianity a participant in the events of the last days, events that the two traditions have historically envisioned in ways that are not only different but also incompatible. Why should Jews affirm that the Church will survive at least until God initiates the final redemption? I am very far from suggesting that it will not or that the world would be better off without it. The question, rather, is, why should Jews affirm that God has a commitment to the Church that shall endure until he “redeems the entire world”?

The reverse question is easy to answer—and provides a clue why the drafters of *Dabru Emet* have made the dubious assumption that underlies this thesis. The prologue of this Jewish statement notes that

³⁶ See Jon D. Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism,” in Mark G. Brett, ed., *The Bible and Ethnicity* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 143-69.

³⁷ See Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, 1996), and, more broadly, Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945* (Cambridge, UK, 2003).

its recent Christian counterparts “have declared . . . that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people. . . .” The prime basis for this reform in the New Testament is Paul’s insistence that “God has not rejected his people,” who remain, in fact, “beloved because of the patriarchs” (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). For the gift and the call of God are irrevocable.” This affirmation (by no means Paul’s only position on this, as we have seen) is pro-Jewish but not pro-Judaism. Its point is that God bears with the Jews despite the failure of so many of them to become Christians. “A hardening has come upon Israel in part,” the apostle writes, “until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel will be saved.”³⁸

In response to the recent concentration on these ideas on the part of some Christians (by no means only the liberal ones, incidentally) and the efforts to make them the basis for a positive evaluation of Judaism, it is readily understandable that the Jews would feel the need to reciprocate. The problem is that the relationship is not symmetrical. For classical Judaism (for all its capacity to evaluate Gentiles and Christianity positively) knows of no specific covenant with the *Church*, no parallel, that is, to Paul’s belief in the irrevocable call of the Israelite patriarchs. Without that, the Jewish claim that the Church will survive until God finally redeems the world seems like a thin imitation of the Christian doctrine contrived for the purpose of the dialogue. In many areas of life, reciprocity is a wise policy. In the pursuit of theological truth, however, it represents a dangerous temptation because it presupposes a false symmetry—as does *Dabru Emet* in general.

The penultimate paragraph of the statement, alone phrased in the negative, strikes an oddly defensive note:

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

³⁸ Rom. 11:1-2, 25, 28-29.

Given the position *Dabru Emet* has already articulated, however, the worries it here dismisses require a more convincing response. The risk of amalgamation—whether through syncretism or intermarriage—is especially great if Jews and Christians really do stand in the relationship that *Dabru Emet* describes in its other paragraphs. For the thrust of the statement is to make Judaism and Christianity look very much alike, indeed two peas in the same Judeo-Christian pod. They have, after all, “the same God”—“the God of Israel,” “the same book—the Bible” (from which they “take away similar lessons”), and the same “moral principles”—in fact, “the moral principles of Torah.” Moreover, both religions now appreciate God’s gift of the Land of Israel to the Jews—or at least “can” do so, and, in principle (though not in the deed), both were the targets of the Nazis’ “murderous rage.” Although the statement mentions differences a few times and asks that they be respected, overall it leaves the impression that Judaism and Christianity represent minor variations on a common theme. The truth is that it is hard to come away from *Dabru Emet* without the sense that nearly two thousand years of Jewish-Christian disputation have been based on little more than the narcissism of small differences. What other conclusion can we draw from a statement in which a Judaism without law and commandments puts an unqualified seal of approval on a Christianity without New Testament, Incarnation, Trinity, and Mary?

If the commonalities really are so basic and encompassing, many Jews will rightly wonder why intermarriage, conversion to Christianity, and “a false blending of Judaism and Christianity” are (as their own tradition used to tell them) to be strenuously avoided and counteracted (what sort of “blending” is not “false,” *Dabru Emet* does not tell us). Indeed, the same decades that have witnessed the remarkable rapprochement of Jews and Christians have witnessed a soaring intermarriage rate and a novel and striking acceptance of intermarriage on the part of many Jewish organizations.³⁹ This is not at all to imply that interreligious dialogue has caused the increase of intermarriage and assimilation. It is to say, however, that the strategy *Dabru Emet* takes—stressing (or inventing) commonalities at the expense of mutually exclusive structures and truth-claims—makes syncretism

³⁹ See Jack Wertheimer, “Surrendering to Intermarriage,” in *Commentary* 111:3 (March, 2001), pp. 25-32.

and conversion seem much less dangerous. That need not have deterred the signatories of *Dabru Emet* from speaking the truth about the relationship of Jews and Christians as they see it. But it ought to have given them pause about the claim that doing so poses no risks to Jewish practice and identity. For one teaching common to Judaism and Christianity that *Dabru Emet* omits to mention is that truth-telling on profound issues is not risk-free.

Wolfhart Pannenberg, the eminent Protestant theologian, finds confirmation of the risk-free scenario that *Dabru Emet* puts forth in the “emergence of ‘messianic Jews,’” i.e., “Jews who confess their faith in Jesus the Messiah without leaving the Jewish community and a Jewish way of life.” “Sooner or later Christian-Jewish dialogue will have to take notice of this fact,” he notes, gently chiding the Jewish statement.⁴⁰ Why did *Dabru Emet* not do so? In fact, it did, but to make a point diametrically opposed to Pannenberg’s. “Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews,” it remarks, in a subordinate clause in the paragraph about our worshiping the same God. In other words, those Jews who combine Judaism with Christianity have indeed abandoned the Jewish way of life, and what Pannenberg sees as proof that the new closeness is risk-free *Dabru Emet* sees as a defection from Jewish authenticity. What the Christian views as positive, the Jews view as negative. But, whereas he is willing to recognize it and has a theology that can reckon with it, they simply deny the problem exists, whistling in the dark.

The last of the eight theses of *Dabru Emet*, finally, affirms that “Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.” This gutsy stand has doubtless provoked unimaginable consternation in the camp that advocates that Jews and Christians work separately for injustice and war.

III

What then is the agenda of *Dabru Emet*? In its own formulation, it is “to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity” in light of the fact that that “Christianity has changed dramatically.” The change to which the statement refers is the new respect for

⁴⁰ Pannenberg, in “A Symposium,” p. 9.

Judaism and the discarding of supersessionist theology in a number of Christian communions, large and small. There is, however, another change in Christianity to which *Dabru Emet* responds, a reformulation of Christian faith that removes, or at least emasculates, the elements that put it into conflict with Judaism. I hope to have now demonstrated that the Christianity that this Jewish statement presupposes is, in fact, a Christianity amazingly like Judaism. It is a monotheistic faith based in the Hebrew Bible, respecting the Jewish claim on the land of Israel, adhering to the moral principles of Torah, giving inevitable offense to Nazi murderers, lasting until the final redemption, and in no way challenging Jewish identity and practice. What the Christianity of *Dabru Emet* lacks is the notion is a God who is triune and not simply one, who was definitively incarnate in Jesus Christ, gave a new and more complete revelation in the New Testament, including a basis for morality at odds with the Judaic focus on law and commandments, and called into existence a new Israel, a community not based on genealogy (and therefore immune to genocide, though not to martyrdom, of course) nor promised any particular real estate. The real agenda of *Dabru Emet* is thus not one of dialogue at all. It is one of negotiation. The Jews are making Christians an offer: If you change your religion so as to make it look more like Judaism, we will, without reservation, affirm it alongside Judaism as our fraternal twin. Indeed, we will present Judaism so that it closely resembles the Judaized Christianity that you have produced.

This is an offer that some Christians, whose beliefs *Dabru Emet* accurately reflects, happily accept. For Jews to enter into constructive dialogue with them is exceedingly easy. The challenge of constructive dialogue with the other sort of Christian is much more formidable and more profound. *Dabru Emet* altogether avoids it.

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