LEHRHAUS Over Shabbat

Kedoshim

Vol. 8, Issue 34 • 2 Iyar 5784 / May 10, 2024

Amidst the war unfolding in Israel, we have decided to go forward and continue publishing a variety of articles to provide meaningful opportunities for our readership to engage in Torah during these difficult times.

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY: A STAR-CROSSED AFFAIR?

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Review of Eugene Korn, *Israel and the Nations: The Bible, the Rabbis, and Jewish-Gentile Relations* (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2023).

In his recent book, *Israel and the Nations*, Eugene Korn argues that being a blessing for all (Gen. 12:3) "implies that the Jewish people should engage with gentiles" (1)[1] and that being a covenantal people involves participating "in the unfolding of sacred history" (9) alongside other faiths. His approach is predicated on Noah being given a general covenant followed by Abraham's specific one. As a result, Jewish theology has traditionally divided humanity into three (and only three) categories: "Jews, righteous Noahides whose beliefs dictate that they obey the moral Noahide commandments, and pagans whose beliefs do not respect the basic civil Noahide obligations and who were therefore deemed illicit." This leads to potential opportunities to acknowledge "the legitimacy of religious diversity, the validity of non-Jewish religious forms, and respect for gentiles, all without Jews sacrificing the primacy of their unique status in God's economy or their particularistic Jewish theological convictions" (51-52). Unfortunately, it also risks absorbing traits from other religions that may be detrimental to Judaism's spiritual well-being while alienating potential religious allies. This essay will examine Korn's arguments in conversation with other recent trends attempting to unite Judaism and Christianity against common threats.

[1] All in-text citations are to the book under review.

One of Korn's core ideas is that texts do not define religions. A faith community's essence is instead based on "how the believing community interprets, prioritizes, and lives the meaning of those sacred texts and theologies" (63).[2] This requires embracing "non-absolute systems" of thought that provide "awareness of the finitude of our religious and political conceptions" (93).[3]

Within that framework, Korn argues that "there is no single permanent Jewish theological position on religious diversity and tolerance of the Other" (63) and that it falls on Jews to determine which such mentalities ought to survive. This will "depend greatly on the quality of Jewish relations with gentile religions, persons, and nations" (64). In Israel and North America, Jewish survival and success hinges greatly on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

Korn acknowledges that without limiting Jewish-Christian interaction, "assimilation is unavoidable and both Jews and Judaism are likely to be absorbed totally by the dominant Christian population and culture." Granting limits, Korn asks if today's Christianity still threatens Judaism or if it can be viewed as an ally. "If the former," Korn writes, then "attempts at developing a positive appreciation of Christianity may well imperil distinctive Jewish survival; if the latter, then a more open Jewish theology of Christianity is possible, even desirable." He then outlines the stakes of this decision, writing that "[a]t a time when antisemitism is widespread in the Islamic world, again burgeoning in Europe and America, and no longer an embarrassment in radical European leftist circles and in academia, official Christian rejection of antisemitism functions as a strong positive force throughout the world" (119-

[2] Emphasis in the original.

[3] A core question is whether or not such a non-absolutist religious system can really work. Kogan has argued that it is "narrow," "egoistic," and "a kind of theological madness" to assume that we Jews "are the only bearers of truth" (Michael Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 183). A similar position was articulated by Raphael Jospe, who argued that "revelation need not, and indeed cannot, be understood to mean exclusive possession of absolute truth, since even the revelation of the Torah at Sinai had to be adjusted to subjective human understanding and to diverse national cultures" (Raphael Jospe, "Pluralism out of the Sources of Judaism" in Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Eugene Korn (eds.), *Jewish Theology and World Religions* (Littman Library, 2012), 111). Jospe goes on to question how we can "continue to insist on certainty and absolute truth in metaphysics" (119) and ultimately "pleads guilty" to arriving "at a degree of moderate epistemological relativism" (120) in order to justify his pluralistic position.
In the same volume, Jolene and Menachem Kellner retorted that Jospe's stance "renders the notion of revelation in any classic sense of the term incoherent" (128) and enters deeply worrying territory:

> Let us for a further moment grant Jospe his thesis, which, as we understand it, boils down to the claim that it makes both philosophical and Jewish (as well as moral) sense for a Jew to affirm the truth of Judaism for Jews while affirming the truth of Christianity for Christians, of Islam for Muslims, and so on... We do not see how Jospe can formulate a Jewish argument against assimilation, intermarriage, and religious syncretism. If Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and so on are different paths to the same truth, or competing but complementary truths, or complicated combinations of truth and falsity each, then why prefer one over the other? For Jospe it would seem to boil down to a matter of choice. If one chooses to abandon Judaism altogether, through assimilation or through outright apostasy, or if one chooses to become a Jew for Jesus, on what grounds can Jospe complain? (131).

120). While Jews "cannot ignore the possibility that the vehement and unbalanced Protestant criticisms of Israel are rooted in traditional Christian antisemitism" (120), it is also undeniable that both Catholic and Protestant Christians "are the strongest gentile supporters of the Jewish State… donating tens of millions of dollars every year to help Israel's poor and hungry and to support Jewish immigration to the Jewish State" and "see themselves as partners with the Jewish people in teaching about the worship of God and creating a world filled with justice and righteousness" (136-137).

Thanks to these efforts and no small amount of guilt over Christian antisemitism contributing to the Holocaust, it "is undeniable that a majority of ecclesiastical authorities have now adopted the "new teaching" about Judaism and the Jewish people, and that the groundwork has been laid for an end to the spiritual and physical enmity between Christianity and the Jewish people" (124). But can Judaism return the favor? Korn acknowledges that "it is difficult to see how Jews (or Christians) could logically understand Christians standing at Sinai while not being obligated to observe all of the Sinaitic *mitzvot*, without at least part of [the] Sinai covenant being invalidated or superseded." On the other hand, taking cues from thinkers like R. Yaakov Emden, Korn emphasizes that "there are solid grounds for probing the possibility that Christianity has entered into the Jewish covenantal mission" (126).[4]

Such a probe is deeply needed. Korn warns that "objectivity and moral absolutes are under ferocious attack" by postmodern relativism, stepping dangerously towards "the denial of ethics entirely." Simultaneously, radical Islam poses a major threat to both Judaism and Christianity by denying their legitimacy in the Middle East. Indeed, Korn emphasizes that Middle Eastern Christians suffer "from the same persecutions of forced conversion, eviction, humiliation, and massacres that Jews experienced for millenia in Europe" and in great need of protection that Jews, via Israel, can provide (137). This serves as "a call to joint action by Christians and Jews, for the Holocaust has taught us that when ethical values do not assume primary importance in human culture, radical evil results" (130). Korn even argues that "God has thrown Jews and Christians together to appreciate the Bible and to be allies against common enemies that want to destroy Jews and Christians, particularly in the Middle East" (137).

Such partnership requires compromise from both sides. Korn writes emphatically that "trauma from the past should not blind us" to new Christian perspectives towards Judaism. Most Christians "wish reconciliation with the Jewish people and to support Jews as their elder brothers" so that there is "no longer any reason to fear or hate them" (137). In the 2015 statement *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven*, Korn and others recognized the Catholic Church's move to "unequivocally reject any form of anti-Semitism, affirm the eternal

[4] Michael Kogan argued in 2007 that "it is impossible for Jews to understand their role as inheritors of the commission to Abraham while blinding themselves to the work among the nations of the church that shares that commission and that inheritance" (Kogan, 118), but few Jews have taken this proposal seriously until now.

Covenant between God and the Jewish people, reject deicide and stress the unique relationship between Christians and Jews, who were called 'our elder brothers,' by Pope John Paul II and 'our fathers in faith' by Pope Benedict XVI."[5]

Protestantism has also moved in this direction, though slower than their Catholic co-religionists. Korn acknowledges, for example, that Protestant theology continues to affirm that "Christianity and the new covenant remain the highest fulfillment of the old covenant, and Jewish conversion to Christianity is still a theological *desideratum* – for God, the church, and for Jews themselves." For Protestants, Jewish conversion to Christianity remains a communal, spiritual, and theological ideal. Korn emphasizes, though, that mainstream Protestantism "decreases the urgency and imperative nature to convert Jews."[6] This "renders Christian theology less threatening to Judaism" so that "Jews need not be defensive about adopting a positive new theological approach" towards it (172).

This is all the more important given Korn's belief that "Jews have a religious task to give testimony, to express the truths of our faith and the dilemmas of our spiritual experience" by proclaiming "that our holy texts come from a transcendent authority Who is the Creator of heaven and earth and not some anonymous sage of antiquity… our commitment [is] to an ageless

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[5] Catholic Cardinal Timothy Dolan described the statement as "a remarkable and unexpected gift" to religious dialogue in its acknowledging that "the Catholic Church in particular may now be considered a true partner in the work of welcoming God's kingdom" and affirming "not only that Christianity is a divinely willed gift to the world, but also an instrument for carrying out God's plan of redemption for all people." Dolan also took the statement as a lesson that both religions "know that what Jews call the 'Oral Torah' and what Catholics refer to as 'Sacred Tradition' are their respective lenses for seeing God's revelation come alive in thought and practice" (Jehoschua Ahrens, Irving Greenberg, and Eugene Korn (eds.), *From Confrontation to Covenantal Partnership: Jews and Christians Reflect on the Orthodox Rabbinic Statement "To Do the Will of Heaven"* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2021), 30-31).
Protestant former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams wrote that the statement represents "startling generosity" (ibid. 34). He acknowledged disagreement, yet room for productive dialogue from his perspective:

> The God of Hebrew Scripture is a God who heals the fractured creation by his own commitment to its ongoing life – centered uniquely in the commitment, the covenant, with Israel, of which the promise of the Land is a lasting sign. The Christian should not be disputing a word of this; but the Christian also claims that this covenanted divine presence is in turn uniquely active in the life of Jesus, in such a way that association with him allows non-Jews to enter a covenantal relation with God and to know God as Father, in the way that Jesus claims to know God – a claim not at odds with Jewish history but presented originally by Christians as the fullest possible realization of the covenantal relation between God and Israel. Within the territory marked out by these beliefs, there will be ongoing disagreements, sometimes very radical; but there is a language in which thoughtful disagreements are possible, and mutual learning can happen (36).

[6] One can question whether this is, in fact, the case. Marcie Lenk notes:

> For many Evangelical Christians, the mission to evangelize the Jews remains in place. Some Christian Zionist organizations instruct employees and participants in their Holy Land excursions to refrain from evangelizing Jews in Israel so as not to offend, but Christian Zionist leaders such as Pastor John Hagee have been severely critiqued for trying to work out a coherent ideology that respects Jewish faith without Jesus (Marcie Lenk, "A Response to *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven"* in Ahrens, Greenberg, and Korn, 109).

tradition that claims us *a priori*, one that we cannot cavalierly dismiss when it is at odds with popular culture." If these ideas cannot be expressed to Christians "who share our quest for eternity, who relate to us as subjects, who acknowledge the permanent differences between us, and who sense our spiritual loneliness," then to whom can they be expressed? (162-163).

Korn argues that the traditional division of people into Jews, righteous Noahides, and pagans should be seen as more of a spectrum, with Christians "somewhere between the Noahide religion and the Judaism of the Sinai covenant" (169). It can then be acknowledged that the two religions "share the covenantal task to make the world a better place, one where each person possesses infinite value because we are all created in the Divine image, where moral values are real, where human affairs reflect a spiritual center to the universe and where every human life is endowed with meaning" (177-178).

Korn is part of a long tradition of thinkers who have attempted to articulate a theology of Christian legitimacy within Judaism. Such attempts, though, did not always go the same way. Professor Susannah Heschel notes that Abraham Geiger, founder of the German Reform Movement, "emphasized an alliance between Judaism and Islam, two religions of strict monotheism," as part of his general "revolt against Christian hegemony." Unfortunately, this also began a worrying trend amongst those interested in interreligious discourse: "[E]ither they aligned Judaism with Islam, marginalizing Christianity, or they aligned Judaism with Christianity, marginalizing Islam."[7]

One might place Korn in that tradition, albeit perhaps against his efforts. In addition to consistently mentioning Islam alongside threats to modernity which were already shown and more, Korn also explicitly states that the "deep wounds inflicted upon us by Rome, the Church, the Tsars, the Nazis, the Communists, and contemporary Muslims who hate Israel" have resulted in trends to idealize Jewish isolation from the broader world (13). Muslims are the only current threat mentioned here. Throughout his writings, Korn implores Christians to see, for example, that the State of Israel is "the ongoing test of whether non-Muslims can be equal in that part of the world, whether they need not be subordinate to Muslim sufferance, whether they can take responsibility for their own well-being,

[7] Susannah Heschel, "A Community for the Sake of Heaven: Emden's Understandings of Christianity and Islam" in Zev Eleff and Shaul Seidler-Feller (eds.), *Emet Le-Ya'akov: Facing the Truths of History: Essays in Honor of Jacob J. Schacter* (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2023), 123.
Heschel's colleague at Dartmouth, Shaul Magid, has indeed argued that discourse around the 'Judeo-Christian tradition' in the West "severs, or at the very least complicates, ties between Jew and Muslim." (Shaul Magid, "The Judeo-Christian Tradition" in Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (eds.), *Theologies of American Exceptionalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021), 113).
Geiger's attempt to turn early Christianity into a Reform precursor led to much discomfort amongst his peers. Heschel understands Geiger as saying that "Christians wanting the faith of Jesus rather than the elaborate doctrines about him… ought to join a Reform synagogue." One of his contemporaries called Geiger's remarks "ten times more horrific than the crucifixion." (Eleff and Seidler-Feller, 122).

and whether they can be free to shape their distinctive identity."[8] Korn emphasizes that "the battle is not between Islam on one side and Judaism and Christianity on the other," but "between extremists of all faiths who hate diversity and difference, and moderates."[9] At the same time, his writing far too often paints a picture of Jews and Christians uniting as threatened minorities against Muslim oppression.[10]

An exception to this marginalizing trend was R. Yaakov Emden. In his dissertation, Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter notes that Emden "enjoyed great familiarity with the New Testament which he quoted extensively" and presented Christianity "in a favorable light" and even "defended the plausibility of the virgin birth." Emden also praised both Christianity and Islam for "spreading belief in God in the world." This was to combat Sabbateanism, which he saw as harmful to both Judaism and Christianity. Emden argued that "Jesus himself expected Jews to continue their adherence to Jewish law, exempting only Gentiles from that obligation." Sabbatean practices, then, "were violations not only of Judaism but also of the teachings of Jesus,"[11] and should be viewed as heretical by both religions.

This willingness to cooperate with Christianity seems to stem from respect. Heschel notes that Emden "claimed that he read Gentile works only while in the latrine, as his father had done," but his writings reveal that his "knowledge of the New Testament texts was extensive and his curiosity profound."[12] For Heschel, there is no question that Emden felt that "Christianity and Islam participate with Judaism in paving a path for the

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[8] Eugene Korn, *The Jewish Connection to Israel: A Brief Introduction for Christians* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2008) 155.

[9] Ibid., 156.

[10] Lenk notes that contemporary partnerships between Orthodox Jews and Evangelical Christians can lead to a similar place and can even be detrimental to the Middle Eastern peace that Korn so passionately pushes for. In her words,

> Many Jews seem comfortable ignoring theology and ideology, which might be seen as a wedge between Jews and Evangelical Chrstians, as they find partnership in the Christian Zionist political views of many Evangelical Christians… There are claims on both sides of these relationships to be fulfilling God's will in the world. Both sides speak of realizing the words of the biblical prophets through Christian support of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. However, these partnerships necessarily ignore much Christian theology, emphasizing only those interpretations of the Hebrew Bible that are shared. They also ignore other Jewish interpretations of these same biblical prophecies, as well as other Jewish ideals. For example, many expressions of Jewish-Christian understanding between Orthodox Jews and Evangelical Christians demonize Muslims, despite the long history of a positive relationships [sic] between Jews and Muslims. Additionally, many Jews (including Orthodox Jews) do not share the extreme nationalism expressed by the Orthodox Jews who partner with Christian Zionist Evangelical groups. Should we necessarily celebrate the shared vision of Greater Israel? If one believes that such a vision is dangerous for any hope of peace and democracy in a future State of Israel, in what way is the relationship with Christian Zionists good for the Jewish people? (Lenk in Ahrens, Greenberg, and Korn, 110).

[11] Eleff and Seidler-Feller, 124-125.

[12] Ibid., 125.

coming of the messiah."[13] This was successful because he identified Christianity with liberal Protestantism. Emden "joined liberal Protestants in eschewing Christianity's supernatural claims and dogma about Christ that had long aroused Jewish mockery: virgin birth, incarnation, Eucharist, and so forth." He was then free to "formulate a Christianity without a theological or political history"[14] and to work with Jesus as "a historical figure, not the supernatural Christ of church dogma." In that respect, Heschel notes that "Emden anticipated the Haskalah efforts to equate Christianity with Jesus as a moral preacher and Abraham Geiger's depiction of Jesus as a liberalizing rabbi."[15] This "mirrored liberal Protestant developments of the era,"[16] making them natural partners against mutual threats.

Korn follows in Emden's footsteps not only in seeking a narrative which allows Christianity to be part of the Jewish redemptive framework, but also in seeking to unite Judaism and Christianity against larger threats to both. See, for example, this lengthy appeal:

> A number of powerful troubling signs dominate our contemporary cultural and political landscapes. Postmodern secularism has created a pervasive value-orientation whose foundations contain the seeds from which destructive forces can again grow… hedonism drives much of contemporary life and ethics, and the glorification of violence is commonplace. These phenomena weaken the importance of moral character and individual conscience, both of which are so critical to human flourishing and dignity. Physicalism, relativism, and moral utilitarianism have all become fashionable, if not dominant, in contemporary academia and high culture. These ideologies promote the idea that human life has no intrinsic value or dignity to be respected and protected. In other words, they forcefully reject the starting points of both Jewish and Christian ethics, namely, that each person is created in God's image, and hence that each person is intrinsically sacred.
>
> Nor do these ideologies reject only theologically based ethics. When all values are merely "relative," objectivity and truth are questionable notions, and a denial of all ethical constructs easily follow [sic]. Finally, as we also noted earlier, political extremism, violent religious intolerance, and

[13] Ibid.,127.

[14] Ibid., 132.

[15] A recent figure who has argued in this direction is Jerome (Yehuda) Gellman.

[16] Ibid., 133.

> radicalism has surged in our young country – and much of these hostile movements take direct aim at Judaism and Christianity.
>
> Jews and Christians play an essential role in God's sacred plan for human progress in history – indeed, for the survival of humanity. As partners in Abraham's covenant, Jews and Christians are both spiritually obligated to heed the divine call of bringing blessing to the world. We can do this together by publicly bearing witness to the following covenantal values that God bequeathed to the world (175-176).

Korn, to his credit, does not allow his acknowledgement of these looming threats to impact what he views as core Jewish theology. Korn's ideal Judaism is able to welcome Christianity into the covenantal mission without allowing Christianity to assert control over the Jewish narrative. Others share Korn's concerns and attempt to make more room for Christian beliefs within Judaism in order to better unite with them against the looming threats.

One example of this is Rabbi Mark Gottlieb's resurrection of the thought of Israeli philosopher and diplomat Pinchas Lapide.[17] Lapide argued that Jesus' resurrection was "factually true" and "the key historical ingredient in Christianity's successful conversion of the pagan peoples of the Mediterranean to the moral and theological legacy of Sinai."[18] In his own words, Lapide wrote that "the resurrection belongs to the category of real and effective occurrences, for without a fact of history there is no act of true faith."[19]

Gottlieb acknowledges that Lapide's position is "inescapably controversial," but sees in its invitation to view all of history (including Jesus' resurrection) as part of a Jewish narrative as beneficial. Gottlieb argues that "it would be shortsighted not to acknowledge the power of this salvational narrative in, theoretically at least, securing a safer environment for Jews living in a Christian world." Indeed, in "situating the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus as part of an organized Jewish faith experience, and while

[17] Gottlieb's and Lapide's positions will be further explored in a forthcoming article.

[18] Eleff and Seidler-Feller, 73.

[19] Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1982), 92. Of course, Lapide's position relies on the assumption that Jesus' resurrection really was a historical event. That premise is highly debatable. Alter, for example, presents no less than 217 issues with the resurrection and "critically surveys many of the voluminous evangelistic and Christian apologetic writings on the subject." He concludes that "sufficient issues are refuted adequately for Christians and any others to rethink the truth of Jesus' claimed resurrection, post-resurrection appearances, and ascension" (Michael J. Alter, *The Resurrection: A Critical Inquiry* (Xlibris, 2015) xlvii).
Additionally, the popular YouTuber Paulogia, a "former Christian who looks at the claims of Christians," has an entire playlist of videos dedicated to challenging scholarly and apologetic defenses of the resurrection's historicity.

acknowledging – together with his faithful Christian neighbors – the historicity of the resurrection," Lapide was able to find common cause with "those Christians who invariably held sway, either directly or indirectly, over the lives of then-current and future generations of Jews."[20]

On this basis, Gottlieb proposes a Lapidian argument for Jews to engage with the resurrection: If one sees value in the spread of ethical monotheism, believes God moves history towards salvation, and believes that the most plausible cause of Jesus' disciples having the "strength, courage, and will to spread their Jewish teachings to the world" is the resurrection, then "it is at least also plausible for a religious Jew to conclude that the resurrection was a divinely driven miracle."[21] He makes this argument more directly elsewhere, writing that Jews "have good reason to offer real but qualified support for Christian belief in the resurrection."[22] In his words, a historical resurrection not only "account[s] for the rapid rise of Christianity, but it also preserves the salvational story still being written by Jews and Gentiles alike, together, nearly two millennia after those world-historic events."[23]

Gottlieb goes on to argue that this could be even more beneficial in a post-Christian world where threats to Jews in Israel, Europe, and North America no longer come primarily from Christian antisemitism but "emanate from extremes on the political right or left and are radically secular, Islamist, or pagan in origin." Gottlieb states that "one might plausibly argue that the stronger the commitment to traditional Christianity, the greater the likelihood of Christian support of Israel and, broadly speaking, the Jewish people." This concern about mutual threats was also explicated by Jurgen Moltmann, who said in conversation with Lapide that "it is imaginable, and I expect it, that Jews and Christians one day will undergo a common persecution and then will

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[20] Eleff and Seidler Feller, 87.

[21] Ibid. Of course, Jesus' Apostles may have sincerely believed that they experienced a resurrected Jesus while having been sincerely mistaken about it.

[22] Similar arguments can be made by Christians as well. One particular philosopher put it this way:

> By appropriating the Christian miracles (which is what Judaism ought to do), you will greatly strengthen the case for Judaism, and the case against your greatest enemy – which is not Christianity, or even Islam, but *naturalism*. Then, when in the midnight hour dark thoughts come up in your mind ("maybe Dawkins is right"; "maybe it's all just an ancient fantasy"), you will know, as assuredly as I do, that the God of Abraham is absolutely and utterly real. (Our God is a consuming fire.) The Resurrection is "the enemy of your enemy"; and the enemy of your enemy is (let us just say) useful.

This particular thinker even grants that "from the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, it does not follow that Christianity is true, or even that the probability of Christianity's being true so much as increases."

[23] Gottlieb's claim that meaningful Christianity dissolves without belief in the resurrection is not necessarily warranted. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* and several other volumes give insight into what Christianity could look like minus metaphysical assumptions. Of course, the sustainability of such models ought to be left in the hands of Christian theologians rather than Orthodox rabbis.

discover the redeeming love of God that binds them at the most profound level."[24] Gottlieb echoes this by writing that Jesus' resurrection, "instead of being a snare and stumbling block for Jews, can serve as a bridge to Christians and as a basis for a shared legacy of trust, fraternity, and mutual protection."[25] Gottlieb's overarching mission, then, is one and the same as Korn's.

One must, however, calculate the costs of unifying Jewish and Christian narratives to this extent. Both Korn and Gottlieb seek to unify Judaism and Christianity against threats like radical Islam, postmodernism, relativism, naturalism, etc. In order to do so, both are willing (to different degrees) to give Christianity a legitimate place within Jewish theology. Unless this is done with explicit caveats, it can easily lead to a world, as Magid outlines, in which Jews can say that "finally Christians have understood that without Judaism Christianity cannot survive theologically," while Christianity can simultaneously "subsume the Jew through assimilation with the mere inclusion of the prefix "Judeo" in Judeo-Christian society, effectively rendering them "pseudo-Christian in the Christian-Muslim narrative of theo-political power."[26]

In R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's timeless words, we are called upon to tell the general non-Jewish faith community "not only the story it already knows – that we are human beings, committed to the general welfare and progress of mankind, that we are interested in combatting disease, in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man's rights, in helping the needy, *et cetera* – but also what is still unknown to it, namely, our otherness as a metaphysical covenantal community." While it is "quite legitimate to speak of a cultural Judeo-christian tradition" in which Judaism has "molded the ethico-philosophical Christian world-formula" and "our Western civilization has absorbed both Judaic and Christian elements," there must also be a clear acknowledgement that

> … when we shift from the dimension of culture to that of faith – where total unconditional commitment and involvement are necessary – the whole idea of a tradition of faiths and the continuum of revealed doctrines which are by their very nature incommensurate and related to different frames of references is utterly absurd, unless one is ready to acquiesce in the Christian theological claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism.

It is indisputable that there are very real threats facing both Judaism and Christianity today. As Korn strongly put it,

[24] Leonard Swindler (trans.), *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine: A Dialogue by Pinchas Lapide and Jurgen Moltmann* (Wipf and Stock Publishers: Eugene, 1981), 67.

[25] Eleff and Siedler-Feller, 89.

[26] Magid in Sullivan and Hurd, 113.

> The common moral axiom of Judaism and Christianity is crucial today because postmodern secularism has given birth to a pervasive liberal value-orientation whose foundations contain seeds from which destructive forces can again grow. Hedonism drives much of contemporary ethos. Violence saturates our media and popular culture, sometimes appearing as merely another justified form of pleasure. This contributes to the evisceration of moral concern and the numbing of individual conscience, both essential to securing the value of human welfare and dignity. Moral utilitarian and thorough-going physicalist ideologies have also made comebacks in contemporary academia and high culture of today. In these theories, human life no longer has intrinsic value and individual human life often becomes a mere commodity to be traded and sometimes discarded. This moral philosophy shares the Nazi denial of the Judeo-Christian ethics, which insists that all persons are created in God's image, and hence each human life possesses infinite sacred value (129).[27]

There is certainly room to partner with Christianity and, for that matter, Islam, against threats to ethical monotheism. Indeed, there is room to partner with all sorts of faith traditions against threats to religion as a whole and even to partner with secularists and atheists against religious extremism as needed. All of those partnerships, though, ought to come from a place of confidence in our own story and identity. Theological dialogue must be had by those who know what they are doing. If one lacks deep conviction in their faith, does not have enough knowledge of their tradition, or has "political or social goals that eclipse theological integrity," then they will "only achieve a polite 'trading of favors' or a dangerous syncretism that both Judaism and the Church must resist regardless of how beneficial the outcome" (165).[28] Every would-be participant in such dialogues then has a responsibility to ask themselves whether their arguments are truly for the betterment of both religions, or if they risk sacrificing Judaism's epistemological independence on the altar of ecumenicalism. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously wrote that interfaith dialogue requires faith, and Korn is no doubt correct in adding that it requires both religious knowledge and spiritual

[27] This is greatly reminiscent of Eliezer Schweid's observation that "disbelief in a God who transcends nature and who is the source of nature and human reason that is bound to nature… is polytheism even if those who hold such views do not relate to the powers of nature as divine." (Quoted in Shaul Magid, "Idolatry on the Other Side of Modernity" in Alon Goshen-Gottstein (ed.), *Idolatry: A Contemporary Jewish Conversation* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2023), 102.)

[28] I reflect on such risks here.

integrity as well.

"Filling In" and "The Poet of Auschwitz"

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"Filling In"

We heard only fragments
on *Simchas Torah* morning

as words carried themselves
like ashes
across the dark roads
of silent cities.

Suddenly we were back in 1938
standing in line at a newspaper stand,
reading over the shoulder of the
man before us,
his hat
blocking the beginning of the headline.

And we were left
filling in what we could not
begin to understand.

"The Poet of Auschwitz"

I often imagine
there was a poet of Auschwitz
who came up with a far better word
to describe the
curve
of the metal sign that greeted him
than we could ever muster.

Who fought only with the
soft scratch of lead
against a scrap of paper,

and when he ran out of paper,
his leather belt,

and when he ran out of leather,
he would curl his words out of
the long strand
of a
single
potato peel.

And when it was time to die,
he must have stood under the cloudiest of skies,
with all of his papers and words
hidden under his clothes,
under his skin,
jutting into the
crevices between his ribs,

the word
for the moment
a candle is about to extinguish,
clinging
to the tip of his tongue.