

75 YEARS AFTER SEELISBERG - REFLECTION

BY

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DIFFICULT TRUTHS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION:

THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 10 POINTS OF SEELISBERG AND THE FUTURE OF JEWISH-CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND DIALOGUE

While this reflection will advocate for Jews and Christians to each **accept seven difficult truths** (and one joint truth), a caveat: the only reason I, as a Catholic theologian, can utter some of these challenging truths is because of the great progress, learning, and friendships flourishing among Jews and Christians. To be clear: The Christian journey of repentance, re-evaluating, catharsis, rewriting, and re-praying remains ongoing. My concomitant call for Jews to accept these difficult mirror truths may seem presumptuous in light of Christianity's greater moral failures, especially in the Shoah where millions of Christians desecrated Jewish men, women, and children, and in doing so, nearly blotted out the image of G_d in our midst. Nevertheless, even the repentant and the repenting can still, in meekness and love, speak to the Other, if only to invite them to avoid the same mistakes the repenting have already committed. But the truth is we are both humbled, searching, and broken peoples, in need of G_d's forgiveness and care even as we also are beloved of G_d.

The points below are interrelated and often mirror the other, expressing Christian and Jewish equality and mutual needs and challenges. As motivation, these are the truths I envision for our children and their children to embrace going forward even as it uncovers difficult questions about religious identity, participation, uniqueness, tradition, and purpose. While advocating an expansive acceptance of the other's faith and tradition, the aim here is not to annul or minimize distinctive religious commitment. It operates under the both/and principle, perhaps clashing, contradictory, or paradoxical to some, but which reflects a G_d of mystery, borderlessness, and creativity; a G_d of tenderness for all.

For the spiritual, moral, and theological growth of the next generation of Christian-Jewish dialogue, I invite and challenge Christians to:

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1. Celebrate Jewish ways of life as salvific in themselves.
 2. Thus, no longer would a Christian person (simply) proclaim: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned” (*Mk 16:15-16*).¹
 3. Reformulate how Jesus is both Savior and Messiah for Christians but “superfluous” for Jews.
 4. Teach and study Rabbinic and post-Rabbinic Jewish thought as sources of Divine Wisdom.
 5. Embrace the need to repent, confront, remember, and heal past moral failures committed by Christians against Jews as an ongoing process and Christlike imperative.
 6. Emphasize and articulate the moral, theological, and practical ways Judaism instructs, fulfils, challenges, and complements Christian vision and hopes.
 7. Accept Jewish critiques of Christianity as signs of grace and potential doctrinal and biblical development.

And for the Jewish people to:

1. Profess a theological and moral need for Jews to learn from and dialogue with Christians.
2. Thus, no longer would a Jewish person say: “Christians need to learn about Judaism, but Jews do not need to learn about Christianity.”
3. Continue creatively exploring how Jesus can be salvific for Christians.
4. Teach and study the New Testament as Sources of Divine Wisdom.
5. Repent for the growing animus in some Jewish circles against anyone (Jewish or non-Jewish) who critiques actions by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people-- even while anti-Semitism must be combatted.
6. Continue to acknowledge and praise Christian acts of repentance in light of the Shoah and Christian repudiation of “the teaching of contempt.”
7. Accept Christian critiques of Judaism as possible signs of grace and development of Halakha.

For both Jews and Christians

Extend that growing love, respect, source of learning, and appreciation of Jews and Christians to Muslims, indigenous peoples, and other world faiths and ideologies.

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In closing, what type of faiths remains if Christians and Jews embrace these challenges and truths? Is the point of interreligious dialogue simply to learn and accept the hopes and beliefs of the religious

¹ The theologically and interreligiously detrimental opening of *Dominus Iesus* may be recalled here.

other, still a worthwhile goal today, or does it call for more challenging, difficult claims—namely, to recognize the incompleteness, moral failures, and blind spots within our own traditions and so the great need to learn from, dialogue, and work together with others in a true spirit of equality and openness? Such a position admits to not having all the answers or even sufficient success in framing and articulating the right or ample number of questions. It is a dialogue both for the self and the other; an act of self-giving and self-care as well as hospitality and nurturing of the other.

At a time when the future of Jewish–Christian dialogue is both desperately needed and yet becoming marginal or the purview of the few, how do we respond to these difficult truths, and then, how do we move beyond them? The visionaries and torchbearers of Seelisberg helped show us a way forward even as the fires of Auschwitz and Treblinka were recent and not distant atrocities. Tentatively, and with some contradictions, the Catholic Church in 1965 issued *Nostra Aetate* and propelled the Catholic Church to see “what is good and holy” in other faiths, thus initiating a true turning, especially towards Jews, as friends and partners. So many great thinkers from various Christian and Jewish groups have responded, and today we also look back to *Dabru Emet*, “The 12 Points of Berlin,” “The Gifts and Calling are Irrevocable,” “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven,” and other seminal proclamations with gratitude, hope, and longing. But where do we go from here and how do we get there together? What further difficult truths need to be added and what are the consequences if we don’t proclaim, let alone embrace, such truths and questions?

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