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Theologies of the Land and State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Jewish and Christian Understandings

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Theologies of the Land and State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Jewish and Christian Understandings

Ruth Langer

Abstract

Christians and Jews have tended to approach theological understandings of Israel through different categorizations of what constitutes appropriate topics for theology. Separation of religious and political realities has been an aspect of Christian culture since the fourth century, but it was never a native separation for Judaism. Thus, contemporary Christian theologians have attempted to develop understandings of Jewish relationship to the land that excludes its political aspects. From a Jewish perspective, this amounts to a recasting of Judaism according to a foreign set of values, one that devalues the potential (if not yet actualized) theological meanings inherent in contemporary Jewish sovereignty over its historical homeland. Progress in dialogue about Israel requires confronting this difference directly.

KEYWORDS: Israel, dialogue, Dabru Emet, A Sacred Obligation, Zionism, covenant

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The sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel provides us with an opportunity to search for deeper understanding on a central but under-discussed topic in Christian-Jewish dialogue. It has been avoided most often because of the sheer complexity of the issues involved: the pitfalls involved for Christians globally in negotiating between Israeli and Palestinian political issues; the wide range of Jewish responses to these same issues; and a sense that political issues have no place in dialogue between religious communities. While acknowledging that the first two concerns also deserve their own discussions, this essay will focus on the third, which functions as a meta-issue that has obstructed productive dialogue on this central element of Jewish life and thought. The theoretical separation of religious and political realities has been an aspect of Christian culture since the fourth century when Christians first began to wield political power, but it was never a native separation for Judaism. Thus, contemporary Christian theologians have attempted to develop understandings of Jewish relationship to the land that excludes its political aspects. From a Jewish perspective, this amounts to a recasting of Judaism according to a foreign set of values, one that devalues the potential (if not yet actualized) theological meanings inherent in contemporary Jewish sovereignty over its historical homeland.

A cardinal principle of dialogue states that one should strive to understand the other from within the other's own terms of reference and then strive to respond accordingly.¹ This means being sensitive to the cultural and theological barriers that lead easily to miscommunications. Rather than presuming similarities, one needs to be open to differences, subtle or not, and to

¹ See Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue," first published in the *Journal for Ecumenical Studies*, 1983, available in slightly revised form at <http://www.usao.edu/~facshaferi/DIALOG00.HTML> (accessed March 2, 2008). See particularly his Fifth Commandment.

learn how the other can operate with a different perspective on the world, with a different set of presuppositions and a differently nuanced set of values. Otherwise, we miss what is distinctive about our dialogue partners. This is particularly critical when we share so many aspects of culture that we become unaware of the need to translate, presuming that our words and ideas are received as we intend them.

Our brains can be compared to filing cabinets or hard drives. We humans tend to listen selectively, filing away that which fits into our preconceived constructs, that for which we already have folders, and either misfiling or ignoring the rest. In dialogue, we meet an other who frequently structures ideas and information differently, who organizes information into a different set of mental files. How do we achieve communication? Dialogue challenges us, on the one hand, to open new files for ourselves, to acquire new ways of organizing and integrating incoming information. On the other hand, it challenges us to discern how our partner has previously learned to organize information and to try to communicate in such a way that what is important to us fits as well as possible into the other's pre-existing file structure – to minimize our partner's need for architectural reform to achieve understanding. By striving to maximize our own mental flexibility and to minimize our demands on our dialogue partner, we seek a maximally successful act of communication.

When we apply this theoretical construct to issues surrounding dialogue about Israel, we see its power. For observant Jews through the centuries, the physical return of the people Israel to the Land of Israel and the resumption of political sovereignty over the land have stood at the center of their messianic vision. Far from peripheral, this vision permeates daily statutory prayers as well as popular piety. It finds expression in texts of *halakhah* and *midrash* almost without number. It is such a given

that there is no need for systematic theological argument.² In contrast, Christianity early on explained Jewish exile from the land as the concrete earthly expression of a theological necessity; it represented divine punishment, minimally for Jewish rejection of Jesus, but more seriously for Jewish crime in murdering him. In this, then, the Jewish and Christian “filing systems” have been utterly incompatible on this issue.

However, in the contemporary world, *Nostra Aetate* and similar documents claim that “the Jews remain very dear to God,” that “neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during [Christ’s] passion,” and that “Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed.”³ Functionally, these teachings undercut traditional Christian understandings of why Jews were exiled from their land, creating an opening for rethinking, theologically, Jewish religious connection to it. This, as part of the contemporary revision of Christian theologies of Jews and Judaism and its search for positive understandings, constitutes a major and extremely challenging revision of the received Christian “filing system,” but one that creates the potential for true dialogue.

² See, for instance, the discussions (or lack thereof) in contemporary summaries of rabbinic theology. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), includes no explicit chapter on the land, and discusses these concepts only peripherally within his final chapter, “On Redemption.” In this, he largely draws upon a pattern set by early twentieth-century works like Solomon Schechter’s *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology: Major Concepts of the Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961; rpt. from Macmillan, 1909). Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), similarly devotes no particular chapter to Israel. For a more detailed study of Jewish understandings of the land in late antiquity, see Isaiah Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 21* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

³ See http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/sources/documents/catholic/Nostra_Aetate.htm.

Land and State in *Dabru Emet* and *A Sacred Obligation*

We see this clearly when we look carefully at the statements about Israel in two important documents that emerged from our dialogue within the last decade: the third point (of eight) of the Jewish document, *Dabru Emet*,⁴ and the ninth point (of ten) of the Christian document, *A Sacred Obligation*.⁵ Both statements address Christian understanding of the Jewish relationship to a place called Israel. Both speak directly to their own communities, but know too that they will be read and studied by the other. *Dabru Emet*’s concern is that its primary audience, Jews, understands that “Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.” *A Sacred Obligation*, in turn, affirms that “We [Christians] affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.” It would seem that this is a simple matter. What the Jewish document says that Christians can do, the Christian document does. But a closer reading challenges this easy conclusion. These are texts that were produced by committees who scrutinized and debated every nuance of every word. Once we go beyond the headings and read closely with sensitivity to the structural question with which I began, we see immediately that the situation is not so simple.

Dabru Emet’s paragraph reads:

⁴ Issued by a committee of Jewish scholars affiliated with the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies, Baltimore, on September 10, 2000, as a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*, with a long list of additional signatures. See http://www.icjs.org/what/njisp_dabruemet.html.

⁵ Issued by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, hosted by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Boston College, on September 1, 2002. See http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/sites/partners/csg/Sacred_Obligation.htm. Note that its fourth point directly addresses the revision of Christian thinking about Judaism to include Judaism’s living reality through history and today.

Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel. The most important event for Jews since the Holocaust has been the reestablishment of a Jewish state in the Promised Land. As members of a biblically based religion, Christians appreciate that Israel was promised – and given – to Jews as the physical center of the covenant between them and God. Many Christians support the State of Israel for reasons far more profound than mere politics. As Jews, we applaud this support. We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.

Where this statement's opening sentence and header speaks of the Christian ability to respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the *land* of Israel – a theological understanding not tied to any particular point in Jewish history – its second sentence speaks of the value contemporary Jews place on of the establishment of the Jewish *state* of Israel – a political and historical experience centered concretely in the proclamation of Israeli statehood by David Ben-Gurion on May 14, 1948, on the 5th of Iyyar, 5708. As becomes evident, this is a deliberate move. Jewish theology often does not rely on abstract philosophizing; here it is concretely *grounded*, literally, in the historical experience of a people called Israel in relation to a specific place called Israel. In Christian terms, this might be understood more as a narrative theology rather than a systematic philosophical theology, and for Christian theologians, narrative theology is rather a newer and less esteemed category.

To try to represent this historical and political reality in the language of Christian theological expression, then, *Dabru Emet's* third sentence frames its point in the categories of this narrative theology. It points to our shared biblical text and the Bible's record of God's promise and gift of this physical space as an integral and central element of God's covenant with the people Israel, known for most of their history as Jews. The nar-

rative authority of Scripture, *Dabru Emet* suggests, is the basis on which Christians can enter into a theological understanding of the covenantal nature of the Jewish relationship with the *land*.

In making this assertion, however, *Dabru Emet* wades into complex waters. For those Christians (and Jews) whose primary approach to the Bible is through the lens of biblical critical scholarship, the "true" narrative of the Bible does not lie in the obvious meanings of the received text, but rather in the human origins of its atomized parts. Such readings can undercut the authority of the patriarchal covenants and make them problematic as bases for a theological understanding of the land. *Dabru Emet's* strategy here thus works in dialogue only with that spectrum of Christian approaches to the Pentateuch that reads its narratives as divinely inspired and hence of theological significance.

Dabru Emet next turns back to the modern political state, suggesting that this theological, biblically grounded relationship with the *land* is a profound basis for many Christians' support of the *State* of Israel. In other words, *Dabru Emet's* brief statement about Israel searches for a bridge between the Jewish groundedness in history and physical location and the universal, often even timeless scope of systematic Christian theological categories. *Dabru Emet's* framers offer a possible Christian framing of these Jewish categories, a way to express the role of Israel for Jews that will accurately reflect the way that minds trained to think in Christian categories and to operate according to Christian presuppositions would do so.

Before focusing on *Dabru Emet's* closing statement, an acknowledgement of the humanitarian crisis among the Palestinians, we should turn to the parallel discussion in *A Sacred Obligation*. While *A Sacred Obligation* arose from the same impetus as *Dabru Emet* and within a parallel group of scholars, it is in

many ways a radically different document. *Dabru Emet's* authors were concerned that Jews understand the new Christian thinking about Judaism; they did not, however, present a Jewish understanding of Christianity itself. *A Sacred Obligation*, in contrast, presents to Christians certain principles of Christian theological understandings about Judaism; it does not try to teach its Christian audience about a Jewish theological understanding of Christianity. Thus, both texts are ultimately discussing Christian theological understandings of Jews; they parallel rather than mirror each other, reflecting an inherent imbalance that has been characteristic of the contemporary dialogue. The publication of *Dabru Emet* preceded that of *A Sacred Obligation* by two years, and is acknowledged in *A Sacred Obligation's* introduction. Some aspects of the Christian Scholars Group's *A Sacred Obligation*, then, respond to *Dabru Emet*.

A Sacred Obligation's ninth point reads:

We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people. The land of Israel has always been of central significance to the Jewish people. However, Christian theology charged that the Jews had condemned themselves to homelessness by rejecting God's Messiah. Such supersessionism precluded any possibility for Christian understanding of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel. Christian theologians can no longer avoid this crucial issue, especially in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land. Recognizing that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own, we call for efforts that contribute to a just peace among all the peoples in the region.

Dabru Emet's negotiation between the language of "land" and "state" is fully absent here. Following the heading, *A Sacred Obligation* mentions the "land" or "land of Israel" another three times, but it never names or alludes to the contemporary

political state, except in the context of resolution of "conflict over the land." This was deliberate; as Michael McGarry explains, the drafters did not want to be drawn into taking sides in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, especially in the face of intra-Jewish differences in how to approach the meaning of Israel.⁶

The challenge that I want to raise is whether this results in a sufficient understanding of Jews and Judaism, one that reflects Jewish self-understanding. The understanding of Jewish attachment to the land that the framers of *A Sacred Obligation* call for is certainly a *necessary* step towards understanding the Jewish relationship to the land of Israel. But should it stop there? Does the desire to stop short of engaging with the contemporary political state represent a failure on the part of the Jewish dialogue partners to convey its significance in categories that Christians can "file" properly? Or is it, as McGarry suggests, instead a prudent choice in the face of conflict?

Before addressing these questions, though, it will be helpful to understand how this distinction between the land of Israel and the modern political state of Israel emerged. In the Catholic world, the bishops at the Second Vatican Council confronted this issue as they negotiated the eventual text of *Nostra Aetate*, presenting it as a religious, theological statement and not one that concerned Zionism or the State of Israel. In no small part, this was needed to overcome the objections of voices from Arab countries.⁷ The most explicit statement of this distinction appears in the 1985 "Notes" continuing the implementation of

⁶ Michael B. McGarry, "The Land of Israel in the Cauldron of the Middle East: A Challenge to Christian-Jewish Relations," in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, edited by Mary C. Boys (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 213-224.

⁷ See Alberto Melloni, "*Nostra Aetate* and the Discovery of the Sacrament of Otherness," in *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections from Rome*, ed. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hoffman, Joseph Sievers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 140.

Nostra Aetate,⁸ but it is also evident in the fact that relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel are a function of its Secretariat of State, and not of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

However, the need to completely omit reference to the State of Israel was not clear to the framers of *A Sacred Obligation* from the beginning. In the course of their deliberations, in November 2001, the question arose whether the scholars were calling on Christians to affirm the Jewish bond to the “state” or the “land” of Israel. Correspondence discussing this question over subsequent months has not been collected and was not available to me, but we should be mindful that these were the bloodiest months of the Second Intifada in Israel and Palestine. The next text is dated April 12, i.e., immediately following the bombing of the communal Passover seder in a Netanya hotel at the end of March, which led to Israel’s re-entry into Palestinian cities, especially Jenin. In mid-April, Palestinian gross misinformation about the extent of Israeli-caused casualties in Jenin had not yet been debunked,⁹ so accusations of horror were flying in both directions.

Thus, it is easy to imagine the context in which the scholars decided that it was most appropriate for them, as Christian theologians, to focus exclusively on theological issues. The deeply revised text, not yet our final version, still acknowledged the founding of the state, but only in the context of a remark about the challenge that it presented Christians who had no

⁸ Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, “Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” (June 24, 1985), VI:25, (http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/Vatican_Notes.htm)

⁹ I.e., reports of the deaths of 500 Palestinians. The eventual documented total was 52 Palestinians and 23 Israelis. In addition to news sources from this period, see the Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations, <http://www.un.org/peace/jenin/>.

theological basis for understanding this historical political reality and its attendant conflicts. The statement acknowledged Christian traditions of denying ongoing Jewish covenantal ties with the land and called for Christian theologians to “engage in the theological task of developing a Christian theology of the Land that will contribute to peace among all the peoples of the region.”

The document as it emerged from the April 12 meeting was too long. A draft dated May 18, 2002, shows our paragraph to have achieved its final, shorter form. It is only at this point that all direct reference to the State of Israel drops out entirely, leaving only the urgency of the Christian theological challenge “in light of the complex and persistent conflict over the land.” *A Sacred Obligation* grants the State of Israel only implied recognition, equal to that of the incipient state of Palestine, through their citizens “Israelis and Palestinians” who [both] “have the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own....”

The way that these two documents treat these issues of conflict underscores the fundamental differences that have become apparent. The framers of *A Sacred Obligation* label it carefully as “the complex and persistent conflict over the land.” They name both Israelis and Palestinians – the political entities and not the religious communities – as those having “the right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own,” and they call for efforts that “contribute to a just peace among *all the peoples in the region*” (emphasis mine). Not only are these carefully neutral statements, but they do not even voice special concern for the troubled Christian communities of the region. Muslims are present only by inference, but this, after all, is a document specifically about Christian-Jewish relations. The reiteration of the word “peace” speaks to Christian values, but not uniquely so. This is the voice of a community that strives to stand as a neutral third party, outside this messy political reality.

Jews, in my opinion and apparently that also of the framers of *Dabru Emet*, do not have that option. This statement, which, remember, is supposedly about Christian support for Israel, concludes, “We also recognize that Jewish tradition mandates justice for all non-Jews who reside in a Jewish state.” This is not a neutral voice; it is also not a statement about Christianity. Rather, it is the critique of the engaged Jewish insider speaking to the political reality of the contemporary State of Israel in answer to an expected Christian concern (one which is absent in *A Sacred Obligation!*) about the plight of Arab communities, Christian and Muslim, in Israeli-controlled territory. *Dabru Emet’s* statement says unequivocally: The Jewish state itself is not negotiable – but that state’s laws do require a system of justice that protects the rights of all its residents, including non-Jews.¹⁰ It is possible that it was simply too difficult for the framers of *Dabru Emet* to present this strong statement of support for the *State* of Israel as a Christian understanding.¹¹

Thus, both statements call for justice, but the ways that they frame these calls are very different. These different framings, consistent with the documents’ discussions of how Christians should understand Israel, point to a deep and substantial disjunction in the Jewish and Christian “filing cabinets,” one with which Jews have struggled from the time of their Emancipation

¹⁰ *Dabru Emet* was framed before the Oslo process fell apart, though it was promulgated in the interval between the failure of the Camp David meeting and the outbreak of the intifada in 2000. Its framers probably anticipated a two-state solution. They felt that as semi-insiders, as Jews but not Israelis, they could speak to the legal norms of the Jewish state, but not to those of a Palestinian state.

¹¹ As opposed to the understanding of people who are Christians who recognize the rights of Jews to the same sort of political self-determination as any other people. This distinction between the political and the religious is clear in the “Notes...” IV:25. The exception would be various Evangelical Christian groups, but these are not the churches with whom the framers of *Dabru Emet* were intensively in dialogue. See Gerald R. McDermott, “Evangelicals and Israel,” in *Uneasy Allies?: Evangelical and Jewish Relations*, ed. Alan Mittleman, Byron Johnson, Nancy Isserman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 127-154.

and Enlightenment on, and one that Christians need to engage with too if the dialogue on this issue is to be genuinely two-way and among equal parties. This discussion over the role of the political in religious understandings of the land is a very critical issue, a meta-issue, underlying more specific discussions.

Meta-Issue: Are There Separate Secular and Religious Realms?

This meta-issue has its source in the fact that Jews and Christians traditionally define the boundaries of religion very differently. Christian definitions have their roots in the specifics of Christian history. Roman law was a well-developed system, very much entrenched when the Roman emperors became Christians and gradually made Christianity first licit and then the official religion of the empire. This law code’s continuing bailiwick defined the secular realm, while areas ruled by the church defined the religious one, at least in theory. Most Christian states had both secular rulers and church hierarchies, often seeking each other’s approval or seeking one to dominate or influence the other, but as distinct entities.¹²

Modernity has seen increasingly successful separation of church and state in most historically Christian countries.¹³ This means that while religious values can certainly inform decisions

¹² The obvious exception was the Papal States and today, the Vatican. Here, Church authorities serve also as civil rulers, controlling territory, conducting foreign relations. One of the complicating factors in Catholic theologies of Israel is precisely that the Vatican’s Secretariat of State, and not the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, handles relations with Israel. This bifurcates the Catholic relationship with the Jewish world.

¹³ The most obvious exception being the UK, where the monarch, since the Reformation, serves as Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and twenty-six of the church’s bishops and archbishops, appointed by the monarch, sit in the House of Lords. See, on the official website of the British Monarchy, “Queen and State: Queen and Church,” <http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/page4708.asp> (accessed June 3, 2008).

made in the secular realm (and do all the time, of course, especially outside of contemporary secularized Europe), western culture has a strong sense of what is religious, or theological, or not. When religion tries to creep too far into the secular realms, it meets with strong resistance. We just have to think of the contemporary culture wars in America over evolutionary versus creationist understandings of biological and geological processes, or over the place of prayer in public schools, or of representations of the Ten Commandments in government buildings. In parts of Europe, this assertion of the secular realm is even stronger. We need only look at recent disputes in France over wearing religious symbols in public schools,¹⁴ or the reluctance in Denmark to ask the press to impose some self-restrictions in deference to Muslim sensitivities over depictions of Muhammed.

Thus, when a group of Christian theologians understands Jewish relationships to the land of Israel explicitly as a theological category that excludes the political reality, they are placing themselves carefully within this spectrum of western thought. Israel as a theological category belongs to religion, to faith, to God, but not to politics, governance, urban planning, water rights, agricultural policy, and so forth except, perhaps, in so far as these affect basic questions of justice and ethics. Such functions are matters of secular politics that affect humans beings who are Israelis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, etc., by nationality; their being Jews, Christians, or Muslims is incidental. Indeed, we do find Israelis who are Jews, Christians, Muslims, and more.

But this separation between secular and religious realms has, in actuality, never been simple. Applying it too strictly to Israel creates a number of entanglements. First, Christian theo-

¹⁴ Paralleled in many ways by the issues in Turkey over Muslim head scarves. This too is a question of the public role of religious symbols in a modern secular state.

logians would readily agree that “covenant” is a theological and not a secular category, and one that plays a significant if complex role in discussions of the Jewish relationship to the land of Israel.¹⁵ But what is the nature of this covenant? Can it be a purely abstract state of relationship? A covenant relating to something concrete necessarily manifests itself in concrete ways, i.e., in expectations of correct human behavior relating to that object. In other words, a covenant of the land must necessarily carry among its terms proper treatment of that land and its inhabitants, worked out in its governance. The boundaries of the theological blur very quickly.

Within this category of covenant lies the traditional Jewish category of “commandments dependent on the land.” These include the agricultural laws, including the land’s sabbatical rest and the dedication of first fruits and tithes to the Temple, ritual laws for the running of the Temple-based worship of God, and political instructions on how to govern the state and its business. These laws have no application at all outside the land.¹⁶ Full resumption of these categories of Jewish life must be messianic, but observant Jews living in the land strive to observe the agricultural laws fully and to use the political ideals of Torah to guide communal life in the contemporary state. To continue to ignore this category or to deny its ongoing validity is to perpetuate the supersessionist attitude that the framers of *A Sacred Obligation* seek to avoid.

However, a focus driven by Christian categories of religious versus secular would dictate that attention be given primarily or

¹⁵ Note, though, that the word “covenant” does not appear in *A Sacred Obligation’s* discussion of Israel. It does not appear in this context in Michael McGarry’s discussion in *Seeing Judaism Anew* either.

¹⁶ These, and other aspects of traditional Judaism, are indeed deeply particularistic. Judaism’s inherent particularism, a characteristic that generally takes precedence over its universalistic concerns, is another significant locus of difference in the Jewish and Christian “filing systems,” one that impacts our discussion here but also one requiring separate attention.

exclusively within this category to issues of Temple-based worship and not to its more explicitly political and agricultural elements. But – and here is our second entanglement – the Temple-based elements of this category are actually the most dangerous and volatile elements of all, the one that only activist messianists dare to address today.¹⁷ Those seeking to spark an immediate apocalypse are calling for the immediate rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple on the site currently occupied by the 8th century Muslim architectural gem, the Dome of the Rock. These are a tiny minority in the Jewish world, aided by some evangelical Christians. Their support is limited even among the orthodox because most believe that this rebuilding must await the arrival of the Messiah, the descendent of King David who will restore the proper *political rule* over the land first. For the most part, Jewish groups interested in rebuilding the Temple focus harmlessly on teaching priests the skills they will need and preparing tools and vessels for the sacrificial service.¹⁸ But periodically, on dates of symbolic significance, a minority of these attempt to drag a cornerstone for the Third Temple up onto the Temple Mount.¹⁹ However, the response from the Muslim world is always, rightfully, one of outrage, as such a move threatens their holy places. This, thus, is one area where theology is more dangerous than politics. A Christian engage-

ment with a theology of the land that seeks to confine itself to obviously religious categories quickly runs into problems.

A third entanglement relates to the definition of “the people Israel.”²⁰ Is this a religious community or a national, ethnic group? The attempt to differentiate between the theologically defined, religious community of Jews and the politically defined contemporary category of “Israelis” has validity at the level of citizenship and its attendant legal consequences. Not all Jews are Israelis and not all Israelis are Jews. But, the world has generally not treated Jews as a religiously defined community. In the Christian world, this found expression in the Augustinian theology of the wandering Jew, forever stateless. Statelessness is, after all, a political category, even if it finds theological justification. The modern experiment to remove national elements from Judaism and to make Jews purely citizens in the states in which they reside (about which more below) finds utter failure in Nazi Europe, where it was Jewish blood, not Jewish faith, that mattered.²¹ The founding of the State of Israel led to overt expression of this understanding in the Arab world as well, which largely expelled its millennia-old Jewish communities after 1948. The world has rarely treated “the people Israel” as a purely religiously defined community. Attempts to do so have created more problems than they have solved, and do not reflect Jewish self-understanding.

The traditional Jewish perspective presumes an inclusive understanding of what it means to be a Jew, of what the peoplehood of Israel means. The roots of this are in our shared scriptures, but traditions of Jewish biblical reading and interpretation lift up texts that Christianity downplays. According to To-

¹⁷ Most orthodox Jews may regularly perform the prayers petitioning for the restoration of the Temple, but they never actually give the topic attention. Conservative Jews changed a few words of these same prayers so that they refer only to the past and not the future. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews eliminated references to sacrificial worship, past and future, from their liturgies. Secular Jews, the majority in Israel and in reality, of all Jews today, omit *all* prayers.

¹⁸ See the website of The Temple Institute (*Maknon Hamiqdash*), especially its page on the Temple’s “Sacred Vessels and Vestments,” [http:// www.templeinstitute.org/vessels_gallery.htm](http://www.templeinstitute.org/vessels_gallery.htm) .

¹⁹ See the website of the Temple Mount and Eretz Yisrael Faithful Movement, especially their photographs from Jerusalem Day 2006, <http://www.templemountfaithful.org/pix.htm> .

²⁰ *Dabru Emet* neglects or perhaps presupposes this category, a significant lacuna.

²¹ Relevant here too is the Iberian suspicion of New Christians beginning in the fifteenth century, a factor that contributed to their preservation as an identified group on the margins of Christian society for centuries.

rah and its covenantal framework, to be Israel in the ideal sense is for the people of Israel to live as a independent, self-governing political entity in the land of Israel, worshipping God in Jerusalem. Exodus and Deuteronomy especially offer chapters full of laws on how to govern this state appropriately, how to tax it, how to farm it, all as part of the people's worship of and covenantal life before God. Exile from the land, then, is exile from Israel's ability to live this ideal life fully. Exile is classically understood as punishment for sin, but Judaism has never understood this to be a permanent state. In the understandings that mature in rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, messianic redemption will allow the full revitalization of corporate Jewish life in the land.

But even without messianic redemption, rabbinic Judaism has always encouraged individuals to return, to "go up"²² to live the fullest lives that they can in the Land of Israel. Today's State of Israel struggles to negotiate the tensions inherent in this vision. It fully embraces the ideal of Jewish life in the land today as the fullest expression of being a Jew. Life there under Jewish sovereignty, i.e., in a Jewish state, is a fuller expression of this. But life there today is not messianic; at best it is proto-messianic, as expressed in the Chief Rabbinate's prayer for the state, which calls it "the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption."²³ To expound on this fully goes beyond the scope of

²² i.e., to "make *aliyah*" in today's Judeo-English. Leaving Israel is *yeridah*, to go down. The language reflects the rabbinic sense that the world's locus of holiness is in Israel, and most particularly in Jerusalem at the site of the Temple.

²³ For a history of this prayer, see Joseph Tabory, "The Piety of Politics: Jewish Prayers for the State of Israel," in *Liturgy in the Life of the Synagogue: Studies in the History of Jewish Prayer*, ed. Ruth Langer and Steven Fine (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 225-246. Joel Rappel, *The Convergence of Politics and Prayer: Jewish Prayers for the Government and the State of Israel* (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2008), presents a more detailed analysis of the history of the prayer and the theology it represents. His conclusions about the genesis of the modern prayer differ from Tabory's.

this essay, but would encompass such questions as how to apply in a modern economy the agricultural laws of the biblical sabbatical year (*shemittah*)²⁴ or of the weekly Sabbath, as well as how to apply civil government regulation of conversion to Judaism, marriage and burial and similar issues of personal status and membership in "the people Israel." On all of these, there are intense differences of opinion from one end to the other of the Jewish religious spectrum. However, these internal Jewish differences mostly are over how to apply these categories in the modern world and not over whether these are relevant categories to the state and its construction of Jewishness. Today's state, while informed by Jewish values, struggles with the relationship between its modern democratic nature and its Jewishness.

This Jewish side to today's state knows no native distinction between the sacred and the secular realms. Indeed, the Torah itself and the rabbinic traditions interpreting and applying it, seek to sanctify the seemingly secular, giving guidance for agriculture, industry, and governance. The rabbinic texts that lie at the heart of the traditional Jewish curriculum address agricultural laws, as well as torts, civil and criminal law. They include mundane issues of urban planning, determining where to locate smelly but necessary industries, including disposal of human waste.²⁵ Part of this concern is to keep the impure away from the sacred, granted, but even this source of impurity is itself not fully profane. After all, after a successful bowel movement, after leaving the profane physical realm of the toilet itself, the rabbis

²⁴ Of real issue as of this writing as the year 5768 (2007-8) is a *shemittah*.

²⁵ For a discussion of a set of these issues that exemplifies the role of *halak-hah* (ranging historically from the talmudic sources to contemporary court cases) and Jewish religious thought in such issues, see Eliezer Diamond, "How Much is Too Much?: Conventional versus Personal Definitions of Pollutions in Rabbinic Sources," in *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed World*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, 2002), 61-80.

mandate a prayer praising God who “created us in wisdom, giving us all the necessary orifices and cavities, for it is fully known before Your Throne of Glory that if one of them should be improperly open or clogged up, it would be impossible to survive to stand before You....”²⁶ In other words, the rabbis teach Jews to thank God for that function of the human body that creates substances that are fully necessary to human health but the epitome of impurity and incompatible with sanctity. If the human body is God’s creation, as is the land on which humans live, then God’s laws for how to live on that land are also of deep theological significance in their directing the Jewish response to God’s creation. Judaism’s traditional “filing system” does not include a concept of a realm beyond the purview of religious concern.²⁷

However, while Judaism traditionally makes no distinction between the religious and the secular realms, precisely this distinction plays a significant role in Jewish self-definition today.

²⁶ TB Berakhot 60b, included in traditional prayer books as a preliminary to the daily morning service.

²⁷ While there are secular Jews who would abandon these categories altogether, Israeli government, both legislative and judicial, has generally sought at least guidance from Jewish tradition. A contemporary example of such a debate has been the question of the mechanisms governing the sabbatical year (*shemithah*) for the Jewish year 5768 (2007-8), when, according to traditional *halakhah*, Jewishly owned land may neither be actively farmed nor its produce sold. The issue is whether Israel’s current prosperity justifies continuing to rely on some legal fictions that lessen the economic impact of the observance. The debate has been quite intense, involving the highest levels of the government-supported rabbinic establishment and even Israel’s secular Supreme Court. On the sabbatical year in general, see Ex. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:1–7, 18–22; Deut. 15:1–11; and David Lieber, Moshe Greenberg, Shmuel Safrai, and Aaron Rothkoff. “Sabbatical Year and Jubilee.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 17:623-630 (accessed electronically through the Boston College Library). On the involvement of secular authorities in this issue, see the editorial in *Haaretz*, “If the High Court Cannot Judge Religious Matters” (October 25, 2007) <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/916790.html>.

This presents Christians trying to understand modern Israel with a very confusing situation, with an apparently confused and confusing Jewish filing system! How can we understand this? While Christianity’s deep engagement with Judaism and Jewish culture is very new, the reverse is not true. Jews, living on the margins of Christian Europe, have engaged deeply and regularly with the categories of Christian intellectual traditions, assimilating them into Jewish culture. As doors opened for Jews to receive less marginalized status in the eighteenth century, this assimilatory process gained momentum, resulting in conscious adaptations of Jewish theology and intellectual traditions that sought to make Jews more deserving of acceptance.²⁸ Aspects of this modern process were also deliberately imposed on the Jewish community. The result was a tension that has shaped the nature of the modern Jewish reality. We deal with the aftermath and continuation of this tension today.

Radical changes entered European society in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Jews began to think differently about themselves when European Christians began to see Jews as fellow human beings, potential citizens and contributors to western society. It should come as no surprise that there were significant segments of the Jewish community that welcomed this opening and sought to explore its implications. Responses, of course, ranged from Jews so eager to find welcome that they converted to Christianity for convenience, to those who sought to adapt Judaism in more and less extreme ways, to those who witnessed this opening with fear and approached it with caution or rejected it entirely. From this, the modern spectrum of Judaisms was born. One of the central questions that came to dif-

²⁸ One could point to other examples of similar processes in Muslim Spain, continuing in Christian Spain immediately after the Reconquista. Israel M. Ta-Shma, “Law, Custom, and Tradition among the Jews of Ashkenaz in the Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries (Initial Investigations),” [Hebrew] *Sidra* 3 (1987): 85-161, points to a similar process that shapes Jewish legal and commentarial traditions in Ashkenaz (Northern France and Germany) in the High Middle Ages. The Italian Renaissance presented another such window.

ferentiate these groups was their thinking about the national elements of their Judaism. Are Jews a people or a religion? Do they hope for a return to Zion, and consequently, to abandon their current place of residence, or are they deeply loyal to the lands in which they currently live? These questions came to matter deeply, in no small part because, in the eyes of many, rejection of Jewish peoplehood and national aspirations tied to the Land of Israel were necessary prerequisites for the acceptance of Jews into western society. This, then, is the point where the idea of Judaism as purely a religion emerges in Jewish thought.

Precisely these elements that Jews were now asked to jettison had been central to Jewish theology. As far as we know, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in the year 70 CE, the failure of the two Jewish revolts against Rome in 70 and again in 135 CE, the subsequent exile of the Jews from Jerusalem, and the loss of even symbolic sovereignty in the land, were defining events for all Jews at the time, whether they lived in the Land of Israel or in the far reaches of the Jewish diaspora. Rabbinic Judaism, that which over the course of the first Christian millennium becomes what we understand to be Judaism, holds these first century disasters at the center of its consciousness and expects that, eventually, God will send the Davidic messiah, resurrect the dead, gather in the exiles to the Land of Israel, and restore Jewish sovereignty there. This hope is ubiquitous in medieval Jewish literature. To the extent that Jews have dogmatic statements of faith, these elements are prominent.²⁹ This messianism is central to the teachings of medieval kabbalah, becoming a dominant force in its popularization in Lurianic form from the sixteenth century on. The first synagogues in the New World received names like Mikveh Is-

²⁹ The most well-known are Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith, included in a liturgical formulation in traditional prayer books, both as a prose listing usually printed at the conclusion of the weekday morning service and as the hymn *Yigdal*.

rael or Shearith Israel (the Hope or Remnant of Israel) or Nidhe Israel and Nefutzei Israel (the Banished or Scattered of Israel), reflecting a belief, voiced in 1650 by a Dutch rabbi and kabbalist, Menasseh ben Israel, that this new extension of the diaspora was a necessary prelude to the imminent ingathering of the exiles.³⁰ For these Jews, the further they moved from the center of the world, from Jerusalem, the more they yearned to be there, and the more likely, they thought, that divine intervention would occur.

Meanwhile, Jews in Europe were increasingly ghettoized, restricted in residence and profession, with no access to secular education. Jews in Muslim lands fared somewhat better as just second-class citizens. In neither case had they reason to cease dreaming about returning home to Jerusalem, dreams that did indeed break out in messianic movements, most famously around the figure of Shabbetai Tzevi beginning in 1665. There are stories of Jews from around Europe at the time transforming their lives in accordance with the teachings of this (false) messiah, some even selling their possessions and preparing to move to Israel.³¹

None of this inspired confidence that Jews were worthy residents in Christian society. Citizens should have sole allegiance to the state in which they reside, and Judaism was teaching Jews to yearn for another state. The enlightenment project thus demanded of Jews that if they sought acceptance and ulti-

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of this, see Jonathan D. Sarna's forthcoming "The Mystical World of Colonial American Jews" in *Modernity: Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter with the Modern World: Essays in Honor of Michael Meyer*, ed. Lauren Strauss and Michael Brenner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

³¹ See the reports recorded by Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), Ch. 5, "The Movement in Europe." Scholem, 477, suggests that some of these reports are exaggerated as there is no evidence for subsequent impoverishment of these people after Tzevi's apostasy.

mately citizenship, they needed to revise this core element of their theology. We see this most clearly in the French revolutionary documents, where the discussions about the place of Jews in French society were deliberate and protracted.³² Until this point in European societies, all Jewish communities were self-governing *political* entities, granted toleration by kings or more local authorities but not citizenship. Thus, when the August 1789 “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” gives all men equal rights and forbids molestation for any opinions, even religious ones, this represents radical change.³³ That December, the French National Assembly debated the eligibility of Jews for citizenship. In that discussion, an advocate for Jewish rights argued:

The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals. They must be citizens....there cannot be one nation within another nation....It is intolerable that the Jews should become a separate political formation or class within a country. Every one of them must individually become a citizen; if they do not want this, they must inform us and we shall then be compelled to expel them. The existence of a nation within a nation is unacceptable to our country....³⁴

A counter voice argued, “It is necessary to grant [Jews] protection, security, liberty; but must one admit into the family a tribe that is a stranger to oneself, that constantly turns its eyes to-

³² The United States Constitution was actually the first document globally to eliminate religious tests for public office and to prohibit legislation concerning the establishment of religion, thus giving Jews citizenship and civil rights. By 1826, all states gave Jews full rights. But these matters were only briefly debated in the United States; for the most part, there were no deep discriminatory precedents to overthrow.

³³ In Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, second edition (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 114.

³⁴ Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 115.

ward [another] homeland, that aspires to abandon the land that supports it...?”³⁵ This particular debate was adjourned without resolution, as was typical for the revolutionary French National Assembly,³⁶ but these were the issues that were to occur and recur. When Napoleon convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables in 1806 from throughout the empire, his questions to them constituted conditions that they needed to accept in order to be considered Frenchmen. Here, the question of Israel did not come up directly, but Napoleon did ask for and receive a specific declaration of allegiance to France. The assembled rabbis stated:

At the present time, when the Jews no longer form a separate people, but enjoy the advantage of being incorporated with the Great Nation (which privilege they consider as a kind of political redemption), it is impossible that a Jew should treat a Frenchman, not of his religion, in any other manner than he would treat one of his Israelite brethren.³⁷

Their parenthetical description of Jews’ achieving French citizenship as “a kind of political redemption” suggests that they were interpreting the events of their times as quasi-messianic, as an event of eschatological significance. This citizenship, they presumed, erased Jewish separateness.

The sequel to this gathering was the famous Paris Sanhedrin, convened at Napoleon’s instruction in April 1807 to give spiritual sanction to the notable’s decisions. In its declaration, we see for the first time, in a Jewish text, this separation of political and religious – that which results from the requirements placed upon Jews for entry into citizenship. The Sanhedrin wrote:

³⁵ Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 115.

³⁶ Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 116, n.1.

³⁷ Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 130.

We therefore declare that the divine Law, the precious heritage of our ancestors, contains within itself dispositions which are political and dispositions which are religious. That the religious dispositions are, by their nature, absolute and independent of circumstances and of the age; that this does not hold true of the political dispositions, that is to say, of the dispositions which were taken for the government of the people of Israel in Palestine when it possessed its own kings, pontiffs and magistrates; that these political dispositions are no longer applicable, since Israel no longer forms a nation....³⁸

This last point, forged by the demands of French politics, found wide religious echo throughout western Europe, especially in the Reform movement as it developed in Germany. The radical non-rabbinic Frankfurt Friends of Reform in 1842 declared in the third of its three principles, "We neither expect nor desire a messiah who is to lead the Israelites back to the land of Palestine; we recognize no fatherland other than that to which we belong by birth or civil status."³⁹ Liberal Jewish thinkers argued for the development of an official German Jewish "church" that could play a parallel role in the Prussian state to the official Lutheran church, thus granting Jews access to civic roles.⁴⁰ In addition, a Judaism that dropped its particularism and that understood its dispersion among the gentiles as the divine will and its task to be a prophetic "light to the nations" could play a role in the Enlightenment project of the messianic progress of the entire world.⁴¹

³⁸ Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 135. For an analysis of the impact of this statement, see most recently, Jay R. Berkovitz, "The Napoleonic Sanhedrin: Halachic Foundations and Rabbinical Legacy," *CCAR Journal* (Winter 2007): 11-34 (http://ccarnet.org/kd/items/actions.cfm?action=Show&item_id=969&destination=ShowItem).

³⁹ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 122.

⁴⁰ Meyer, 125ff.

⁴¹ Cf. Meyer 201 et.al.

These ideas crossed the ocean and became formative for the American Reform movement too. Its 1885 Pittsburgh Platform declared, "We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state." To the extent that this document voiced an eschatological vision, it was a universal one, in which Jews work in harmony with other monotheists by searching for justice, truth and righteousness on earth.⁴²

Thus, a political trajectory that began as part of the Enlightenment project, became formative of liberal Jewish identity in Western Europe and in America. Jews were a religious community only, with allegiance only to the state in which they resided. The Land of Israel, let alone a revived State of Israel, ceased to have any significance for them. Once Zionism emerged as an organized movement in the late nineteenth century, many in the Reform movement became officially anti-Zionist. The Zionist desire to rebuild a Jewish homeland, to revive a specific Jewish culture, to create a Jewish political entity, flew in the face of this entire Western attempt to redefine Judaism to be a religion of universal horizons, legitimately part of European and American culture. Philosophically, or, if you prefer, theologically, they understood religious Reform and Zionism to be utterly incompatible. Zionism was undermining what Reformers saw as the route to end anti-Semitism.

But Zionism was relatively successful – it attracted Jews to Ottoman and then British Mandatory Palestine, and it transformed the desert there into increasingly modern cities, farms, and industries. With all its problems, it provided an attractive refuge, especially for Jews fleeing Eastern European anti-Semitism. In the face of Russian pogroms, Arab riots seemed

⁴² Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 469; the text is also posted at http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=39&pge_prg_id=4687&pge_id=1656.

tame. On the other hand and more importantly, the western European experiment failed utterly. The rise of virulent anti-Semitism in Europe, culminating in the Nazi Holocaust, showed Jews that however much they attempted to transform themselves into Germans, French, etc., of the Jewish faith, Europeans ultimately considered their Judaism to be much more than a religion. Modernized Jews of Arab lands received this same rejection when they too were expelled after 1948. This combination of factors led to a sort of resolution of the conflict between Reform Judaism and Zionism. Especially after America closed its doors to immigrants in 1924, even before the rise of Nazism, leaders of the American Reform movement gradually come to accept the need for a Zionist settlement for European refugees; in 1937, they made this acceptance formal.⁴³

But formal acceptance of an ideology by the leadership of a movement does not necessarily reflect or effectively shape the thinking on the ground. This enlightenment project of recasting Judaism as a universal religion without specific or necessary ties to nationality and culture was imposed on Judaism as a condition for acceptance into Western civilization, something many Jews deeply desired. It consequently became a formative element in the shaping of modern western and especially American Judaisms, assimilated into their theologies. Thus, even after subsequent history debunked significant elements of this ideology, aspects of it remained and remain very strongly present. Thus, we find diaspora Jews today whose religious

identity does not include deep identification with either the land and state of Israel or even the people of Israel. While within a pluralistic understanding of Judaism, this cannot be deemed “right” or “wrong,” it is a product of a peculiarity of the Jewish struggle for acceptance in modern western society. It also no longer represents the official teachings of any major Jewish group.

In some ways, this modern separation between the religious and national aspects of Judaism shaped the Israeli reality. Secular Zionism, from its late nineteenth century origins, championed precisely those elements of Judaism that this modernized, westernized, religiously defined Judaism rejected. While eliminating or limiting religious expression, it celebrated Jewish culture, nationalism, and Jews’ historically rooted attachment to the homeland. This approach resulted in a State of Israel whose governing structures are those of a secular democratic nation, not those that would be dictated by rabbinic *halakhah*. It resulted in a state that is culturally Jewish, that accommodates and negotiates with religious aspects of Judaism, but not one that excludes minority cultures and their religions. Most would agree that this state does not represent a utopia or ideal society. It has very real and even severe problems, internal and external. But this state does represent an authentic Jewish striving and searching for an expression of important aspects of a holistically defined Judaism.

The orthodox Jewish world largely resisted this rejection of one part or another of Judaism. Religious observance, Jewish cultural and ethnic identity as the people “Israel,” and the ideal of life in the land of Israel and sovereignty there were never questioned. What complicates orthodox theology is the status of the contemporary political state. Orthodox understanding ranges from absolute rejection of the Jewish validity of any pre-messianic state (these include some ultra-orthodox groups who are resident in the land, some of whom have their own political

⁴³ In the Columbus Platform, A.5 (http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=40&page_prg_id=4687&page_id=1656). Particularly important in the process towards this are discussions at the 1935 Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) convention about re-accessing elements of Jewish nationalism. See David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (World Zionist Organization, 1976), 169ff. In 1997, the CCAR adopted its first official Zionist platform, “Reform Judaism & Zionism: A Centenary Platform,” an official American Reform theology of the land and state (http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=42&page_prg_id=3032&page_id=1656)

parties and participate in the state for the sake of expedience, some of whom do not), to religious Zionist positions that understand today's state to be proto-messianic and God's will. Within the latter group, there is a range from those like the *Gush Emunim* (Bloc of the Faithful) who understand Jewish residence in the whole biblical Land of Israel to be God's will and necessary to create the conditions for the advent of the Messiah, to those who advocate the practical necessity of compromise towards a peaceful two-state solution.

Thus, without question, there are many Judaisms today, and the theologies of these various Judaisms express different understandings of the role of the land and state of Israel. But within these, only a tiny minority of those who actually think about their Judaism seriously still accept the Enlightenment rejection of Judaism's national, ethnic, or familial elements or its ties to its historical homeland. Essentially all would accept that successful *Jewish* life in that homeland requires its effective governance. In other words, the vast majority of Jews agree that political issues cannot be excluded from theological discussion about Israel. By no means does this preclude criticism of the current government; in fact, the Jewish project requires continual constructive criticism and striving towards an as yet unachieved messianic ideal.⁴⁴ Talmudic culture has embedded in Jewish culture a love of argumentation and a sense that it is within the dialectic of this argument that truths will emerge, that God's will will become evident to us.⁴⁵ Thus, the diversity of un-

⁴⁴ The appropriate modes and boundaries of this criticism are another very complex topic. To what extent do Jews living in the diaspora have a voice? For Christians, the question needs to be phrased in terms of the boundary between legitimate critique and critique that is driven by traditions of anti-Semitism and/or anti-Judaism. Answering this question requires careful discernment – but also very careful voicing of any critique so that its legitimate content is received as intended. The challenges of communicating across the different “filing systems” of our communities are directly relevant to this.

⁴⁵ For an exposition of this dynamic within the Talmud itself, see David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli* (New

understandings about contemporary Israel, from a Jewish perspective, can be understood as a sign of health and theological vitality, one that from the perspective of the Jewish “filing system” is to be cherished. While this diversity makes the Christian task of coming to an understanding of Judaism complex, to insist on simplicity or doctrinal uniformity is to impose foreign categories on the native structures of Judaism.

Conclusions

Enlightenment Christians welcomed Jews into western culture only if they jettisoned what was distinctive about Judaism, that which seemed to go beyond the confines of the categories of Christian theology. This included especially elements of nation, state, and land. But ultimately, even this did not create categories that allowed exclusion of anti-Semitism; instead it seemed to have enhanced it. In other words, Christian attempts to bring Jews into the Christian “filing structure” were disastrous; Jews were welcomed only if they jettisoned large segments of their existing “hard drives.” Consequently, even this altered (or reformed) Judaism never fit fully.

We may speculate whether a recognition of this reality lay behind the Vatican Commission's 1974 statement that Christians “must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience.”⁴⁶ In other words, any culture, to be in dialogue with others, needs to come to conscious recognition of its own presumptions, of its own “filing structure,” in order to be able to recognize where

York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Because study of the Talmud formed and forms the core of traditional Jewish education, its intellectual values deeply impact Jewish culture.

⁴⁶ Vatican Commission for Religious Relations With The Jews, “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, No. 4,” (December 1, 1974), Preamble (http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/Vatican_Guidelines.htm).

others legitimately differ. In order to engage with any specific other, one must be able to enter into its mental structures and intellectual categories, its way of organizing the world. Christians have historically little experience with this;⁴⁷ Jews, as a minority culture for most of their history, have somewhat more. But Christian-Jewish dialogue, like dialogue between any two communities, requires developing this sensitivity. In terms of our specific topic here, the development of adequate theologies of the land and state of Israel within the context of the contemporary dialogue, this is a crucial first step. Here, Jews are asking Christians to come to an understanding of a critical aspect of Jewish thought and life.

For this understanding to reflect “the essential traits [by which] Jews define themselves,” Jews need to reflect deeply on

and verbalize not only the specifics of Jewish theologies of the land, but also the mental categories that govern how the elements of these theologies operate. Without such entry into the Jewish “filing system,” Christian reflection on Israel can reflect only the re-filing of elements of Jewish theology into Christian categories. Our communication and hence our dialogue will inevitably, then, be inadequate. And of course the reverse is also true: Jews must also understand the Christian “filing system” and to communicate in ways that enable words and ideas to find productive and accurate hearings. It is this that I have attempted to do here: to explore our different structurings of the secular and religious realms as this affects the possibilities for our theological understandings of the land and state of Israel.

⁴⁷ The enterprise of Comparative Theology seeks to open this door. For resources on this, see <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/theology/comparative/resources/articles/ct.html>.