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Eva Fleischner and Christian-Jewish Dialogue in the Twenty-first Century

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You shall not abhor the Edomite, for he is your kinsman. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land.

—Deuteronomy 23:8

We must not allow anyone, or any group, to be at the mercy of or dependent upon the good will of a few. We must create societies in which the human rights of all will be safeguarded with just social, political, and legal structures.

—Eva Fleischner[1]

Is it possible that the antonym of "forgetting"' is not "remembering," but *justice?*

—Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi[2]

For me as a Christian, the Jew has become, through my encounter with the Holocaust, the witness to the living God in the world.

—Eva Fleischner[3]

The entire Christian tradition stands under judgment today.

—Eva Fleischner[4]

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1. Eva Fleischner, "Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust," in *The Memory of Goodness: Eva Fleischner and Her Contributions to Holocaust Studies*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (Greensburg, PA: Seton Hill University, 2022), 111.
2. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Postscript," in *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 117.
3. Eva Fleischner, "Response to Emil Fackenheim," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Eva Fleischner (Ktav, 1977), 230.
4. Eva Fleischner, "Review: *The Crucifixion of the Jews* by Franklin H. Littell," *Crosscurrents* 25, no. 1 (1975): 102.

In October of 2021, the Washington National Cathedral unveiled a stone carving of Elie Wiesel's countenance for its Human Rights Porch. Sculpted by Chas Fagan and carved by Sean Callahan, this piece was the first sculpture by a non-Christian to be commissioned and displayed on this esteemed platform. Accompanying the celebration of Wiesel's inclusion into the company of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, among other illustrious heroes and luminaries, were questions concerning the appropriateness of displaying a Holocaust survivor in a church. The deeper question was: Does Wiesel's inclusion there increase our capacity to remember Christian complicity during the Holocaust, hence the moral imperative to "never forget"? Or does it do precisely the opposite: erase the very narrative that his likeness is supposed to evoke? The philosopher Jacques Derrida, for instance, wrote of this kind of remembrance as a form of forgetting.[5] This idea suggests that once a monument is in public view, we allow the memory of what it commemorates to disappear—the monument no longer appears as a call to act.

Before we dismiss Derrida for mere hyperbole, a few years earlier, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany released a survey that disclosed a shocking lack of awareness of (and apathy toward) the Holocaust among American adults. Seven out of ten Americans surveyed said that they were ambivalent about the Holocaust and 58 percent of those surveyed said the Holocaust could happen again. Even though we know there were some forty thousand ghettos and concentration camps in Europe, 45 percent of the Americans surveyed could not identify a single one. At the same time, 93 percent of those who were surveyed said that Holocaust education should be a part of our education system, and 80 percent said that teaching about the Holocaust was essential to preventing another genocide.[6] How do we make sense of this data? The majority of Americans are ambivalent and ignorant about the Holocaust, and yet this same majority believes Holocaust education is essential to prevent another one? How do we account for and address this disturbing contradiction?

The past few years have witnessed a very unsettling trend of political populism that has provided public platforms for Jewish conspiracy theories, xenophobia, racism, and jingoism. As a result, we have seen a rise in antisemitic incidents, none more horrific than the murderous rampage at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and the Chabad shul in Poway, California. Historical analogies will always be imperfect, but it's not too difficult to discern certain trends. Both shooters believed they were protecting society from alleged deleterious efforts of Jews.

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5. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2004).
6. See https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Holocaust-Knowledge-Awareness-Study_Executive-Summary-2018.pdf.

Once again, Jews are fearful of their neighbors. Old questions concerning anti-Judaism and antisemitism are rearing their ugly heads. One question that emerges from this crisis is: What is the role for Christians to address and challenge these trends? Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem, but rather a non-Jewish one. In some cases, it has been an exclusively Christian problem.[7] How can and should people address their own prejudices? In particular, how can Christians grapple with the tension between exegesis, history, and theology to employ their faith effectively to build deeper relationships with their own neighbors rather than to belittle or persecute them? We know that how people deal with their own history is an indication of how they will deal with their present and future.[8] Is the failure of Christians to prevent the Holocaust doomed to repeat itself, or has that failure put Christians on a very different path, in which, as the noted Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in regards to racism in the United States, "some are guilty, but all are responsible."[9] Time will tell. However, there are those who made it their life's work to prevent such a disaster from reoccurring, and it would behoove us all to revisit their works.

One such person is Eva Fleischner.

Reprinted in this volume, Fleischner's book *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945: Christianity and Israel Considered in Terms of Mission* is an early post-Vatican II attempt to address these questions. In many ways, she was a pioneer, both in terms of theological humility and curiosity. Fleischner's path was on the margins. She probed the histories, worldviews, theologies, and ultimately systems that both informed her sense of identity and her desire for reconciliation. She was driven by a deep ethical impulse and conviction to change the way we relate to others, and ultimately, she sought to lay the groundwork for a more dialogical, pluralistic path to God that incorporates the theological worldviews of those in the past, present, and potential future(s). She was a committed Catholic and saw her work as part of a robust history of Christian thinking and tradition. Her views, however, seem to enjoy more influence in the academic sphere, rather than in the Christian mainstream.[10]

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7. David P. Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* (St. Paul: Paragon, 2003), 13. Gushee writes: "*The Holocaust was an event in the history of Christianity*. No serious student of the subject can deny it" (Gushee's emphasis).
8. See Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
9. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Religion and Race," in *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 93.
10. Mary Boys, "Eva Fleischner," in *Interreligious Heroes: Role Models and Spiritual Exemplars for Interfaith Practice*, ed. Alon Goshen-Gottstein (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021), 246.

As a Jewish person and a Jewish scholar, I recognize that I am not part of Fleischner's intended audience: she did not explicitly write her book for me or for people like me. In fact, in a strange way, as we will learn below, Fleischner was at once following a Christian tradition that often speaks about Jews and Judaism as objects for Christians to interpret, and yet at the same time she was vehemently rejecting that perspective. She demands that Christians learn to engage living Jews and Judaism, not merely the hermeneutical or dead ones. She demands dialogue over mission. She was cognizant of Christian anti-Judaism well before it entered into public theological discourse. And, of course, we still have a lot of work to do before we can realize her dialogical goals. In this way, then, her book is very important to me, and at this moment I see myself as an important audience for this work. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to engage her work here, because, as you will learn below, her work is essential to maintaining humility, dignity, and honesty in interreligious dialogue. It is also essential for attaining a general understanding of tradition. Another Catholic theologian, Peter Phan, has argued that, in many ways, tradition can be understood as a continual process of selective reinterpretation and reconstruction.[11] In this way, Fleischner's moral imperative to dialogue is at the heart of this process of tradition and espouses a genuine, sacred sense of humility, since being Christian, in her mind, is inherently an interreligious endeavor.

In what follows here, I will first examine Fleischner's work on Christian theological supersessionism and anti-Judaism in order to lay out why she sought to challenge and change conventional theological tropes concerning Jews and Judaism, especially in regard to mission and missionizing. Second, I will explore how her views of dialogue compare to more contemporary views on this topic, so we can have a better sense as to why her work is essential to the success of Jewish-Christian relations in particular, but also to the work of interreligious dialogue more generally. In the third and closing section, I will show how her work shares notable features with Jewish dialogical thought, in order to make the case as to why people like me need to study and engage her work seriously.

Supersessionism: Tensions between Exegesis, Theology, and History

Eva Fleischner belongs to a generation of Christian scholars who felt they had a "sacred obligation," in the wake of the Holocaust, to repent for and to repair the Christian church's "teaching of contempt," its centuries-long denigration of Jews

11. Peter C. Phan, "The Mutual Shaping of Cultures and Religions though Interreligious Dialogue," in *Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Change*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Stephanie Corigliano (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 37–39.

and Judaism, rooted in destructive allegations that Jews are cursed and punished by God because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah and killed him.[12] As these scholars assessed the history of Christian theological anti-Judaism, they saw that its "teaching of contempt" toward Jews and Judaism not only led to Christian persecution of Jews over the centuries but also still bedevils contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue.[13]

Fleischner was clear. For her, while "the Shoah cannot be solely attributed to the anti-Jewish teachings of Christianity," it still "fertilized the soil in which Hitler's genocidal antisemitism flourished."[14] In fact, she wrote, "Hitler completed the process begun by the church centuries earlier. He added, however, one unprecedented, critical step: genocide."[15] This charge was bold, but she understood the role Christian theology played in the unfolding of the Holocaust's twisted path. The sacred obligation, argued Fleischner, requires Christians to ask: "How could this have happened? How could Jesus's gospel of love have been turned into a teaching of contempt?"[16] The answer, for her and for many others, can be found in the Christian theological category of supersessionism.

Supersessionism is an easy and not-so easy word to define.[17] It is sometimes referred to as "replacement theology."[18] More recently, it has also been associated with colonialism and white supremacy.[19] The word itself denotes a particular

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12. See The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, "A Sacred Obligation," in *The Memory of Goodness,* 221–26. The phrase "teaching of contempt" was coined by the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac. See his books *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) and *Jesus and Israel*, trans. Sally Gran (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971. See also Eva Fleischner's lucid summary, "The Teaching of Contempt: The Origins of Anti-Judaism," in *The Memory of Goodness*, 61–69.
13. While it would not be hyperbolic in any sense, in my view, to suggest that this particular generation of scholars—working over the past half century—advanced the cause of Jewish-Christian relations more than at any other time in the previous two millennia, obviously we still have a lot of work to do. Yet, I find it difficult to imagine doing my own work in interreligious dialogue without the important contributions of these scholars.
14. Eva Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations," in *The Memory of Goodness*, 137. See also *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945: Christianity and Israel Considered in Terms of Mission*, 77 [23].
15. Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations," 136.
16. Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations,"135.
17. R. Kendall Soulen, "Supersessionism," in *Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 413–14.
18. Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations," 136.
19. See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of the Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, and Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017); Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2020); Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American*

theological move away from the Hebrew Bible (what Christians refer to as the "Old Testament") and the divine covenant with Jews toward a new divine covenant sealed with the messiahship of Jesus Christ. This new covenant superseded the old one. It also meant that the church superseded—indeed replaced—Judaism as God's favored people.[20] However, as Fleischner noted, "the continued existence of Israel since the coming of Jesus challenges the nature of the church."[21] Christian theologians needed to reconcile the tension of how the people of Israel continued to exist while also being replaced. This replacement theology took a more dangerous turn in the second century when Melito of Sardis wrote the first known accusation of deicide against Jews.[22] Not long after, Augustine indulged in a similar speculation when he represented Jews as descendants of Adam's murderous son Cain. Israel's dispersion and loss of political autonomy were, for him, a clear example of divine punishment: Jews were merely a living witness to their own ontological evil, and thus testified to the greater truth of Christian doctrine.

Augustine thought Jews were what the medieval theologian Bernard of Clairvaux would later call "living letters."[23] In his oft-cited *Contra Faustum*, Augustine remarked, "no one can fail to see that in every land where the Jews are scattered they mourn for the loss of their kingdom, and are in terrified subjection to the immensely superior number of Christians."[24] The survival of Jews, as people bearing the mark of Cain and the likeness of Noah's rebellious son Ham, is evidence that

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Christianity (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020); Santiago Slabodsky, "It's the Theology Stupid! Coloniality, Anti-Blackness, and the Bounds of 'Humanity,'" in *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics*, ed. Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 19-40; M. Shawn Copeland, "White Supremacy and Anti-Black Logics in the Making of U.S. Catholicism," in *Anti-Blackness and Christian Ethics*, 19-40; Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Khyati Y. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Mark A. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

20. Eva Fleischner, "The Teaching of Contempt: The Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism," in *The Memory of Goodness*, 66–67. She writes: "In trying to find its identity, the church saw itself as the 'new' Israel, as the new people of God, which had inherited all the promises and privileges of the first people of God, the Jews. The church believed that the Jewish people had failed in its mission—namely, recognizing and welcoming the Messiah—and had therefore lost its claim to be the people of God. The church had taken their place. . . . This argument would have been more convincing if the Jewish people had disappeared, had ceased to exist, as was the case with so many peoples in the ancient world. But they did not disappear, despite the catastrophic destruction of the Roman wars. They not only continued to exist, but regained strength—the first Roman war was followed by the flowering of rabbinic Judaism—and the Jews continued to make converts."
21. Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 83, [29].
22. Helen P. Fry, "Charge of Deicide," in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, 123.
23. See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 219–70.
24. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 12.12.

they are *scriniaria* ("the writing desk") of Christians.[25] In Augustine's doctrine of witness, Jews endure as "testimony to the tenets of the church, so that we honor through the sacrament and what it announces through the letter."[26] As has been well documented, these passages have been used to demonize Jews and Judaism.[27] They have also been used to justify violence towards them.[28] But they have also been used to protect (more appropriately, preserve) Jews.[29] Hence, we have the famous Augustinian paradox: While the potential for violence against Jews is real (and has a long track record), it is not perforce a logical extension of an Augustinian worldview. Reconciliation for this violence is at least a part of the theology that inspired it.[30] Christian theology can be held accountable for this violence, while also offering a different path. Serious theologians must reconcile traditional religious convictions with the promises of pluralism and liberalism.[31] Eva Fleischner understood this point better than most people and was troubled by a tradition insisting that to be Christian required one to be anti-Jewish.[32]

Early in her doctoral studies at Marquette University—where she was studying historical theology—Fleischner became unsettled and concerned about how deeply embedded anti-Judaism was in Christian theology. Starting with Martin Luther's anti-Jewish writings and going back to Augustine and even the New Testament itself, there seemed to be a distressing theological worldview that required anti-Judaism to accompany Christian theology.[33] She learned that Luther's vilification of Jews was not unique. Her realization inspired a commitment to pursue deeper

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25. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 12.23.
26. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 12.23.
27. See Michael Frassetto, ed., *Christian Attitudes Toward Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and The Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
28. See Rosemary Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).
29. Paula Fredrikson, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*.
30. See Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 192 [146–47].
31. Religious pluralism here refers to the civic engagement with religious diversity as articulated by Diana Eck and the Pluralism Project and not the theological pluralism laid out in Alan Race's well-known threefold typology. See Diana L. Eck, "Prospects for Pluralism: Voice and Vision in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, no. 4 (2007): 743–76. See also Alan Race, *Thinking about Religious Pluralism: Shaping Theology of Religions for Our Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).
32. As Fleischner explained, Augustine argued "there is a reason for continued existence for Jews (a confusing fact for the church): in their exile, Jews remind the world of what happens when human beings reject God" (Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations," 136).
33. Eva Fleischner, "A Door That Opened and Never Closed: Teaching the Shoah," in *The Memory of Goodness*, 42. See also Boys, "Eva Fleischner," 226.

knowledge of Jewish tradition and its sources, which led even to her "seriously [contemplating] converting to Judaism."[34]

Fleischner was born in Vienna in 1925. Her mother was a Catholic, her father a Jew. He converted to Catholicism when his daughter was eleven. Fleischner did not learn much about Judaism from her Jewish relatives.[35] She was raised Catholic, but that fact would not have prevented the Nazis from identifying her as "Jewish." In the eyes of the Third Reich, Jewish converts like her father not only remained Jews but also their children inherited sufficient Jewish identity to put them at risk. Fleischner's ongoing commitment to study Judaism on its own terms existed in that historical context.

Completed in 1971, Fleischner's dissertation, *The View of Judaism in German-Christian Theology Since 1945*, explored the relationship between supersessionism and anti-Judaism by examining how Protestants and Catholics in Germany continued to advance a subtler version of the "Final Solution" through an organized missionary effort to convert the remaining Jews. The theological worldview justifying Judenmission, as it was called in German, still required placing Jews on the margins of society. To become Christians, Jews had to relinquish the core of their own identities.

Fleischner argued that Christians must replace this theological call to missionize Jews with a new moral imperative to seek dialogue with Jews as Jews. In fact, Fleischner argued that the church's relationship to Jews and Judaism was the litmus test by which we can engage whether or not it can have a relationship to a broader, more diverse world. So, to be Christian, for Fleischner, requires building new spaces, as equal partners, for Jewish-Christian dialogue. As a Jewish scholar who works in the world of Jewish-Christian relations, it is striking to me how prescient her claims were and how important they remain today.[36]

Radical Humility and Radical Pluralism: Dialogue Over Mission

Very often in my work in Baltimore, my colleagues and I ask: How can we create new spaces for dialogue? Dialogue is complicated, especially when some of our interlocutors seek to convert us to their religion. Even if our dialogues are oriented around an understanding of a shared humanity, when someone assumes we must betray our religious life and experiences in order to been seen as equals theologically, we feel, and in fact very often are, dehumanized. After a decade of

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34. Boys, "Eva Fleischner," 226.
35. Eva Fleischner, "A Door That Opened and Never Closed," 41.
36. See, for example, Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, which echoes Fleischner when he writes that "the need for Christians to learn to reread the Torah alongside the living Israel, attending carefully to Christianity's deep involvement in the Shoah, follows compellingly from examining the tragic legacy of colonialism" (283).

work in interreligious dialogue, I have learned that most people of faith regard their humanity as refracted through the particularity of their religious community. In my view, honest dialogue, indeed engagement, requires some acknowledgment that any religious faith, especially that of biblical or theistic orientation, unavoidably engenders some intolerance, possibly even some prejudice. Religious knowledge, after all, is privileged knowledge. We know too well how a claim to privileged knowledge can lead individuals not only to hubris but also to contempt for other religious traditions. We also know well how the liberal ethic of tolerance emerged to abnegate the indignation and wrath animated by conflicting theological claims. Tolerance should inspire ambivalence, which, of course, is preferable to the violence associated with intolerance. However, I am *not* ambivalent about religious difference: In my experience with interreligious dialogue, a view of tolerance usually emerges that challenges *all* religious people to account for their fidelity to their particular religious values while acknowledging the cognitive, spiritual, and theological dignity and integrity of competing worldviews.

That outlook creates a critical challenge for all religious and even non-religious people: How do we educate our children, our friends, our families, and our congregations to embrace the particularistic values of our religious communities while simultaneously allowing a space for values that may be at odds with our own? In a world where calls to tolerance abound, we cannot responsibly teach people simply to tolerate others. Tolerance is certainly important. However, in an ever-changing pluralistic and multicultural world, tolerance is only a place to *ask questions*. We need more than tolerance to engage them.

Fleischner argued this very point. In her dialogical engagement with Jews, she developed an answer to the conundrum of pluralism described above. How can Christians dialogue honestly with Jews in a pluralistic context when the Christians' theological mandate to convert them challenges any notion of tolerance, let alone of respecting the dignity of the other? For her, the answer was through humility. The Christian who genuinely dialogues with Jews is not a mere bibliophilic tourist who consumes the literary and theological works of Jews and Judaism because of a fleeting curiosity or an anthropological voyeurism or, worse, a dominating colonialism.[37]

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37. There is a real danger in such an approach. As Christine J. Hong argues: "The notion of competency when it comes to people's lived experiences in culture and religion harkens back to the colonial operationalization of science and education to subjugate, control, and destroy. . . . Competency in religious education and even theological education through a dangerously colonial understanding presumes whiteness and Christianity as normative. Any difference is 'other' and therefore expendable or buried in favor of white and Christian ways of knowing and being" (Christine J. Hong, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Encounter* [New York: Lexington, 2021], 18).

Instead, in the theological and even cultural expressions of Jews, a Christian may receive glimpses, perhaps even testimonies, about—in Philip Cunningham's words—the universal importance of "the virtue of humility, of remaining within the limits of our knowledge and respecting the hidden ways of divine Providence."[38] Humility, in this instance, can evoke a sense of theological mystery. Jews and Christians in dialogue orient around a divine mystery about the aporia, the impasse or contradiction between two divine covenants, which, for millennia, have been interpreted without this interreligious humility. The reconciliation, if any, between these contested outlooks gets pushed far into the future—even to an eschatological "end of days." Unfortunately, humility can lead to meandering in theological abstraction, and that can get in the way of genuine dialogue. How helpful is theological humility to building dialogical bridges between Christians and Jews? Can it correct the "teaching of contempt" and orient Christians beyond supersessionism and Judenmission? Is it enough to say, as in the biblical book of Isaiah, that "God's ways are not our own?" (Isaiah 55:8). Is theology enough?

In our current political environment, Judenmission remains a complicated theological problem. In January 2010, a provocative cartoon by Enea Riboldi appeared in the Italian-Jewish newspaper *Pagine Ebraiche* (The Jewish Pages). Responding to Pope Benedict XVI's scheduled visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome that month, the cartoon depicted him walking on a tightrope over the Tiber River, situated precariously with a balancing rod weighted by two flags: one emblazoned with the word *conversione* (conversion), the other with the word *diologo* (dialogue).[39] A year before the publication of this cartoon, the pontiff was embroiled in an interreligious controversy. Attending to a small percentage of Catholics who continued to worship according to the pre-Vatican II Tridentine Rite, the pope penned a new Good Friday invocation for Jews. It petitioned God to "illuminate [Jews'] hearts so that they may recognize Jesus Christ as the savior of all men."[40] The pope's new prayer seemed to portray a move away and back from the 1970 post-Vatican II invocation—which does not mention Jews— prayed by most of the world's Catholics on Good Friday. The change startled both Jews and Catholics. Even in the twenty-first century, a post-*Nostra Aetate* pope needed to balance a two-millennia-old desire to convert Jews with a very contemporary one that seeks to dialogue with them. Even though mandated by the church, could *diologo* truly replace *conversione*? Can the church succeed in charting a radically different future,

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38. Philip Cunningham, *Maxims for Mutuality: Principles for Catholic Theology, Education, and Preaching About Jews and Judaism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2022), 37.
39. See https://www.moked.it/unione_informa/091222/091222.htm.
40. See https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/11692/pope-benedict-xvi-issues-new-good-friday-prayer-for-the-jews.

one that not only accepts Jews as partners but also accepts that Jews have their own covenantal relationship with God?

Eva Fleischner emphatically chose *diologo*. Sadly, though, after almost sixty years since the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, it would seem that only a few members of the Roman Catholic Church's hierarchy have faithfully followed this path.[41] Despite Fleischner's call that "dialogue [with Jews] must indeed replace mission"[42] and that the church must develop and teach non-supersessionist theologies, most who do any work in this area simply offer what Leon Klenicki called "interfaith tea and sympathy."[43] Despite Fleischner's work in repairing relationships with Jews as well as attending to Christian theological anti-Judaism, most clergy still do not exhibit any meaningful understanding of Jews, their history and religion, their fears and concerns. The shortcoming, unfortunately, is on display in weekly homilies.[44]

Fortunately, Fleischner's work has enjoyed an important and influential afterlife in academia: both in the field of Christian-Jewish relations and in the nascent field of interreligious studies. Her writings on Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as on the Holocaust anticipated more recent trends in scholarship on religious pluralism. For example, even though Catherine Cornille, a Catholic scholar of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology, does not explicitly cite Fleischner, she implicitly expanded Fleischner's argument to include other religions. Cornille's book *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* concludes with a clear Fleischnerian insight: "the capacity for dialogue is thus itself a process, involving, indeed calling for, continuous critical self-examination and a creative retrieval of resources that may open the tradition to the religious other and to growth in the truth."[45] Cornille argues that in order for interreligious dialogue to have meaningful impact or significance, practitioners and believers of any religious community must find the reason and the motivation for dialogue within their own textual traditions. She focuses five conditions for dialogue:

1. *Humility:* Dialogue requires a possibility of change and growth, thus those who practice dialogue assume a basic recognition of their own limitations, prejudices, and imperfections.[46]

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41. Robert P. Erickson, "Jews and 'God the Father' after Auschwitz: American Responses to *Nostra Aetate*," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 29, no. 3 (2016): 329–30.
42. Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 166 [115].
43. See https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/547/article/what-next. Klenicki, the director emeritus of Interfaith Affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, made this comment in 2005.
44. Boys, "Eva Fleischner," 228.
45. Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 216.
46. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 9–58.

2. *Commitment:* Even though interreligious dialogue may lead to questioning the truth of one's own theological point of view or theological orientation to the world, interreligious dialogue, for Cornille, requires a commitment to one's own religious tradition, while respecting the truth claims of another.[47]
3. *Interconnection:* Dialogue requires finding a shared way into any conversation and requires people to search for and make relevant new ways into interreligious conversations.[48]
4. *Empathy:* Dialogue allows people to grasp not only an intellectual but also an experiential understanding of their religious other.[49] "This point must be made more boldly," Cornille avers, "It is only to the degree that one is able to resonate with the religious meaning of particular teachings and practices of the other religion that they have an impact on one's own religious tradition."[50]
5. *Hospitality:* Dialogue requires people to be hospitable to the authentic truth of another.[51]

Cornille's project is abstract: the book lays out a dialogue among religions as opposed to a dialogue between people. While there are certainly important similarities in Cornille's approach to interreligious dialogue and Fleischner's approach to Christian-Jewish dialogue, I think it will be fruitful here to explore their differences. While both Fleischner and Cornille understand humility as a theological virtue for dialogue, they understand this virtue differently. For Cornille, dialogical humility is informed by Christian eschatology: that is to say, humility is required for the quest for absolute truth. It is also required for an affirmation of that truth.

Cornille draws from a long and rich intellectual apophatic tradition—defining or knowing God through negative statements—that recognizes the deep ineffability of divine reality.[52] To affirm God is to affirm one's own inability to comprehend the depths of such an affirmation. For Fleischner, however, humility as a theological

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47. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 59–94.
48. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 95–136.
49. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 137–76.
50. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 5.
51. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 177–210.
52. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 31. For a general understanding of this tradition, see "apophatic theology" in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81: "Another name for 'theology by way of negation,' according to which God is known by negating concepts that might be applied to him, stressing the inadequacy of human language and concepts to say anything about God. Philo and Plotinus influenced the Christian apophatic tradition, which is found, for example, in Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite."

virtue is understood dialogically, between people, not always through abstractions or ideas. For her, it requires interpersonal accountability, recognition of societal and cultural power asymmetries, and a genuine affirmation of Christian complicity in historical atrocities, especially the Shoah, or Holocaust.[53]

Christians must dialogue with Jews—with full recognition of and with full accountability for the tumultuous and, at times, violent history of Christian anti-Judaism.[54] Christians must also consider the wide diversity of Jewish tradition(s). For Fleischner, dialogue with Jews is essential for Christian theology, regardless of how Jews engage their own tradition. On the other hand, Cornille asserts that only committed members of a religious tradition, who unequivocally affirm the authority of their tradition's theological truth, may enter interreligious dialogue honestly and with integrity. "It offers the basis," she argues, "for confidence that one is effectively engaged in a dialogue with a genuine religious tradition, rather than with an arbitrary individual."[55] She continues: "While dialogue does not necessarily presuppose expert knowledge, it does presume the ability to speak with a certain informed confidence about the beliefs and practices of one's tradition."[56]

This difference in approach is crucial.

For Fleischner, the relationship between Christians and Jews is more complicated. In her view, the living historical truths held by religious communities should inform not only their dialogical encounters but also their theological truth claims. Regardless of how a Jewish interlocuter understands, believes in, or even cares about Jewish tradition, a Christian must still consider the distinct realities of Christian anti-Judaism and seek dialogue. No Jewish person, in Fleischner's view, could ever be merely an arbitrary individual in this encounter. Humility requires Christians to be less confident in the present about their truth claims when entering into dialogue with Jews. To make dialogue a priority requires an uncomfortable openness to discerning the potential ephemerality of theological certainty and to questioning theological authority.

Returning to Fleischner's question above: "How could Jesus's gospel of love have been turned into the 'teaching of contempt'?"[57] How can Christians in good conscience proselytize Jews given the violent history that exists between them? How could they choose which Jews to dialogue with? Respecting theological differences, for Fleischner, was not enough. Fleischner argued that the task for Christians needed to emphasize "two principal concerns: theological reflection about the

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53. See Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 188–97 [141–51].
54. Fleischner, "A Door That Opened and Never Closed, 47.
55. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 67.
56. Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 67–68.
57. Fleischner, "The Shoah and Jewish-Christian Relations," 135.

people of God, and the desire for dialogue."[58] It is impossible to both dialogue with and missionize Jews. One must choose, and this choice is not merely theological in nature. As we will see shortly, it is also political.

But first, we encounter another problem, which presents a different set of choices. A recognition of antisemitism is essential to a genuine Christian-Jewish dialogue, according to Fleischner. However, what if Jews and Christians are unable to agree on a definition of what antisemitism actually is? Adding to this problem: What if there is no consensus among Jews and Jewish communities? How does this puzzle constitute a mandate for Christians to dialogue with Jews?

A brief anecdote: Several years ago, a Catholic bishop came to speak at my synagogue for Shabbat. He wanted to reiterate the importance of sound Jewish-Catholic relations, especially in the wake of two recent synagogue shootings. He waxed nostalgic about how Jews and Catholics share many values: That we are part of a shared destiny and have many scriptural connections. He emphasized the promises and values of *Nostra Aetate*. His presentation touched upon—albeit briefly—all five of Cornille's conditions for interreligious dialogue. Though moved by his presentation of Catholicism's deep, humble, and thoughtful theological attunements, many of my coreligionists felt that these were mere niceties, that they were simply enjoying some "interfaith tea" with the bishop.

My coreligionists were more concerned with the present, immediate predicaments. One congregant shared data that white Catholics in the United States not only support the policies of then-president Trump but also espouse his hardline attitude toward minorities. This particular congregation felt besieged by Trumpism and by emboldened Christian nationalism. They blamed the rise in antisemitism on both. Obviously not all Jewish communities hold the same views. But this dialogical moment between a Catholic leader and a Jewish community was important. Genuine fear and anger were present in the room. At one point, when decorum seemed a mere suggestion, one gentleman asked, "What about Steve Bannon?"[59]

The Jews in the room wanted affirmation of their bodies, guarantees of their safety, not explorations into the affinities in Catholic-Jewish relations and scriptures. They wanted more than mere condemnations against antisemitism. They wanted action.[60] And here is where dialogue might get complicated: How should

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58. Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 188 [141].

59. Bannon is a very controversial figure for Jewish communities. See Judith Butler, "Why Is Bannon's Antisemitism Considered Alright?" *Jewish Social Studies* 22 no. 3 (2017): 182–85.

60. On this point, Fleischner's work on the French rescuers during the Holocaust is critical to understanding her approach to dialogue (in contrast to Cornille's). Focusing on the how Catholic bishops and institutions, indeed, the overall leadership of the church, failed Jews during the Shoah, Fleischner is less sanguine about the role religious authorities can play in an interreligious context. While Cornille argues

Catholics dialogue with Jews around antisemitism? Again, is theology enough? Given the recent proliferation of articles, essays, books, proclamations, and non-legally binding working definitions of what is and is not antisemitism, it would seem my coreligionists do not agree on a simple definition, which, as it turns out, has a robust history too.[61] But, I wonder whether Jewish communities care more about alliances, in which dialogues with Catholics orient around the salient issues of the day, and less with certain affinities in scripture and theology.

Fleischner, as we learned above, took these issues very seriously.

So, inspired by Fleischner's charge, my question is: How should Christians and Catholics in particular broach the topic of antisemitism with Jews and Jewish communities? I suggest that Christians think about how to organize to combat antisemitism, and with whom they organize to do that work. My concern is that in making such decisions, well-intentioned Christians wield power and their decisions have important political ramifications. An interesting tension exists between Jewish identity and how one defines antisemitism.[62] Christians need to be cognizant of it when entering into dialogue. Do Christians, for example, orient around the definition offered by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)[63] or by the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA)?[64] How would making such a decision also be a decision about Jewish identity and which Jewish communities a person values?

These questions lead me to an observation and yet another question: Fleischner argued that Jewish communities must have theological self-determination in interreligious dialogue. Christians should never decide who is Jewish and who is not. That determination is for Jewish communities to make. Given Fleischner's commitment to dialogue with *authentic* Jewish communities, the decision about which community to be in dialogue with is by necessity a political one. Identity is a tricky issue.[65] "Confusion about religious belonging," wrote Fleischner, "is one of the

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that the worldview of lay, non-religious people may be insufficient for true interreligious encounters, the alternative, though—that is, those committed to living an "authentic" religious life as recognized leaders—seems to be incapable, in a Fleischnerian sense, of understanding, valuing, and protecting religious difference. Sadly, the bishop in my anecdote follows this trajectory as well. See Eva Fleischner, "Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust," in *The Memory of Goodness,* 104–11.

61. See https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1083467261.
62. See *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, ed. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
63. See https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism.
64. See https://jerusalemdeclaration.org.
65. See Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. (London: Sage, 1997). Hall rightly observes that "there has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of 'identity'" (1).

legacies of the Shoah."[66] While I agree that Jews should decide for themselves who is or is not Jewish, the problem is that Jewish communities do not agree with one another on who holds the definitive authority to answer this question. The question of who we engage or whose authority we respect will determine who we think is and is not *authentically* Jewish. While it may come across as a rather picayune problem with Cornille's basic approach to interreligious dialogue—because Cornille places too much attention on authority—it becomes more urgent in Fleischner's because, for her, dialogue with Jews is essential to Christian theology and identity.

Consider, for example, the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. He was a towering figure in public matters of interreligious dialogue but was less tolerant of the Masorti and Reform Jewish movements.[67] Did he consider those who converted in those movements to be truly "Jews"? Does his authority matter more in Christian-Jewish dialogue? Like identity, authority is complicated. In order to convene interreligiously with the Vatican, Jewish organizations formed the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (ICJIC).[68] Yet, is the ICJIC really an authority for Jewish communities? Do Jews really have the right to theological self-determination in dialogue if they need to restructure their religious hierarchy and bureaucracy merely to have the opportunity to meet with Christian leaders? And yes, what about the State of Israel, where a little over half of the world's Jewish population resides. We can also think about the equally untenable situation there, in which the state and its supreme court decide on the authenticity of religious identity and conversion through inconsistent and deeply political criteria: think about the case of brother Daniel (Shmuel Oswald Rufeisen) in 1966,[69] the Nahum

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66. Eva Fleischner, "'Who Am I?' The Struggle for Religious Identity of Jewish Children Hidden by Christians during the Shoah," in *The Memory of Goodness*, 123.
67. Anshel Pfeffer, "1948-2020: The Contradictions of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks," *Haaretz*, November 9, 2020. https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/2020-11-09/ty-article/.premium/1948-2020-the-contradictions-of-rabbi-jonathan-sacks/0000017f-eaac-dc91-a17f-feadec9d0000.
68. See https://licatholic.org/international-meeting-with-jewish-leaders-a-collaboration-for-peace/.
69. Jewish identity is bedeviled by definitional ambiguity. Traditionalist responses to the question—"Who is a Jew?"—were simply inadequate to answer the questions of identity, community, and belonging posed by the Jewish nation state. Rufeisen was born to a Jewish mother and was raised in a Jewish home. During the World War II, he joined his coreligionists in Poland to fight against the Nazi occupation. He lived and operated as a partisan in forests. Yet, during this time, he converted to Christianity. He became a Carmelite friar. He also sought to make Aliyah, to become an Israeli citizen under the Law of Return. According to Halakhah—Jewish law—Brother Daniel was a Jew, even though he converted to Christianity. He was a Jewish apostate but still a Jew. However, in its decision to reject Brother Daniel's petition to become an Israeli citizen, the Israeli Supreme Court argued that in his decision to convert to Christianity, he effectively cut himself off from the "destiny of the Jewish people." The court argued against Halakhah and based its ruling on a teleological view of Jewish history, culture, and heritage that accounted for secular and nationalist sensibilities. See Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 230.

Shalit affair,[70] or the thousands of Russian *olim* who didn't convert and were not born to a Jewish mother. Or, more recently, and after years of deliberation, the Interior Ministry in Israel decided—in the face of opposition by many other Jewish organizations—that members of the Jewish community of Uganda (the *Abuyadaya*) are not eligible to make Aliyah. To the state, they are not really Jewish.[71]

However, as reported in *Haaretz* (2021), in a different part of Africa, a group of Pentecostal Afrikaners converted to Judaism, immediately made Aliyah, and many now populate towns in the West Bank.[72] It would seem that a Christian's political orientation might determine which Jewish community she or he chooses to dialogue with. Are Ugandan Jews really less Jewish than Pentecostal Afrikaner converts? How can a Christian know for sure? Also, should Christians rely on the Israeli nation-state to determine who their potential Jewish interlocutors are? Some might find these questions unsettling. For Fleischner, however, answering them responsibly would be critical to forming and understanding Christian identity.

Choosing with whom to dialogue is a decision about whom you value as Jewish, and with whom you see authentic interreligious possibilities, and even friendships. In this instance, if we can call on Jacques Derrida, friendship is political.[73] I wonder, what is the theologically responsible way to wield this political power?

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70. In 1958, an Israeli Jew, Benyamin Shalit—while studying abroad in Edinburgh, Scotland—married Anne, a non-Jewish Scotswoman. He and his wife returned to Israel in 1960 and, several years later, had two children, Oren and Galya. The Shalits were atheists and raised their children as atheists. When they were required to register their son in accordance with the "Registration of Inhabitants Ordinance" of 1949, they ran into a legal problem. There are questions regarding the child's "religion" (*dat*) and her or his "ethnic group" (*leoum*). The Shalits recorded that their child had no religion but that their son's ethnicity was "Jewish." They wanted to declare their son—and subsequently their daughter—as Jews by ethnicity and nationality. After a few setbacks with the Ministry of the Interior, their case went to the Israeli Supreme Court. As in the case above with Brother Daniel, the court would provide authority on Jewish identity. Again, the court did not base its decision on Halakhah, Jewish law. This time, though, it ruled that both children—despite their apostasy and non-traditional religious status—could be considered Jews, but without religion. In the court's opinion, being ethnic, or national Jews, allowed both children to be a part of Jewish "destiny." Interestingly, years later, the Knesset—the Israeli parliament—passed a law that nullified the court's initial ruling. The government returned to a traditionally Halakhic definition of identity. See Yigal Elam, *Judaism as a Status Quo: The Who Is a Jew Controversy of 1958* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), 125. See also Lawrence S. Nesis, "Who Is a Jew? Shalit v. Minister of Interior et al. The Law of Return (Amendment No. 2), 1970," *Manitoba Law Journal* 53 (1970): 53–88.

71. Judy Maltz, "Ugandan Jews Not Eligible to Immigrate to Israel, State Informs High Court," *Haaretz*, January 25, 2021.

72. Judy Maltz, " 'Cleansed by Torah:' Why These Afrikaners Converted to Judaism and Moved to Israel," *Haaretz*, September 30, 2021.

73. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York Verso, 2020). "Friendship," says Derrida, "does not keep silence, it is preserved by silence. From its first word to itself, friendship inverts itself. Hence, it says, saying to itself, that there are no more friends; it avows itself in avowing that. Friendship tells the truth—and this is always better left unknown. The protection of this custody guarantees the truth of friendship, its ambiguous truth, that by which friendship is founded—

I agree with Fleischner that Christians are not in position to define Jewishness. As unfair as it seems, however, they are in a position to empower certain marginalized Jewish communities by dialoguing with them as Jews. Dialogue increasingly seems to be oriented around political allegiances and shared political commitments, which is unsurprising given our current politically polarized environment. Yet dialogue, according to Fleischner, should be transformational. How can dialogue perform this sacred transformational work for both Christians and Jews when Jewish-Christian dialogue may already orient and organize around circumscribed political issues? Can such orientation and organization be beneficial and to whom? Here, I am inclined to agree with Paul Knitter's assertion that we should not only lean into this new reality and see interreligious dialogue as a form of social action but also prioritize the voices of the persecuted or oppressed.[74] This approach adds another complicated layer to dialogue—intersectionality.[75] With that complicated addition, where would the transformation take place and what would it look like?

Similar problems arise in discussions about gender and authority in interreligious dialogue. "A focus on doctrine and exchange at the level of belief," wrote the constructive theologian Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "too easily elides the difficult questions of practice, masking unjust practices in the process."[76] When dialogue focuses on essentialized or authoritative notions of religions or doctrine, participants may not only depoliticize interreligious dialogue more generally, but also ignore the power dynamics that play a role in any conversation. Fletcher reminds us that any discussion informed exclusively by male authority "too often forgets to ask whom these authoritative stances serve, and too often the interests of women are eclipsed in the process."[77] In the same way, if Jews and Christians dialogue around theology—without a recognition of violent history and political power dynamics—then the dialogue only serves the interests of the powerful, those in a position to "tolerate" difference, rather than to engage and be transformed by it.

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more precisely, the bottomless bottom founding a relationship, which enables it to resist its own abyss. To resist the vertigo or the revolution that would have it turning around itself. Friendship is founded, in truth, so as to protect itself from the bottom, or the abyssal bottomless depths. That is why friendship had better preserve itself in silence, and keep silent the truth" (49).

74. See Paul F. Knitter, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action," in *The Wiley Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2013). Knitter writes that this new reality "leads to even more unsettling requirements for dialogue: these voices of the oppressed, whether or not they are religious believers themselves, have a *privileged* place in the conversation. Their voices, their experiences, their analyses of suffering must *be heard first*" (143, Knitter's emphasis).
75. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege*, 165–66.
76. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Gift to the Prophet from a King: The Politics of Women in Interreligious Dialogue," in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 31.
77. Fletcher, "Gift to the Prophet from a King," 31.

True dialogue, as Fleischner understood, requires justice. If dialogue serves merely the interests of the church—without the humility to be open to repair and transformation—then it becomes merely a tool for a politics of tolerance. Such politics depends upon and promotes a problematic bourgeoise civility that requires minorities, religious or otherwise, to avoid publicly engaging deep differences and power dynamics between communities.[78] Beneath the surface of any public bourgeois civility is a more complex political and existential situation seldom bereft of tension and pain. Depoliticizing dialogue for the sake of theology is unjust. Making matters even more complicated, Christine J. Hong contends that "despite vocal and public commitments to justice," theological institutions more generally "are still ultimately colonial and Christian enterprises."[79] In Hong's view, despite many religious institutions' best intentions, their efforts to be more inclusive, whether interreligiously, interculturally, or interracially, replicate the deleterious, colonial efforts to marginalize or erase the cultures, histories, stories, spiritualities, epistemologies, and, theologies of historically marginalized, minority peoples.

Fleischner's approach shares many of Hong's concerns. For example, although their vocabularies differ, Fleischner sought to decolonize the relationship between Christians and Jews. "Decolonizing is a political process," writes Hong.[80] Colonialization is a political and even existential practice of taking away the voices and dignity of marginalized peoples. In a colonialized environment, marginalized or minority peoples always have to translate their ideas and worldviews into the sensibilities of the colonizer. Their identities become practices in negation. Racism operates in the same way. Hong argued that non-white, or non-Christian "narratives do not exist to become foils to white Christianity's understanding of itself, the divine, or the world."[81] Rather, the *other* has a positive, life-affirming identity of their own, independent of what role they might play in the formation of other peoples' identities. In its simplest form, decolonizing is a liberative practice requiring mutual recognition of the marginalized or minorities' right to self-determination.[82] In this sense, if Jews are to be Christians' equal dialogue partners, Christians need not only a theological justification to humanize Jews but also a real-time historical accounting and accountability for their historical violence against

78. Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 16.
79. Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 1.
80. Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 16.
81. Hong, *Decolonial Futures*, 17.
82. For an important account of philosophical and theological views regarding decolonization and the process of decolonizing, see Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

Jews. This is Fleischner's view: Christians need to *decolonize* the role of Jews in Christian theology. For Christians to be *authentically* Christian, they need to learn from Jews and Judaism in dialogue, even if that learning brings them to uncharted and uncomfortable places. Dialogue must be a form of disorientation if humility is truly to be a sacred virtue in the encounter. Fleischner still has much to teach us about how to perform this work.

Fleischner's Move to Jewish Thought: Contemporary Possibilities for Dialogue

"Genuine dialogue," wrote Fleischner, "implies a dialectical relationship which is characterized by mutual respect, partnership and equality, freedom, willingness to listen to and hear others, see them as they are, challenge them and be challenged in turn with whatever risk this may entail."[83] Risk here implies danger. For Fleischner, this danger should play an active role in our dialogue. We can be fearful, but let us not be afraid. Fleischner's book offers hope, but she reminds us that hope should not minimize the danger. Contemporary Jews too must preserve the sacred memory of this tumultuous relationship—between Christians and Jews—while remaining open to the myriad possibilities within it. Jews must find a dialogical way to live in between conflicting emotions, forever oscillating between hope and fear.

Fleischner was deeply attuned to this reality, to a world replete with divergent passions. By making the move to reject missionizing and to encourage and advance dialogue, she opens new conversations between Christians and Jews, because if dialogue *is* the mission—in place of conversion—then Jews and Christians can speak more deeply about theological and even political affairs. To use the language of Cornille, they can appeal to their "authentic" truths. In fact, to be *authentically* Christian means to *authentically* desire to learn from and dialogue with Jews. Decolonizing, then, becomes essential to Christian theology and identity.

To amplify understanding about how this process operates, I want to point to one final example: Many look to a common scripture for inspiration in dialogue, which is a familiar approach, such as in the famous quotation from the book of Leviticus 19:18, often translated as "You should love the neighbor as yourself." According to Martin Buber, the famous Jewish practitioner of dialogue, this translation of the verse opens it up to numerous misreadings, the most common, of course, is that you must love the neighbor as you love yourself. This reading is not

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83. Fleischner, *Judaism in German Christian Theology Since 1945*, 157 [105].

dialogical, since you impose your understanding of love onto your neighbor, which is a form of supersessionism.[84] Such imposition is not an act of humility.

Deeper awareness acknowledges a long-standing problem in Christian-Jewish relations: Each tradition understands and engages love differently. Interpreting the verse to mean that the imperative is to love the neighbor as yourself risks overlooking or ignoring that the neighbor is a different, unique person. Worse, the neighbor in this reading could be perceived as a reflection of our own prejudices, worldviews, and self-conception.[85] For Buber, the phrase should be translated as "you shall love the neighbor, she or he is like you."[86] In this sense, the love is directed toward the neighbor, not toward one's self. There is a basic truth reflected in this translation: this love is a recognition that the neighbor is like you—she or he has the ability to love—but not the same as you. Thus, there is equal mutuality in this relationship.[87]

In this sense, Fleischner's call to replace Judenmission with dialogue echoes Buber's reading of this verse. Understanding and respecting doctrinal differences

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84. See Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 69.

85. See Buber, *Two Types of Faith*. "The word so translated," says Buber, " refers neither to the degree nor the kind of love, as if a man should love others as much as himself or in such a way as himself (the idea of self-love does not appear in the Old Testament at all); it means, equal to thyself, and thus means: conduct thyself in such a way as if it concerned thyself. An attitude is meant and not a feeling. It does not say, one should love someone, but 'to someone.' This strange construction of the dative is found in the Old Testament only in this chapter in Leviticus. Its meaning is easy to ascertain when once the question is put in this way: the feeling of love between men does not in general allow its object—designated by the accusative—to be prescribed; whereas an attitude of loving-kindness towards a fellow creature—designated by the dative—can indeed be commanded to man" (69).

86. See Martin Buber, "The Language of *Botschaft*," in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 27–39. See also *Die Fünf Bücher der Weisung: Verdeutscht von Martin Buber und Franz Rosenzweig*, bd. 1 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992), 326: "Halte lieb deinen Genossen, dir gleich...." In this particular translation, Buber and Rosenzweig stressed the personhood of one's neighbor and, in verse 34, the sojourner. Because they sought guidance in traditional medieval Jewish commentaries, they learned that the command "to love," was not best expressed in the German infinitive—*lieben*—but rather as *Halte Liebe*, "to act lovingly," or literally "to hold dear." Buber took a more holistic approach to the translation of this verse. He did not see this commandment as independent from the previous one, "you shall not take vengeance," but rather understood them as inexorably connected. As seen in his work on Hasidism, Buber's approach here also portrayed aspects of a pansacramentalism and practical mysticism. Buber argued that according to a biblical worldview, all humans, regardless of background and experience, are parts of the same collective body. Harming the neighbor or the stranger, or anyone for that matter, is ultimately harming oneself. It is inescapable. Buber compared the translation of the entire commandment—both parts—to a person who accidently stabs herself or himself. Vengeance in this scenario would be against the assaulting hand. Does it make sense, then, to punish the hand by stabbing it with the other? That only inflicts more pain and suffering. Thus, if people harm another in anger or through vengeance, they fail to see this basic truth that all people are connected. Such actions, according to Buber, only lead to more violence.

87. On this point, see Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Love, Accusative and Dative: Reflections on Leviticus 19:18* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 22.

are important to interreligious dialogue. But Fleischner's primary impulse was to engage and relate to another person. That impulse emerged from her conviction that empathy, or more appropriately relating to your neighbor's *Lebenswelt*—lived life as experienced by her or him—is indispensable for dialogue and politics that seek not merely to understand or contain conflict but to end it.

Replacing the theological imperative to missionize Jews with a call for dialogue—indeed a call for mutual understanding—changes the conditions not only for dialogue but also for politics. Fleischner sought to establish what in German is termed a *Mitwelt*, a space where a person understands the moral obligation to find balance in opposition, to live in-between, to create space in life for mutually respected difference. To be dialogical in a Fleischnerian sense is to live a spiritual life precisely in that space—the space in-between people, in-between worldviews, and in-between experiences—so that one may, in the words of the Psalmist (27:14), "look to the Lord," and "be strong and of good courage."