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## Luther Legacy Conference: Martin Luther and Antisemitism January 20, 2020

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## **Luther Legacy Conference: Martin Luther and Antisemitism January 20, 2020**

*Editor's notes: Rev. Dr. Mark Harris gave this presentation to start the Conference.*

I am Mark Harris, the Principal Dean of Martin Luther University College and I want to warmly welcome all of you to this inaugural Luther Legacy conference. As we gather today, we assemble in an area once known as the Haldemand Tract, the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples. We are grateful to the first people of Turtle Island and for all who have been loving stewards of this land through many generations. We are also deeply grateful to the many donors and sponsors who have made this day possible and who have been listed on the screen here for us this morning. It is their generosity and their concern for the issue before us today, which has made all of this possible.

Today's events are being held in the Senate and Board Chambers of Wilfrid Laurier University. Laurier's roots are found in a small Lutheran theological school that was founded on this campus in 1911. Over the years, that school expanded its programming to include the Waterloo College School and then the Waterloo College of Arts, which was associated with the University of Western Ontario in 1973. Waterloo Lutheran University was provincialized and became Wilfrid Laurier with Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, the small theological school that started it all, continuing as a federated partner over much of the next 40 years.

Waterloo Lutheran Seminary continued primarily as an institution for the training of Lutheran pastors, the *raison d'être* for the school's founding so many years before. But things were also changing by the late 1970s. The pastoral care and counseling and several other graduate programs were established. As enrollments in divinity courses declined, not only at the seminary but across North America, the school continued to diversify its offerings, including the addition of an undergraduate program. And, as the seminary's programs began to appeal to more into a more diverse population, the Board of Governors under the leadership of Dr David Pfrimmer began to discuss whether the name Waterloo Lutheran Seminary was even appropriate any longer. For a while, that name had been an accurate description of the institution when they had been primarily concerned with the training of Lutheran pastors. This same name had now become a misrepresentation when the M.Div. had become our smallest program. And so it was that in 2014 the decision was made to change the name of the school to Martin Luther University College as a way of acknowledging our theological roots while at the same time attempting to reflect the diversity in programming, which this institution had become. But there were also challenges that came with this choice. Even as the decision was made to name this school after Luther, civil and educational institutions across North America were removing statues and taking the names of historic characters off public buildings because of their ambiguous legacies and we were in the same position. Martin Luther – while widely acknowledged or vilified depending on your point of view, as the father of the Protestant Reformation, substantially contributed to the unfolding of modernity, the promotion of education for all, and social reform.

But Luther also had scathing and inexcusable words for Jewish and Muslim communities and for the peasants of his age who demanded social reform. Were his contributions to be totally discounted because of his vitriolic writings? Was there not also a danger in discarding the name and forgetting our history and the lessons that history teaches us and which must never be forgotten?

And so, the Board of Governors wrestled with whether there was a more honest and life-giving way forward, a way of acknowledging both Luther's contributions and his indefensible flaws and the horrors that have been used to support. It is that desire which we as an institution, which bears the name Martin Luther, have chosen to intentionally engage and carry as a responsibility in this in what we hope will be a yearly series of conferences called the Luther Legacy conferences.

We will strive to honestly and critically engage with Luther and his legacy and the replica repercussions that that legacy imparts to us down to this very day. And we do so not as a means of lifting him up but as a means of promoting both understanding and justice for all. And in today's inaugural lecture and with the help of our special guest, we are seeking to lean into that challenge.

It is my honor now to introduce the Reverend Susan Johnson who is the presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada who will offer some remarks and introduce our speaker.

*Editor's note: Bishop Susan Johnson gave this presentation to introduce the keynote speaker.*

Thank you, Mark. I am very happy to be here for this inaugural Luther Legacy conference and I am very pleased that Martin Luther University College has chosen this topic, Lutheran antisemitism, as the first subject of the Luther Legacy conference. It is important for a variety of reasons. Luther himself would have reminded us that we are all a combination of saint and sinner, and Luther had a healthy dose of the unsaintly in him. It is important that those of us who bear his name as a church or as a university college do not seek to make a hero out of Martin Luther but rather acknowledge and deal with both the positive and negative aspects of his legacy. It is very important that we speak about antisemitism at this point in time.

Hate crimes, including antisemitic crimes, are on the rise in North America, something we were all painfully made aware of after the stabbing attack at a Hanukkah party last month in New York. In 1995, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada in convention adopted a statement to the Jewish communities in Canada, which is just as timely today. Let me share with you two quotations from the statement. It begins in this way: "the treatment which Christian believers have accorded Jews on many occasions over the centuries is a tragedy and a cause for shame very few Christian communities have escaped the contagion of anti-Judaism and its modern successor antisemitism Lutherans belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada carry a special burden in this matter because of the antisemitic statements made by Martin Luther and because of the suffering inflicted on Jews during the Holocaust in countries and places where the Lutheran Church is strongly represented." The statement ends in this way: "grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, we affirm our fervent wish to live our faith in Jesus Christ in love and full respect for the Jewish people. Antisemitism is an affront to the Gospel, a contradiction of its central teachings, and a violation of our hope and calling. We pledge this Church to oppose the deadly

working of such bigotry in our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray that greater understanding and cooperation may continually grow between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community in Canada today.” I reiterate this statement with its commitments on behalf of our whole Church.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin has an impressive list of work and accomplishments. He is an author whose works have sold more than half a million copies. His book, *Jewish Literacy* (revised edition) is widely recognized as one of the most respected and indispensable reference books on Jewish life, culture, tradition, and religion. I counted at least 23 of his works on Wikipedia and found out that it includes three mysteries, including the character featuring the character Rabbi David Winter. Rabbi Telushkin has also written for television. He served as the spiritual leader for the Synagogue for the Performing Arts in Los Angeles since 1993. He lectures across the United States and abroad. He was recognized by *Newsweek* for being among the top 50 influential Rabbis in America and by *Talk Magazine* as one of the 50 best speakers in the United States. I think we are in for a treat today.

Rabbi Telushkin was ordained at Yeshiva University in New York and pursued graduate studies in Jewish History at Columbia University. He is an Associate of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and lives in New York with his wife, Deborah, and their four children.

*Editor’s note: Rabbi Telushkin gave the keynote address.*

## **Martin Luther and the Jews: Passion over Ethics Joseph Telushkin**

I am profoundly honoured and feel a profound sense of responsibility. This is a very unique sort of conference. Forgive me, if at certain points in my speech I am not as fluent as I normally am. I will be checking my notes more. I have worked out the speech very, very carefully and, I hope, wisely. I hope I do not make too many mistakes. I am assuming since I am not a Lutheran scholar, and I am surrounded by Lutheran scholars, that I will be happy if people disagree, maybe, with my interpretations. I do not want to say something incorrect factually though. Even that, probably, you have disagreements.

When Israel was created in 1948, air travel was not nearly as good as it is now. The trek by plane from Israel to the United States, for example, was very protracted. People were not coming over quite as often. In 1949 a major figure in the Israeli government came to the United States. It was not that common to travel so a big group greeted him at what was then called Idlewild, present day JFK Airport. As he came out of the plane, one of the members of the group said to him, “So, tell us what the situation is like in Israel in one word.” He said, “Good.” Then somebody said, “Okay, in two words.” He says, “Not good.” In a sense, any time we are going to speak about what is going on in the world or even in the talk today, as was made so clear by the Bishop in her opening comments.

Growing up as I did in a Jewish context, my impressions of Martin Luther are not as positive because you are familiar with another part. But, actually, a title came into my head. I come up with a lot more titles than books. People say, ‘You have written a lot of books.’ You have no idea how many more titles I have. I thought of a title for a biography from a Lutheran perspective about Luther, called *Flawed Diamond*. It just struck me as that –because in a sense that is what we are speaking about.

What I want to do before I get into the story of Luther and the Jews is I want to make a number of sort of overriding comments about antisemitism and its history in general. The word antisemitism, of course, was a euphemism created by a man named Wilhelm Marr, who really disliked Jews. It was intended to replace the word *Judenhaus* (Jew hate / Jew hater)<sup>1</sup> because he wanted to make it sound like it was something more scientific; which has often led people in the Arab world to claim, “How could we be antisemites?” And many of them are not. But many of them – certainly those who would like to see Israel destroyed – are. And they said, “How could we be antisemites? We are Semites.” But it never had anything to do with the designation “Semite”. That is why in all of my books about it I have adopted a different spelling for the word. I just write “antisemitism” or “antisemite” as one word, not “anti- (dash) capital “S” [i.e. “anti-Semitism,” “anti-Semite” (ed.)] – as if there was something distinctive, as if there was a distinctive entity of Semites that it was being directed against. What has been striking historically about antisemitism has been how widespread it is. Very few non-Jews and, for that matter, not that many Jews are aware of just how small a people the Jews are. The Jews today constitute about one-fifth of one percent of the world's population. A friend of mine was once on a plane and he was speaking to a woman next to him who seemed quite knowledgeable about Jewish matters. She was not Jewish but she knew quite a bit and at a certain point he asked her, “How many Jews do you think there are in the United States?” This was quite a number of years ago when the population in the U.S., which is today well over 300 million, was only about 200 million. She said, “Well, you know, they always say America is Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. I know the Jews are the smallest group. I would estimate that there must be 30 million Jews in the United States.” He told her there were fewer than six million. She responded, “Well, then, they all live in my city.” Because Jews have tended to have a disproportionate impact and make oversized contributions – and those who do not like Jews would say oversized negative contributions – but disproportionate to their numbers. So, I want to first speak about the universality of antisemitism, the depth of antisemitism, and its permanence.

When I say universality, Jews at one point or another have been expelled from many of the societies in which they lived in. The most famous expulsion, of course, was the expulsion from Spain, which five years later, was followed by the expulsion from Portugal. Fewer people today are aware that the Jews were expelled from England, an expulsion that lasted for 400 years. Jews were expelled in 1290 from England. What makes that so interesting is that means that when Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*, there were no Jews living in England, and, no Jews had lived in England at that point for over 300 years. It shows how negative stereotypes can persist for such a long period, even when the Jews are not around. Jews were then restricted in Russia to what was called the Pale of Settlement.

The depth of antisemitism is suggested by the fact that words entered the English language which are widely known among non-Jews and Jews that are used by any group to describe terrible campaigns against them. For example, Jews were confined to certain areas of cities, which were known as ghettos. Now we see the term commonly used to apply to other groups as well. Attacks were often made on Jewish neighborhoods in the town. These attacks would sometimes lead to murder, rape, robbery and those attacks were known as *pogroms*.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, the term refers to tenement housing where Nazis housed Jews during World War II. Figuratively, however, the term acts as a transferred epithet for hatred of Jews, based on ill-treatment assumed by the word. (ed.)

Obviously, the attempt by the Nazis to wipe out all the Jews has two words for it: the term, “genocide,” which is an attempt to wipe out a group, and the term, “Holocaust.” More recently, a term that people fear greatly is the term “suicide bombers.” People might forget but this term started with attacks against Jews. These ‘homicide bombers’ were willing to die, as a by-product of their killing. That is how important it was to them. That is how the term came in, and then the permanence of antisemitism was that Jews, though they were a minority group, often became an obsession to the people who disliked them.

At one point, to the Roman Empire and then, of course, for much of the history of the Jewish-Christian encounter, Jews were often perceived as very great enemies. I want to emphasize something: relations today are better than they ever have been, which is not to say there has been a total elimination of antisemitism in Christianity. But there has been such a dramatic change, and a lot of Jews – particularly, European Jews recall the past history of Christian antisemitism that a lot of Jews have difficulty dealing with. I said to them, “You know, you have to recognize (that) in different ages different things happen.” There is a real reaching out.

I would say that one of the things that epitomizes this is the very fact that I have been called here to speak at an event like this. Martin Luther probably would not have invited me to present my views about Judaism, certainly not in the way that I am planning to present them.

So obviously, the Jews became the obsession of the Nazis, and, simultaneously, it became the obsession also of the communist world. Stalin, fortuitously for the Jewish community and, I would say, probably fortuitously for many of the people in Russia died less than a week before he was planning to put a group of Jewish doctors on trial. The doctors were being charged with trying to poison the Soviet leadership. From the documents that were subsequently uncovered, they were obviously going to be found guilty, and then Stalin was going to exile all of Russia's Jews to Siberia because he wanted “to protect them” from the murderous rage that would then happen with the Soviet people. Clearly today, to much of the Muslim world, Jews are seen as a particularly vicious enemy even though we (again, I emphasize) are a very, very small people. The Jewish population today in relation to the Muslim world is about one percent, not more (it is about one percent of the size of the Muslim world) and, obviously, Jews tend to do least well in extremist ideologies.

By and large, most Jews that you meet today are not religiously observant, but they always still identify as Jews because in Judaism peoplehood is also a part of the religion. The first convert, whose process of conversion was described at length in the Bible, is a woman named Ruth. This in itself is interesting because in the Bible, much more often than not, males play major roles. But you have the five books of the Torah and the Scrolls.<sup>2</sup> So, two of the Scrolls have no plot lines (the Song of Songs... no, actually, the Song of Songs does have somewhat of a plot line), the Lamentations, which is Jeremiah's lament over the destruction of the Temple, and Ecclesiastes, which is in some ways the most pessimistic book in the Bible (“all is vanity”).

In the three that do have somewhat story lines, the central characters are women – and they are very atypical women. Esther, a Jewish girl who wins a beauty contest, marries a non-Jewish king and ends up saving the whole Jewish people. Any year, whenever I speak about the story of Esther to a Jewish audience, I say, “Number 1: she is the central character.

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<sup>2</sup>In Hebrew, the collection of five writings, is called the Megillot, literally translated as Scrolls. (ed.)

You know, her cousin Mordecai plays a very great role, but as the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to note, “the book is called Esther; it is not called Esther and Mordechai.” She is the sort of Jew that Jews would often write off. She wins a beauty contest - not the most common aspiration of the Jewish community, or at least not one that is verbally expressed, maybe secretly it is. She then goes and marries a non-Jewish king, but she ends up saving the Jewish people, which means that we should not write anybody off. Then, in the Song of Songs, the unnamed Shepherdess who is so loyal in her love to the Shepherd to whom she is not at that point married. Then, of course, there is Ruth, who is a Moabite woman. Ruth embraces and also marries a Jewish man, and then, subsequent to her husband's death, becomes a Jew. She does so with a four-word declaration in Hebrews. (And, by the way, some of you were looking at me; I just want to make it clear, I am going to soon get to the topic of Martin Luther, okay – and I want to dwell on happier things for a moment than the aspects of Luther.) She says, “Your people shall be my people; your G-d shall be my G-d.” That really has been in some ways the paradox within Jewish life – that peoplehood and religion are so intertwined.

So many Jews, who today consider themselves Jewish, are not at all religious, and, as a result, a lot of the theories about antisemitism started being questioned. “Is it really based on a reaction to Judaism?” I believe that it is. I believe that until about 1800 the world that the Jews inhabited was overwhelmingly a religious world. Most Jews were in Muslim or Christian societies and antisemitism was focused on the religion of the Jews. By and large, a Jew who was willing to give up his or her religion could be accepted. I mean, just to give you a dramatic example, Isaac D’Israeli converted his son Benjamin in the nineteenth century in England to Christianity to evade some of the consequences of antisemitism. His son, Benjamin D’Israeli becomes Prime Minister of England, which is quite remarkable because he basically kept the name, Benjamin the Jew. A lot of Jews in the United States – I assume probably it happened in Canada – changed their names to make them sound like less Jewish names. Clearly, the antisemitism was directed against the religion of the Jews.

As nationalism started to become more significant, antisemitism increasingly became directed towards the peoplehood of the Jews, which is why the contemporary expression often of it is anti-Zionism. So, people came up with other reasons like: how many of you have ever heard it said, “Jews were hated in the medieval world because they were money-lenders?” So, the first question is, ‘Is that true?’ and, yes, a disproportionate percentage of moneylenders were Jews. Did people have reason to hate moneylenders? Nobody here will be shocked to learn that, yes, they do.

I once saw a thirteenth century document in France that showed that interest rates had reached 43 percent per annum. How would you like holding a mortgage at 43%? But, in order to assume that that is the reason that Jews were hated, you would have to make the following assumption. Jews were regular members of European societies; then they got together at some annual retreat of Jewish leaders and said, “The real money to be made is in money-lending;” whereupon antisemitism erupted. Obviously, what I just said is ridiculous. What happened is that Jews were hated. Because they were hated, they were forbidden to practice other professions. They were forced into moneylending. Once they became moneylenders, it exacerbated but did not cause antisemitism.

There is another problem with the economic theory of antisemitism. Jews have tended to encounter the least antisemitism in capitalist societies where they have been most affluent. When I speak to American Jewish audiences. I ask them, “How many of you know yourselves to be more affluent than your great grandparents?” And every hand goes up. Then

I ask, “Did your great-grandparents encounter less or more antisemitism than you encounter?” Now again, we are very nervous right now in the Jewish community about sudden rising tides of antisemitism, but obviously it has been far less. Jews are often used as scapegoats. People blame Jews in order to gain power. Many years ago, Lucy Davidowicz wrote a history of the Holocaust called *The War against the Jews*, and she made the point that Hitler did not gain power by blaming the Jews. He gained power in order to murder the Jews. Have a look at the last statement Hitler made before he committed suicide. He wanted to keep up the campaign against the Jews. But the scapegoat theory has another fallacy to it. It still does not explain why the Jews can unite the far right and the far left? Groups that hate each other and can find almost nothing they agree on? You can suddenly, strangely enough, unite them when it comes to hatred of the Jews. Maurice Samuel, a Jewish scholar who wrote about antisemitism years ago, once said, “To say that a man has hallucinations when he is hungry makes sense. To say that a man has hallucinations when he is hungry only about the Jews does not make sense.” This still doesn’t account for why the Jews are targeted. After World War II, they came out with a whole series of studies called *The Authoritarian Personality*. That was the lead volume, and they were trying to psychologically explain antisemitism, which, not surprisingly, came up with the thesis that antisemites basically were people with fascistic personalities, were rigid, and all sorts of other things. This was done to try and assure Jews that anybody who disliked them was probably psychologically sick which, obviously, we would like to believe. But, do I know for a fact that of the thousands of people who saved Jews during the war, all of them were necessarily models of mental health? We all would like to believe that people who do not like us have something psychologically wrong with them, but can the tens of millions of Europeans, the millions of people who voted Hitler into office, can we comfortably say that they were all mentally ill? So, the thesis years ago (that) my friend Dennis Prager and I offered is that antisemitism ultimately is a reaction against Judaism's values that challenge the world.

The three pillars of Judaism are G-d, Torah, and peoplehood. Martin Luther was not one of those who was aroused to anger at the Jews because of their notions of peoplehood. For Luther, it was the Jewish concept of G-d which excluded the possibility of Jesus being a God and, interestingly enough, and this is less focused on - the Jewish concept of law. Luther, as I understand it (I am going to keep saying as I understand it; you can point out to me if I am wrong), very much stood in the Pauline tradition in which the law was thought of as a curse. The law in Judaism is not thought of as a curse but, in Luther's view, it really was because people would inevitably break the law, and that would cause them to be a bit damned, which is, of course, Paul's position. Certainly, it comes across if you read Saint Paul. I most strikingly remember the quotes from Galatians where, basically, it amounts to the fact that if you break the law you will be damned.

Now, how does Judaism deal with that issue? It deals with it in a very different sort of way. It acknowledges, already in the Bible, that there is no person so righteous who will never sin. So, then you have to deal with it in one of two ways. Will that sin damn you in G-d's eyes and damn you permanently? Or is there some mode of rectification for the sin? You find very pronounced in Judaism the development of the notion of *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is the term for repentance in Hebrew and it was very much believed. You see sinners in the Bible, people who have done wrong things. You are pointing out in your conference that Martin Luther was a great man, but he had done some great wrongs. He is certainly not the only one who has done it, you know. Look at King David in the Bible. There are problematic issues



even with other Biblical characters, and the notion that repentance can change G-d's attitude is very pronounced whether it is in the case of David or for that matter. The longest religious service in Judaism is the Yom Kippur service, the Day of Atonement service. You are pretty much in the synagogue for the whole day, and they have readings from the Torah. But those of you who might be familiar with the Jewish liturgy know that in addition to the readings from the Torah, there are also readings from the Prophets. The central reading from the Prophets on the Day of Atonement is from the book of Jonah. Jonah tells the story of a Jewish prophet that G-d tells to go preach to the people of Nineveh, which was a negative city from the Jewish experience, and tell them (that) in 40 days Nineveh is going to be destroyed. Jonah goes there even though he does not want to do it. He does not want to preach to them. He does not want those people to repent. He does not want G-d to forgive those people. Jonah tries to run away and G-d ends up putting him on a boat. Then a whole series of escapades happen, and Jonah gets swallowed by some sort of gargantuan fish and he gets spit out. He goes to Nineveh and, tells the people of Nineveh to repent. They are then forgiven. So, there is a notion that you have to repent. Now the trick is in learning to be a good person. I once read a comment by an American humorist writer, not a Jew, Edgar Watson Howe. He said it is harder to repent of sins before we commit them than after. That is really the idea. How do you get people to anticipate in advance? It is something I am working on, I am writing on now, what I call moral imagination – you know, to imagine the enormity of something before you do it – and therefore come away and not do it.

In the case of Luther, one of his distinctive features is, Luther actually starts out as a philosemite, not a commonly used term. One of the books I want to write is a book on philosemitism, which Jews underrate – the number of non-Jews who have been very supportive of Jews in the Jewish community and for whom one has boundless admiration. I will just give you one brief example. Teddy Roosevelt was the President of the United States in the early 1900s. In 1895, he was the Police Commissioner of New York City, which already had a substantial Jewish population. An antisemitic preacher named Hermann Ahlwardt visited New York City. There was a big German community there that was often somewhat hostile to the Jews. You probably had comparable things here in Canada. Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography that the Jewish community was very unhappy about this and they came to him as Police Commissioner, and they said, “First of all, do not give him a permit to speak,” and, secondly, “even if he does speak, do not give him any police protection.” Roosevelt replied, “First of all I do not know if that would be legal, and, secondly, even if legal I think it would be unwise. You will just turn him into a martyr. Our goal should be to make him ridiculous.” Roosevelt wrote that he assigned 20 policemen to guard this preacher; 20 policemen to be at every one of his speeches; and all 20 of the policemen were Jews. Ahlwardt was giving his antisemitic tirade surrounded by Jewish cops. This is an example, I would say, of philosemitic behavior.

So, Luther starts out as a philosemite. Here is Luther writing in 1523 in his essay, “That Jesus Christ was born a Jew.” This is quite a remarkable statement to be coming from a Catholic Priest as he was then. Luther writes, “If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads governing and teaching the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings. They have done little else than deride them and seize their property.” He went on to say how he really would have preferred anything rather than to become a Christian. This was a philosemitic statement, but it had a price tag attached to it, which was not obvious to people

at first. Luther really did seem friendly to the Jews, but part of his friendship was rooted in the idea implicit in what he said, that if the leaders of the Catholic Church had treated the Jews differently, they would have converted. And so, Luther really did advocate a much more tolerant policy towards the Jews as he spent the next years. It was not a major effort of Luther's, but it was a significant attempt to convert Jews. But Jews did not convert and that is what turned Luther with great anger against the Jews. That is when he came out in 1543 with his essay "On the Jews and Their Lies," which had catastrophic results. He wanted eight measures to be taken against the Jews. 1) burn all synagogues; 2) destroy Jewish homes; 3) confiscate the Jews' holy books, including the Bibles; 4) forbid Rabbis to teach; 5) forbid Jews to travel; 6) forbid Jews to charge interest on loans to non-Jews; and confiscate Jewish property; 7) force Jews to do physical labor; and 8) expel the Jews from provinces where Christians live. I think we see that, with the exception of murdering all the Jews, where Luther was heading.

I remember I once read something by the historian, Roland Bainton, in his biography of Luther, *Here I Stand*. He says that maybe it would have been better if (because this was written quite near the end of Luther's life. Luther died in 1546 and he wrote this in 1543) Luther had died before he had written that. Then trying to find some good in it, he says, 'but in a way he was sort of anticipating Zionism, you know, getting Jews back into doing physical labor.' Jews often were not allowed to own land. Land was taken from them but I think that is somewhat naïve. I do not think that there was some hidden hope for any redemption there. Now, again, what caused this great animosity? It really was a disagreement over faith. The Jewish denial of Jesus as being the Messiah, as being a divine being, and the Jewish insistence on the supremacy of deeds. Remember, Luther (it depends on the way you could read it – I was discussing this with someone last night – but how you read what Luther said. My impression from my readings of Luther, and again here I am speaking in the face of an audience that is read Luther much more carefully than me) is that Luther had very much a tendency towards Paul.

Within the writings of the New Testament, the figure it seems to me who had tendencies more in the opposite direction of Paul was Jesus' brother James. The Epistle of James is a small epistle. Nevertheless, James insists on the significance of deeds. How does he put it? Faith without works is dead. So, he said the proof is, I will give you an example drawn from a totally different world. The word "love" as divorced from deeds I find to be a meaningless term, and I will tell you why I say that. Do you know that a large percentage of parents who have abused their children actually claim that they love their children? I have heard people defend that, "Well they do." I said, but if there is no difference in the behavior between parents that say they love their children and mistreat them and parents who love their children and treat them well, then you have taken away any meaning from the word "love" because if a person who acts abominably to somebody can still be considered to have loved that person, so then what does love mean? Love becomes some amorphous emotion. So, in a sense, that is what the Jewish issue was. If you have faith, that has to manifest itself in deeds – which is why there has always been the Jewish problematic.

I am curious because, here is where I am attentive to what I say and cautious in what I say because I have heard people quote things from Jewish sources that do not sound so nice at all, but I happen to know that within the Jewish tradition the way those sources are interpreted do not yield the worst possible explanation. I am assuming there are different ways that Christians understand it. But here is a letter that Luther wrote to his close

associate, Philip Melanchthon. In his letter to Melanchthon he writes, “If you are a preacher of grace, do not preach a fictitious grace but a true grace. G-d does not work salvation for fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin vigorously. But, even more vigorously believe, and delight in Christ who is victor over sin, death, and the world. It is sufficient that we recognize through the wealth of G-d's glory, the Lamb who bears the sins of the world. From this, sin does not sever us even if thousands and thousands of times in one day we should fornicate or murder.

I must admit, I have never understood that thousands of times in one day we should fornicate – this was even before Hugh Hefner [founder of *Playboy Magazine* (ed.)] – or murder. The point of the matter is, if you really do have faith in who Jesus was you would not do that. Again, I am giving it from a Jewish perspective; so, understand that it is not for me to tell you how you should believe. If Luther had said everybody is going to sin but he then restricted his explanations of sins or his examples of sins to somewhat more minor types of sins, of course we would say it is all true.

There are problems with the Sermon on the Mount. For example, “He who looks upon a woman lustfully is as if he had slept with her or committed adultery.” That is more understandable, because that is a very, very common human tendency. But, murder? That someone could find a way to be forgiven? I do not know. Maybe, if people knew in advance that if you committed murder you could never be forgiven – maybe that would make them less likely to commit murder. Why should we worry that much about afterwards? And then, if their victims had the wrong faith? However, according to Luther you could end up with the weird situation that a murderer who then gets the right faith will be saved but the person whom he murdered who did not have the right faith will not be. So that became one of the problematic teachings that separated Luther very, very much from the Jews.

So, what was the Jewish attitude? The Jewish attitude will come probably as a little shocking because while faith in G-d is very important, the keeping of the law is in some ways even more important. There is a radical statement in the Talmud attributed to G-d. But even though it is attributed to G-d, it is not said anywhere in the Bible. G-d is imagined to be saying, “Better if the Jewish people abandoned me and kept my commandments, for the keeping of those commandments will ultimately bring them back to me. It is like the old joke: a Lutheran minister was friends with a rabbi, and when they parted from each other, the minister said to the rabbi, “Keep the faith, rabbi” and the rabbi answered, “Keep the commandments.” In a sense, that is really what the idea was in the commandments. In Christianity, this idea was very influential and particularly in Paul's understanding of it. Jesus' sacrificial death was necessary to atone. The rabbis confronted the same problem when the temple was destroyed. And the teaching in the Talmud is, now that we no longer have the Temple G-d will have to accept acts of *Gemach*, acts of loving kindness, as purposes of atonement. Now I told that joke, “Keep the commandments or keep the faith” - if the conflict could only remain that lighthearted. But for Luther the conversion of the Jews was very important, as it was for many early Christians, and it was not unrelated to the fact that the Jews were the people who actually knew Jesus and rejected the claims being made for him.

The joke I tell in the United States – I do not think it will have as much resonance here because he is not as significant a figure, but – imagine in the United States if everybody believed that Jimmy Carter, the former president, was the Messiah. It is a bit far-fetched what I am saying. Imagine everybody in the United States believed Jimmy Carter was the Messiah except for the citizens of a small city in Georgia called Plains where Carter comes from. How

would the rest of the citizenry react to the people of Plains, Georgia? Either people would say, "Listen, if we who know him only a little think he is the Messiah, but they who know him well say he is not, maybe he really is not." Or, alternatively, "If we who know him only a little can recognize that he is the Messiah, they who know him well must assuredly know that he is the Messiah. If they deny it, it must be because they are allies of Satan." Unfortunately, for the Jews, the second interpretation became more common, and this explains an unusual feature of medieval antisemitism.

Normally, when people hate a group, they make things up. Even if they are making up stuff, they are normal sorts of claims such as, they will cheat you in business, they will kill you or all sorts of things. But the claims that were made against the Jews were so out of sync with any reality, but they were, indeed, claims that you would only make against people who you assumed to be allies of Satan. I will take the most famous one, the blood libel, that Jews kill non-Jews and drink their blood. It is interesting because this was very widely believed. Tens of thousands of Jews were murdered in Europe on the basis of this accusation, and it was totally false. It was not based on any truth.

An early cultural Zionist thinker, made an interesting comment. He said, "There is only one good thing you can say about the blood libel. Normally, when a lot of people say something about you, you start to question yourself. Can I alone be right and the whole world wrong?" And he said, "The blood libel will prove that possible. Yes, the whole world could believe that, or very large segments of the world, but anyone who was Jewish knew that Jews never would kill somebody in a ritual and drink their blood. In fact, interestingly there is an irony. The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, was – as far as I know – the first book in any society that forbade the consumption of any blood, including animal blood. Anybody who is familiar with the laws of *Kashrut* (knows) you have to drain the blood. The blood is the life. Interestingly, and maybe not surprisingly, there was a country where consumption of blood was not at all uncommon, which was Germany. They had these blood burgers – not burgers – blood sausage, which I found really was blood. That was forbidden (for Jews to eat), and yet many people could (not?) believe it.

That is the reason I am so resentful of the attempts now to resurrect a similar sort of accusation against Israel of genocide. I am a big proponent of a two-state solution. I want there to be a separation of Jews and Arabs where they do not want to live together. I think that would be immensely helpful. But, to accuse Israel of genocide? We know what genocide means. We know that by the end of World War II, two-thirds of the Jews who lived in Europe were dead. The increase in population of Palestinians living under Jewish rule since 1948 has been seven-fold. So, it is very, very dangerous when such things are said; and, the other medieval accusations that Jews poisoned non-Jews.

In 1610, the medical faculty at the University of Vienna certified as its official opinion that Jewish law required Jewish doctors to kill one out of ten of their Christian patients. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be in a Jewish doctor's office with nine people in front of you? Unfortunately, one of the people who propagated that belief was, indeed, Martin Luther, who said Jewish doctors are so proficient they can kill somebody with a poison in an hour, in a few hours, or even in 10 or 20 years.

By the way, in this statement of Luther's we find another distinctive theme of antisemitism, which is that usually when people dislike a group, they often claim that the group they dislike are their mental inferiors. You speak to a white racist and you know the sort of garbage you are going to start hearing coming out of their mouths. It has been done

with groups throughout history, and I believe there has been a lot of disrespect in the United States. Non-Jews have rarely accused Jews of being stupid. They tend to see Jews as smart, but using their intelligence in a malevolent manner. So, normally, what would be regarded as a virtue gets converted in the minds of the non-Jews into a bad thing, which probably was somewhat true of Luther's beliefs. Why would Luther have minded if the Jews did not convert? One, because they were of the people of Jesus; and, two, because he thought they were smart and they might therefore use their intellect to turn other people away from Christianity. I have a thesis that there are two sorts of people who think Jews are smarter than everybody else: antisemites and Jews.

Jews tend not to be the most modest group in the world. As I said, one out of every 500 people in the world is Jewish. Statistically, one Jew should win one Nobel Prize every 30 years. In any given year, however, if a Jew does not win a Nobel Prize, the Jewish community immediately assumes it is antisemitism. They tell a joke that a Jew is traveling alone on the trans-Siberian railroad in Russia in the early twentieth century. Suddenly, the train pulls to a stop. An officer in the Czar's army gets on the train. The train starts to move. He grabs the Jew by the lapels and says, "Tell me, why are you Jews brighter than everybody else?" The Jewish guy does not know what to answer. He is nervous. "This guy is, like, holding on to me." He says, "I think it is because of the herring we eat." The train resumes moving. The Jew takes out some herring and starts eating it. The officer asks, "How much do you want for that herring?" The Jew says, "20 Rubles." The officer gives him 20 Rubles. Normally, it is an enormous amount of money. He takes one bite of the herring and then he says to the Jew, "This is ridiculous. In Moscow I could have bought all that herring for a few Kopeks." The Jew says, "You see, it is working already." But you had the poison. I am dealing with these situations in a calm atmosphere where we are all joking around. The accusation of Jews as poisoners again led to tremendous amounts of deaths of Jews. Jews were blamed for the Black Plague in Europe. Whole Jewish communities were killed. You found, in Switzerland, any Jewish child over the age of seven was considered to be knowledgeable and complicit in the plot of spreading the blood poisoning and killed. Any Jewish child under the age of seven was allowed to live and was converted to Christianity.

I want to speak now for a few minutes about an issue related to that which enables me to see Luther, I would say, in kindly or in somewhat more kindly terms and then, also, to offer a suggestion. There is something else I keep mentioning, other projects I am working on. I have a theory that when people make ethics secondary, even if the primary value that they are propagating is a good one, it ends up having catastrophic results. I want to set Luther in a balance of five different people over whom I want to offer this thesis. Obviously, the problem I am presenting, again from my Jewish perspective, is that Luther made faith central, and not the ethical. That is how he came up with if you have the right faith, you will be saved, even if thousands of times in one day you murdered. Faith is an extraordinarily important value but if it is the most important value and it overrides the ethical, then bad things will be advocated in its name. There was a reason why - and Luther is not responsible for the Nazis - but there was a reason why Hitler liked to publicly align himself with Luther and why Nazis reprinted his works. However, not all Germans were taken in. One of them I want to speak about is one of my heroes, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But I will give you four other examples.

Emmanuel Kant was considered the supreme ethicist philosopher of Germany. Kant had his area where he thought one value was supreme above all others - truth. Kant actually offers the following example: "If somebody runs by you and (he actually says this), and then

another person runs by clearly intending to murder that person – he has a dagger drawn or whatever – and asks you where the first person ran, you are forbidden to lie. He writes about this in an essay called, “On a supposed right to lie from beneficent motives.” He forbids it. Interestingly, Kant was trying to establish an ethic that did not depend on G-d. Kant personally believed in G-d, but he felt that it could not just be a commanded ethic so he came up with a series of what he called categorical imperatives. Sissela Bok, a philosopher who wrote a book called *Lying*, analyzed Kant's statement. She said there is no question that according to Kant, a German ship captain who, during World War II, would be hiding Jews on his ship – if the ship was stopped by the Nazis and they demanded to know if he was carrying any Jews – there is no question that Kant would have said that he is forbidden to lie. I do not know if Kant had any really close personal relationships, but I have wondered about that because the fact that he could so easily dispense – look there are people, not everybody for example has children. Kant, as far as I know, was not in any romantic attachments, and did not have children. I think that anybody who has children would think, anyone who would say, “I would rather not lie and let my child be killed,” we would think of as a somewhat irresponsible parent. But what further convinced me that Kant has been vastly overrated is another example, and this is far less known of Kant. It is only because I was so curious about how morality acted out in his personal life (that I discovered this fact about Kant.). Kant was a believer in capital punishment. I am very limited, but in certain circumstances, I also think that that can be just. I know the prevailing view is that it is never right. But I do think that in certain situations I can imagine it. Kant had certain exceptions. Two notable exceptions, one of which I can go along with. He did not think that someone who killed somebody in a duel should be executed. I would say if the other party really had agreed to the duel, okay. I think there is a case to be made for that. But the second, and this is not widely known: a mother who kills her child, if the child was born out of wedlock. Kant believed that a child who was born out of wedlock had no right to exist. He believed – to use his language – the child had stolen into the country like contraband goods, and, therefore, there was to be certainly no capital punishment. I do not know if he thought there should be any punishment at all. So, I thought, look what Kant established in the minds of people: two very terrible teachings, very useful to totalitarian countries. The first is you cannot lie to authorities. The exaggerated respect for authorities, you cannot lie to them. Certainly, that would make the Nazis happy. The second one was he declared a class of people who had no right to live. Think about that - a child born out of wedlock who had done nothing wrong had no right to live. That also established the basis of it.

A second example – so it does not look like I am only looking to go after Christians – I will give you one of the Jewish teachings, which I was hurt by. It is maybe not as extreme as the last example I gave, and I could be accused of being unfair. I come from a background that was largely Hasidic. How many of you are familiar with the term Hasidic Jews? Okay. I certainly expected some people to raise their hand. The other side were the misnagdim, and the misnagdim were accused of being cold rationalists. The leading figure among the misnagdim was Rabbi Elijah of Vilna who was known as the Vilna Gaon. He felt that the highest value in Jewish life was Torah study. Many of you might be familiar that there are Jews who assert that that is the highest value and will spend many hours a day. But, as is the problem with most people when they have a favorite value, he took it to an extreme. What did he do in his extreme? In his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, he comments on a verse that refers to people of stout heart and he said, “Who is a man of stout heart? A man

who believes that Torah study is the highest value there is and spends his whole life studying Torah. When his children come and say to him, “Abba, father, we have no food; father, we have no clothes; he does not listen to them, and he continues studying Torah.” Again, on behalf of a good value, suddenly he is acting not as a very good parent. That is what happens when we make another value supreme. I will give two more examples, and then I want to say something about Bonhoeffer.

Another example is a man who is widely esteemed as one of the greatest or perhaps the greatest saint of the twentieth century, which was Gandhi. Gandhi was probably the second most famous person in the British Empire, in the British world. The most famous during World War II, I would say, was probably Churchill. Gandhi and Churchill did not have a particularly high view of each other. I will tell you one of the reasons why. Gandhi saw non-violence as always being the right. Now I want to be fair to him. He saw non-violent resistance as always being the highest moral goal and the highest moral behavior. And indeed, he did practice non-violent resistance against the British and was willing to suffer. The British did some terrible things in India. On one famous occasion, they killed over 1,500 people. But Gandhi still advocated nonviolent resistance. Eventually, he also knew against whom he was advocating it. Eventually, it wore the British down and they really did get out of India. Gandhi, similarly advocated nonviolent resistance to the Jews of Germany, and in the light of Kristallnacht, he said if 5,000 German Jews were willing to die that it would melt Hitler's heart.

Years ago, I wrote a book, *A Code of Jewish Ethics*. One chapter in the book is on common sense. I remember my wife argued with me. She said it is not fair to call common sense an ethical value because if people do not have common sense it is not their fault. In order to be unethical you have to know what you are doing. I am saying not being smart enough to know the difference between good and bad – unless you actually are so functionally lacking (for example, having an IQ of 40) - becomes a moral offense at a certain point. I will tell you why I say that about Gandhi. It is not just because of what he advised the Jews, it is because in May of 1940 when France was about to fall, Canada had entered the war, but the U.S still had not entered the war and England was going to be left alone to fight against the Nazis. Gandhi, at that time, wrote a public letter to the soldiers of England to lay down your arms and let Hitler and Mussolini occupy your country – but do not surrender your souls. We know what would have happened. The Nazis would have occupied the country and people would not surrender. They would have been wiped out. So, again, he saw the value of non-violent resistance as eclipsing all other values.

My final example is a person who is probably not as well known here in Canada as he is in the United States. But he is a significant figure, a man named Robert E. Lee. Robert E. Lee was the general of the southern armies during the Civil War. Lincoln had actually offered Lee to be the overall commander of the American army but Lee said, “I can not take up arms against my people,” and Lee, because of a sense of what he called honor and loyalty to the state of Virginia, became the General of the Confederate army. He was a very good General. He was very smart. Things that actually are normally a good thing can become a terrible thing. It is much worse to encounter a bad person who is smart because the person is going to use intelligence for malevolent purposes. In his personal dealings with people, you could say Lee was an honorable person. I do not know if black people thought he was such an honorable person. He was ultimately fighting a war on behalf of slavery and, because of his mastery of being a soldier, tens and tens of thousands of more soldiers died than would have

died otherwise because of a notion. Lee himself questioned whether slavery was a good thing. But his sense of loyalty – he could have set out the war if he did not want to fight against his own people. But he took up arms on their behalf. When people make a value other than ethics their central value, no matter how good the other value is, it will end up getting perverted to bad means. Where do we go from here if we acknowledge that Luther was a mixed bag?

I did not even get into the other subject. I assume there are people here who are far more knowledgeable than me - but Luther's advocacy of extreme violence against the peasants. From what I understand, and here I might be being unfair to Luther, but from my reading of it, it seemed to me that when Luther advocated basically destroying the peasants in their peasant rebellion in the most violent way, when he ended up to use as I once saw quoted somewhere, when he preached pacifism to the peasants but not to the lords, he betrayed a certain moral thing. As I have understood it, he did so in part because he was dependent on those German princes to support him. Luther was not the first person in history who ever thought the Papacy was doing terrible things. But the others generally got wiped out. Luther had allies, and maybe he felt he could not alienate those allies. Whatever it was, where do we go from here? Yet, for many people who are followers of Luther, he is a flawed diamond. You can only focus on the flaws and, in that case, where do you go? This is your Church. Or you can only focus on the diamonds, and in that case, where do you go? You ignore and have no motive to improve. But then, you had people who did want to improve.

One of the people whose lives, from the time I have learned about it - was it Eric Metaxas who came out with a biography of Bonhoeffer - I have been profoundly moved. So, we have models of other people that we can also follow. We can be followers of Luther, but not necessarily in every way. You are blessed in a sense with the fact that Luther is regarded as a very holy figure, but he's not regarded as a figure whose every word is divine. Jews would have more problems with biblical teachings because the words of the Torah are regarded as divine. Muslims believe that the words that came out from Muhammad were divine. First of all, Luther had a lot more words. Are not the collected works of Luther about 100 volumes? In that regard, I do envy him. I cannot come out with that. Maybe the world should envy him. I cannot come out with that many books.

Bonhoeffer was, obviously, a German who had grown up his whole life in Germany and already had come out quite anti-Nazi. His life was in danger, and everybody was relieved when he accepted a position at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Then, after he accepted that position, he went back to Germany in 1939. He went back during the most dangerous times and was willing to accept martyrdom. The Nazis did not kill him immediately. They arrested him. Then they kept him alive for a while. He said, "Only those who cry out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants." He was really challenging because the Lutheran Church in Germany was not willing to stand up to Hitler. One of Luther's less edifying teachings, in my mind, was that he did grant such powers to princes, to worldly rulers.

I remember – and this is not a Lutheran I am speaking about here – years ago, Billy Graham the famous American evangelist went to Russia. The Russian evangelicals were moved. It was exciting that Russians had let him in. He spoke in church and he said to the people who were looking for hope and encouragement, "You have to listen to your masters. You have to do your work." He took a position not that dissimilar from Luther's, even when Germans who had been captured and were being held as slaves by Turks wanted guidance



from him. He said, “You are slaves, and you owe it to your masters. When do you, when can you rebel? And against what can you rebel? The one leniency he allowed was that if the prince was a Catholic, you had to follow him. If he was a Lutheran, you had to follow him. If you disagreed, you were allowed to leave.

I think what we need to build on is exactly on people like Bonhoeffer. Regarding Luther’s antisemitism, so in 1940 Bonhoeffer wrote a draft for a Church confession of guilt, which was never made.

The church was silent when she should have cried out. The Church confesses that she has witnessed the lawless application of brutal force and the spiritual and physical suffering of countless innocent people. The Church has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder, but she has not raised her voice on behalf of the victim. She has not found a way to hasten to their aid. She is guilty of the deaths of the weakest and most defenseless brothers of Jesus Christ.

So we have models on which we can build, and I think the outreach has started when you read the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada’s statement from 1995. This is hardly the only Lutheran church in the world that has come out with such statements and with this acknowledgement – in a way they had almost had to, also, because most Protestant denominations are not named after a person. Since this person was so identified with it. But that is the way.

In Jewish teachings, Maimonides writes, “What is the first step in repentance?” It is exactly what you said, recognition of the wrong one has done. Maimonides writes that you have to say it aloud, which you have done, because otherwise we can rationalize in our minds we do not want any other people to know. But if we acknowledge it aloud, that becomes the first step. You have taken that first step. I am sure you have taken more steps. And I am very proud, and I hope I have represented myself fairly, and your positions fairly, to have been invited as you get ready to take more steps. I really am honored to be here.

*Editor’s note: As the Conference Moderator, Luisa D’Amato gave these post-keynote comments.*

I do not identify as short, but the podium disagrees with me. I am Louisa D’Amato. I am a columnist for the Waterloo Region Record and very honored to have been invited here to thank you, Rabbi Telushkin, and to participate in the question and answer session later this afternoon.

Rabbi Telushkin, thank you for such a wonderful speech. It was so conversational and yet so enlightening and often those two things do not necessarily go together. It has been a time for me to make connections and my brain has been kind of flashing around. I know that there will be many, many questions for you later in the day so I want to at this time invite everyone to look in the middle of the table where there is a green – have I got the color right? Yes, good – a green post-it note pile and on that pile please consider writing a question for Rabbi Telushkin that will be responded to later in the day.

I would also just like to say, too, that my name is Italian but I am one of those Jews whose family members were refugees from Nazi Germany and who covered up their identity with a non-Jewish name. It has always been that there are so many Jewish people who live

some of the things that you have been talking about. And that is all very much sitting on the shoulders of some of us.

*Editor's note: Rev. Dr. Allen G. Jorgenson gave a Christian response to the keynote address.*

## **A Lutheran Response to Luther's Unsettling Antisemitism**

### **Allen Jorgenson**

**F**irst, let me thank Rabbi Telushkin for his wise words, and his invitation for me to think through, with you, how passion has usurped ethics in the thought, and life, of Martin Luther, especially as evidenced in his hostility towards the Jews.

Steven Katz, in *The Holocaust in Historical Context* has noted that Luther “is often described as the single most important source of later, obsessive German antisemitism and is held accountable for the enduring hatred of the Jews” (Katz 1995, 386-387). He goes on to note that there is “considerable truth in this accusation” (Katz 1995, 386-387). The conversation we are having today is incredibly important for many reasons, not least of which is that the institution hosting this conversation bears Luther’s name. But beyond this is the question concerning what to do with someone whose legacy is marred by horrific and unconscionable diatribes. Alas, Luther is but a singular instance of what holds true for many other people whose lives have impacted world history. Is it possible to separate the wheat from the weeds, and then to sift the wheat from the chaff? What do we do with Luther’s treatment of the Jewish people?

Luther’s animus to the Jews might seem surprising in light of his early compassion and interest in them. We read, for instance, in “That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew” (1523):

Therefore, I would request and advise that one deal gently with them and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along. Instead of this, we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don’t stink, and I know not what other foolishness. Again, when we forbid them to labor and business and have any human fellowship with us, thereby forcing them into usury, how is that supposed to do them any good? (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 83)

Luther seems to be challenging many of the commonplace stereotypes associated with the Jewish people of his day. But then, 23 years later we read this same Luther commending rulers to “burn down their synagogues ... force them to work and deal harshly with them, as Moses did in the wilderness, slaying three thousand lest the whole people perish” (Luther 1971, 291). Later he writes, “If this does not help we must drive them out like mad dogs” (Luther 1971, 291). He also suggests restricting their travel (Luther 1971, 276), the confiscation of their prayer books, the forbidding of public prayer and education, as well as uttering “the name of God within our hearing” (Luther 1971, 286).

This horrid and drastic shift in language has long bewildered interpreters of Luther. Why this change? Did Luther’s theology shift? Did he have experiences that he was reacting against? Did he imbibe some new anti-Jewish texts?

Aarne Siirala, a former professor at Luther, surveyed responses to some of these questions in a LWF document. He referenced Luther’s own estimation that “The Jews had

begun to act quite differently from what he had experienced in the early 1520's" (Siirala 1964, 350). He also notes a common German Reformation antipathy toward usury, associated with the Jewish people, and their supposed interactions with "the Turks" (Siirala 1964, 351). These suggestions are not altogether satisfying. The editors to his 1546 "On the Jews and their Lies" ask whether this change can be attributed to declining health, frustration with problems associated with the development of the Reformation, and untoward experiences with Jews. These explanations, too, seem too weak to explain Luther's shift from a seeming compassion for the Jewish people to a blind passion as evidenced in the very hostile "Against the Jews and their Lies."

Brooks Shramm, in his introduction to "Martin Luther, the Bible and the Jewish People: A Reader" reframes the conversation:

To be sure, one can speak of an intensification of anti-Jewish rhetoric toward the end of his life – especially with regard to the question of what should be done about the Jews – but Luther *theological* evaluation of Judaism and the Jewish people remains essentially unchanged from the earliest stages of his career." (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 3)

Shramm isn't so interested in how Luther's approach to the Jews has *changed*, but rather he is attentive to how his thought *has remained the same*. This continuity he identifies with his theological assessment of the Jews. So, we might ask what was this theological assessment? You see something of this as early as Luther's 1515-16 Lecture on Romans, where he writes:

... we teach that when we see the fall of Jews or heretics or others, we should consider not those who fell but the work of God in them, so we may learn to fear God.... (Luther 1972, 428)

The Jewish people are here compared to heretics, which is to say, theirs was a religion gone bad. What is the basis for this assessment? In this text on Romans, and elsewhere, we read of Luther's affront at Jewish self-identification as children of God by virtue of their birth. He interprets this claim to mean that the rest of humanity are not children of God and cannot be, and so are damned as a result (Luther 1972, 7). Further to this, being an inheritor of the promises of God by virtue of birth and circumcision flies in the face of justification by faith alone (Luther 1971, 148-50). For the Reformer who staked his life on the belief that we are saved by grace through faith for Christ's sake, this is anathema. And so, Thomas Kaufmann notes that, for Luther, Jewish existence is under God's wrath (Kaufmann 2006, 72). Why are the Jewish people under the wrath of God in "On the Jews and their Lies" Luther writes that

The very reason for their condemnation is that they possess [God's] commandment and yet do not keep it, but violate it constantly. (Luther 1971, 168)

How is it that they violate the covenant? Luther claims that they violate it by imagining themselves to be right in God's sight by virtue of what they do, rather than what God does. These children of God by birth maintain their status with God by their good works. Luther holds no truck with such a claim. And so Shramm is correct in his assessment that

Thus for Luther ... the Jew – and Judaism – represent the negative religious standard against which all other negative religious phenomena are finally measured [so that] it follows that the ultimate human problem that Christ and the gospel have to remedy is the Jew inside us all. (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 8)

To sum up so far: Luther's animus toward Judaism is a life-long posture, and the figure of the Jew is a central concern throughout his career. We see the latter most especially in his work as an interpreter of Scripture (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 4).

So, what then are Luther's thoughts regarding Judaism and Scripture? Thomas Kaufmann notes that Luther consistently refused to acknowledge Rabbinic Judaism as a legitimate way to interpret Scripture (Kaufmann 2006, 96). Why? Because Luther considers the Hebrew Bible to be a Christian text because of its "promise of the coming of the Messiah and faith in that promise" as evidenced in the characters inhabiting the Hebrew Bible (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 13). This faith, which Luther regularly identifies in the matriarchs and patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible, is the same faith celebrated in the Christian church. Abraham, Sarah, and others were really Christians *avant le temps*.

Reading the Hebrew Bible via the interpretive lens of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the *sine qua non* for a proper interpretation of Scripture. For this reason, the Jews are "an utter aberration" insofar as Christianity rather than rabbinic Judaism is the legitimate heir of the faith tradition of the Hebrew Bible (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 13). Luther sees Christianity as a continuation of this ancient faith tradition rather than a replacement (Shramm and Stjerna 2012 11, 12). In Romans 11, Paul uses the metaphor of the Gentiles being a wild olive shoot being grafted onto the rich root of Judaism (v. 17). But what Luther has in mind might be pictured rather something like a tree trunk, with its lead removed because of disease, and so replaced by a grafting of Gentiles in its place. The Gentiles have become inheritors of the faith of the Hebrew Scriptures. Judaism has been removed and Christianity has become the crown of the tree. Consider Luther's comments on Romans 11:

... salvation has come to the Gentiles by the fall of the Jews, in order that their fall might not entirely be barren of fruit and an evil thing without any good. (Luther 1972, 426)

To be sure, Luther hopes for the raising of the removed branches, that they might again feed upon the rich root of the faith tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Katz notes that Luther was interested in demolishing Judaism rather than murdering Jews (Katz, 1995 391, 394). He would like to see the Jewish branches back on the tree of the faith of the Hebrew Bible. But for him, the only way back to the tree is by faith in the Messiah, that is Jesus Christ, a conviction he gleams from his Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible. Any other reading of the text is not only mistaken, but actually dangerous. For that reason, Luther was especially anxious that some reformers were beginning to study with Rabbis. Shramm writes

For Luther, there could be no compromise on this most basic of all theological issues. Jewish interpreters, and Christians who interpreted like Jews, had to be attacked and defeated on the Old Testament battlefield, because everything, from a religious point of view was at stake. (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 13)

And so, Shramm notes, “Luther perceived in Jewish readings of the Old Testament a genuine threat” (Shramm and Stjerana 2012, 13).

This is why Luther is so insistent on underscoring how the Jewish people live an impoverished existence: this is proof that they have fallen out of favour with God, who blesses those with whom the Divine is pleased. Luther makes much of this in his commentary on Genesis 12 (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 132, 134). Luther avers that

[The Jews] have now been living for almost 1500 years under great hardships and in uninterrupted captivity, and they have nothing of promises of which the Lord is speaking here. If God is truthful in His promises, then they must be liars; and through their unbelief they have forfeited these promises and are no longer the seed of Abraham to which these promises were given. (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 134)

This purported wretched state of Jewish existence is proof, for Luther, that the Jews are cursed by God. And this curse means that they have fallen from the olive tree. This assessment is consistent throughout the career of Luther. There is a kind of stridency in texts such as these that smacks, finally I think, of fear.

Luther’s hostility to the Jewish people is grounded in fear: fear of being wrong, fear of being excluded and fear of his doubts. Of course, Luther was not and is not unique in having such fears. In his hostile writings concerning the Jewish people, Luther reiterates themes advanced in the Middle Ages, and commonplace in the dark history of Christianity’s relationship to Judaism. It is also frequently noted that Luther’s antipathy toward the Jews is equalled by measure when we read his invectives hurled against the pope and the Turks. And yet, as noted by Shramm, the other two had the advantages of being powerful forces at some distance from the Reformer (Shramm and Stjerna 2012, 9). The Jews in Luther’s backyard did not have these luxuries of distance and power. When the flame of hatred was fanned, they were under fire.

To summarize again: Luther’s hostility to Judaism was a perennial feature in his writings, and is rooted, above all, in his refusal to countenance a Rabbinic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, fearful that Christianity itself is under threat from an alternate reading of this ancient text. Luther has taken hold of the Hebrew Bible and claimed it for Christianity. I find this seizure of the Hebrew Bible and refusal to countenance a Rabbinic reading of it akin, in a fashion, to the so-called discovery of the supposedly “New World” by explorers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century, the very time period during which Luther lived his life. The parallels, in some ways are apt.

Europeans Settlers came to America, to what is also called Turtle Island, to draw resources for their economies at home, pillaging the homelands of others for their own purposes. In like manner, Christians too often rip texts from the Hebrew Bible, violently interpreting it without attention to its context. And just as Settlers in this land have marginalized and demonized the Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island, Christians have expelled and obliterated Rabbinic readings of the Hebrew Bible, not to mention the Jewish people themselves. And just as Settlers have demanded the assimilation of Indigenous populations for their full inclusion in the body politic, so Luther refused any reading of the Hebrew Bible by Jews who did not become Christians.

The analogy, of course, is not perfect; but it can be instructive, I think. By comparing the relationship of Luther to the Jewish people and their scripture, to the relationship of Settlers to Turtle Island and its Indigenous inhabitants, I hope to accentuate some learnings that might be of aid. And so, finding a way forward in dealing with the legacy of Luther might be informed, in part, by what we have learned from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) process. The TRC was tasked with addressing the attempt to enforce the assimilation of the First Peoples of this land through the residential school system, where children were assaulted in every way imaginable. The assimilation of a people is, of course, a genocide. The TRC demonstrated that, and so invites us to ask what else we have learned from this process. So, what have we learned?

1. We have learned that there is no reconciliation without truth telling.
2. We have learned that reconciliation is a process.
3. We have learned that beneath the whole mess of the Residential School System and the tragedy of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is systemic racism.
4. We have learned that not so many have learned what we have learned.

Let me make some comments on each of these, as they apply to the matter at hand.

First, we know that there is no reconciliation without truth telling. Some of this truth telling has happened in the context of the Lutheran church. The Lutheran World Federation made a formal statement regarding Luther's anti-Jewish texts:

The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks, the violence of his attacks on the Jews, must be acknowledged with deep distress. And all occasions for similar sin in the present for the future must be removed from our churches. (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada 1995)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), which is a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) issued a statement containing the wording from the LWF 1984 condemnation of Luther's anti-Jewish writings, along with Canadian contextual considerations on "the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau and other Nazi death camps" and the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noting

Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, we affirm our fervent wish to live our faith in Jesus Christ in love and full respect for the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism is an affront to the Gospel, a contradiction of its central teachings, and a violation of our hope and calling. We pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry in our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray that greater understanding and cooperation may continually grow between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish Community in Canada. (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada 1995)

These statements are important markers in the lives of Lutherans and Jews in Canada, but we might query how widely known this statement is, and how we can better live into its goal of "greater understanding and cooperation between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish

community in Canada.” How many Lutherans know this truth that has been told? This brings us to our second learning.

Reconciliation is a process, and to return to Rabbi Telushkin’s talk, we need to understand it as an ethical process. We have learned from the TRC in Canada that reconciliation is like walking up a down escalator: the moment you stop walking up you continue back down to where you started. Working toward right relations with our Jewish brothers and sisters demands ongoing work, and I think that this is especially the case in our need to consider how we read, use, and interpret the Hebrew Bible. At Luther we have been especially fortunate in having Daniel Maoz, our Jewish Scholar in Residence, to help us in this regard, and I covet such an opportunity for Lutherans across Canada. Just as the TRC invites Settlers to learn from the people Indigenous to this land, so Christians would be wise to learn from those who live most deeply in the Hebrew Bible.

In some ways, for Christians, Paul might be of aid to us here. Lutherans today would be well served by revisiting Paul’s analogy of Gentile stocks grafted onto a well-established olive tree. The grafted branches only do well when the natural tree is healthy. In a way, then, the health of Christianity is contingent on the health of Judaism. When Judaism suffers, so do we. When Judaism thrives, so do we. There is a spiritual truth here that we can also apply to our present context: the health of Canada and the church in Canada is contingent on the well-being of our Indigenous neighbours. Well-being is not a zero-sum affair. I don’t fare better when you are worse off. In fact, in this season of colds and flus, we know the opposite is the case.

Third, we need to acknowledge the ways in which racism undergirds much of the hostility between peoples here in Canada and around the world. In addition to the issue of racism, we also need to acknowledge the dangers of religious superiority. The -isms work together, that way. Feelings of religious superiority are as dangerous for the health of the body politic as is racism. Further to this, we need to understand that both racism and religious superiority exist at both systemic and individual levels and are inter-related. I am a racist because I live in a racist world. The minute I quit fighting the racist in me is the moment that I begin to assault my humanity. There is no escaping this struggle. These things are in the air we breathe, and a posture of constant vigilance is needed to counter their odious effects.

Lastly, we have learned from the TRC that very few people have this important national project on their mind, and fewer have it in their hearts, and still fewer have it in their agendas. Why are so many Canadians uninterested in reconciliation with the First Peoples of Turtle Island? I sometimes think this to be the case because we quickly go to a place of guilt when we realize we have done wrong, and this guilt takes shape in us in a habit of shame. So, we tend to turn from things that make us feel guilty. Many of us have forgotten the truth that doing the right thing is always good for you. Doing the right thing is always good for you, even if the upside of this is not immediately evident. I think we are well served by hearing stories of how reconciliation –between Christians and Jews; and between Settlers and the First Peoples – enhances lives and opens pathways for possibilities otherwise not imagined. Truth and reconciliation enrich lives; giving us more not less. This has certainly been my experience. We need to share this good news.

In conclusion, I need to ponder for a moment, Rabbi Telushkin’s invitation for me to consider how to respond to Luther’s passion for faith over ethics. I begin with some words from Luther himself as quoted in *The Book of Concord*:

Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old 'Adam' and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and all powers, and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. ... Thus, it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire. (Kolb and Wengert 2000, 576)

Faith here is not an idea, nor is it a decision, although both are involved at some level. Rather, faith is our very way of being in light of our encounter with God. When God shows up, faith is born. And, this faith works. This faith works in the sense that it does work informed by its encounter with God. This is why Luther says that faith and works cannot be separated.

Alas, our dear Martin's faith sometimes was united with works that were malicious in-deed. But if he is correct – that faith and works are indivisible – then we might ask what he was trusting in in those moments in which he demonized the religious other. Was he trusting in a God who created the world with a diversity that deserves celebration? Was he trusting in a God whose vision for the healing of the cosmos includes a healing of the religions? Was he trusting in a whom, or a what? Of course, I will never know, and so I will leave it to the Master of the Universe to judge him.

Luther's legacy is marred, this much is sure. And so, we return now to the question behind this conference: what are we to do with a public figure whose important contributions to society are marred by abhorrent attitudes and activities? Are we to bury the malicious side of his life? No, that is manifestly impossible. Luther is a whole. We cannot cut out Luther the anti-Semite from Luther the theologian. So, some suggest that we bury Luther altogether, malicious and benevolent sides both: that we leave him beyond in the dark caverns of history. But no, that seems both foolish and impossible. Impossible because his fingerprints can be found all around us: in the notion of the secular, in the welfare state, in the freedom of conscience, in the affirmation of the ordinary. But it is foolish, too, because Luther still has things to say to us: he invites us to imagine a God who abides with people in their pain; he invites us to read Scripture with the expectation of encountering a sacred mystery; he reminds us that God's love is not conditional, a message embodied in Jesus of Nazareth; he reminds us that love of neighbour is the counter-point of faith, and that our sworn duty before God is to care for the person before me, the community around me. Luther's legacy is surely stained. Luther is complicated and needs to be kept complicated. His legacy is complex, this much is sure.

But his complicated and complex legacy – in no small part – resides within me. What am I to do? I will read Luther against Luther when his passions run amok. I will counter his odious passages with his proclamation of grace. I will hold Luther accountable to Luther. This is the ethical thing to do, and the only true way in which I can grant him the respect he deserves.

*Editor's note: Luisa D'Amato introduced Jean Becker*

Elder Jean Becker is the Senior Director of Indigenous Initiatives at the University of Waterloo where she builds capacity for Indigenous education in fostering specific courses,



working with the curriculum, and working with the university community to fulfill the resolutions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Jean did much the same job at Wilfrid Laurier University as well for many years and so she is a very well known figure in our community.

I have interviewed Jean several times as a journalist here and I can attest that she is one of the kindest and most patient people I know as she helps settlers who are completely ignorant of understanding on this land, the Indigenous experience, and the Indigenous point of view. I really look forward to this discussion by Jean Becker.

*Editor's note: Elder Jean Becker gave this response at the Luther Legacy Conference.*

## **Christian Claims on Indigenous Peoples**

**Jean Becker**

**M**y name is Jean Becker. I am Inuk from Nunatsiavut, Labrador and I have lived among the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe peoples for the last 40 years or so, not to mention all of you or some of you. Some of you were not born when I got here.

First of all, I want to start by saying that I am not representing a faith tradition. I think that is an important distinction to make about what I am saying. What I am saying is not Indigenous Spirituality. Indigenous belief systems are not, in our view, faith traditions. Furthermore, as an Inuk, I am speaking very specifically from a certain vantage point. There are still today some 60 Indigenous languages spoken in Canada and there are hundreds of different first nations across the country as well as the Metis People and the Inuit People. We are not a unified group. No one person speaks on behalf of us, certainly not in the way that you may have some unity among Lutherans (which I just heard at the table, there is not that much unity anyway). Having quite a number of Jewish friends, I know that there are differing opinions there as well. However, I do not think that we can talk about Indigenous points of view as quite unified a thing that you might say around Lutherans and Jewish people. I just wanted to be really clear about that.

I hope you can adjust to the change of pace here. I have been taught by my elders that whenever I speak, I am intended to speak for myself and from the heart and to say whatever is given to me by the circumstances, by whatever has arisen today. That is what I am doing today.

I want to thank Rabbi Telushkin for a really stimulating and inspiring address this morning. Thank you so much. I was really struck actually by the many similarities between the Jewish people and history and Indigenous people and the history here in Canada. Jews today are one-fifth of 1% of the world's population. I do not know how to equate the Indigenous population of Canada to that, but I can tell you that we are roughly 4-5% of Canada's population so we are very much in a minority here. As I understand it, in the United States, Native Americans can constitute about 1% of the population down there. Rabbi Telushkin talked about the oversized contributions of Jewish people to society and I think in Canada people would probably not view Indigenous contributions as oversized, but rather we are almost invisible here in Canada, even after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He talked about negative stereotypes of Jews perpetuated even in their absence. This is certainly true of Indigenous people.

I spent half of our break trying to remember the one joke that I have about Indigenous people that I thoroughly love, but I could not remember the punchline. So, I thoroughly enjoyed Rabbi Telushkin's humour throughout his talk. I always enjoy it when the speaker has some humour to lighten the mood and wake us up. So, I've decided to tell you my husband's favorite Indian joke, which is shorter, and I remember the punchline, too. There was a little boy traveling on a train with his dad, a little Indian boy and an Indian father. By Indian, you understand I mean Indigenous. They were on the train, sitting there minding their own business. There was a group of what we call in Indian country, White People. You understand, White is not a racial designation. I hope you understand that this is the case in Indian country. White is not a racial designation; it is a political statement. So, they were talking about the Indian problem and they were complaining about all the money the government is spending on the Indians and how they were all getting a free ride. "They do not pay taxes, they get free education, all of the many benefits of being an Indian in Canada today." So, the little boy was getting madder and madder as he was listening to this. Then, he finally stood up and he stomped over to these men, and he said to them, "Well, you can all go to Hell. There are no Indians there."

That is my second favorite joke. But those are some of the stereotypes about Indigenous people in Canada. If you believe those stereotypes, you might be wondering why we are not living in the best houses with running water and why we are not floating around the lakes in yachts. But people do not seem to connect these things. Rabbi Telushkin talked about Jews being confined to ghettos. In Canada, the term is reserves. Pogroms against Jews – well, in Canada that did not happen. There were no Indian wars here. We just had residential schools, the removal of the children, the decimation of the culture through that means. The Rabbi talked about how the far right and the far left unite by hating Jews. There is a book by Stan Barrett called, *Is God a Racist?* and one of the things that Stan discovered in his research with White Supremacists here in Canada – a lot of his research took place in Kitchener, by the way – one of his interesting little tidbits that he discovered is that White Supremacists generally are supporters of native Canadians. They do not lump us in with other people of color. As a matter of fact, they tend to almost idolize us, hold us up as some kind of noble savages. And, of course, the far left seeks to form alliances with us for every cause that they take on, particularly environmental causes these days. You have to hire an Indian and get a headdress and put them at the front of the parade. So, while Rabbi Telushkin was speaking, I was trying to think of what it is, over ethics that defines this relationship with Indigenous people, not just in Canada either but across the world. I have not had a lot of time yet to fully flesh this out, but it seems to me that probably the answer is land. It is our land that is really an issue here. In the talk about reconciliation and the era of apologies, this is the one topic that is never addressed.

What about the land and the water, as Daniel Maoz pointed out earlier? So, it is all well and good to talk about better relationships, getting along with each other. Fundamentally, the issue that has to be addressed and has to be talked about is land. I want to go back in history and talk a little bit about how we came to where we are today in regard to this land. The Doctrine of Discovery seems to be a good starting point. In case you do not know, the Doctrine of Discovery was not one but a series of fifteenth century Papal Bulls. These Papal Bulls are the legal foundation upon which North America was colonized. The first one came from Pope Alexander VI, *Inter Caetera Bull* of May 4, 1493. I will just read you snippets out of it.

To the illustrious sovereigns, our dear son in Christ, Ferdinand, King, and our very dear daughter in Christ, Isabella ... chose our beloved son, Christopher Columbus ... discovered very remote islands, and even main lands ... therein dwell very many peoples living in peace ... and are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of diverse kinds and qualities ... we exhort you to lead the people's dwelling in these lands and countries to embrace the Christian profession ... we give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors ...

Pope Alexander noted that he was speaking on the authority of the Almighty God – pretty high authority. The Doctrine of Discovery inspired the Monroe Doctrine, which gave the U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere, inspired manifest destiny, which justified westward expansion. The principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands and native peoples. It gave certain rights of occupancy and use. The Doctrine of Discovery underlies the legal relationship in Canada with Indigenous people today. Under that doctrine, Indigenous people could not claim land ownership, only occupancy and use. The Doctrine of Discovery today is manifested in international law. The legitimacy of the British Crown's assumption of underlying title and the limitation of aboriginal rights and the occupation and use of the lands of Turtle Island is grounded in that doctrine. Indigenous rights in Canada today are considered by the dominant society to be Common Law rights stemming from the British Crown's earliest sovereignty claims which are legitimated by the Doctrine of Discovery.

What is to be done with fifteenth century Papal Bulls that gave the whole continent and its peoples to an invading force? There have been numerous calls on various Popes, particularly the last three, to repudiate or rescind the Doctrine of Discovery. I was really interested in Rabbi Telushkin's definition of repentance and atonement. First, he says you must recognize the harm done. So far, the successive Popes have refused to make an apology following requests by first Indigenous people and more laterally by the Canadian government. (I will not say the Catholic Church because, as I understand it, the Catholic Church has avoided an apology from Rome regarding residential schools on the basis that all of the Churches are autonomous.) There was actually a motion passed in Parliament asking Canadian Bishops to go to Rome and ask for that apology to be made and the Pope has refused to do so. I would say that the first step in atonement has not been accomplished yet: recognize the harm done and state what that harm was. I asked Rabbi Telushkin what the second step was, and he said, "The second step in that process is undoing the damage done."

While I fully recognize and acknowledge the work that a number of the Churches have done, including the Catholic Church, to at least make some steps towards undoing that harm, I think there is still a lot of work to be done in that area. Seventy percent of the residential schools in Canada were Catholic schools. I think that fact alone speaks to the importance, at the very least, of a Catholic acknowledgement of the extent of the harm that was done. In my view, it certainly calls for an apology. But, then, I was thinking, if the Pope repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery and if, in fact, this is what gives legitimacy to the occupation of not only the Americas but many other Indigenous lands throughout the world, this could be quite a dilemma. I can just hear some of the cases springing up in the Supreme Court. So, we are back to the same point. I think that, perhaps, this is really the source of the refusal to address land issues.

People here think the only solution is to drive out all of the people who are not Indigenous and return it to a pre-colonial state. I do not think anybody envisions that happening and I do not know of any Indigenous group in Canada or elsewhere who is even suggesting that. But we are here in Waterloo. We are on the Haldimand Tract. Six miles on either side of the Grand River, source to mouth, is Haudenosaunee Territory. Most of these lands are in possession of non- Haudenosaunee people. These lands somehow left the control of the Haudenosaunee people without ever being paid for. The amount of rent that we should be paying is quite a large amount. The dispossession of these lands started back around 1800 and, yet, there is not even a conversation in this territory. None of us is talking about how we redress, how we undo the harm that has been done in this very local example. Every part of the country has these examples. There is nowhere in the Americas that was unoccupied. The whole notion of *Terra Nova* has been proven to be a fallacy. The territory was occupied and it was in use.

I am happy that this conference has been started. I truly hope that it will continue into the future. Talking about the Luther legacy is very critical. Having begun by talking about what is perhaps the most difficult part of his legacy is a very good step for the Martin Luther University College to take. I acknowledge you for your courage and your compassion in taking this conversation on.

Thank you for listening to me and thank you for including an Indigenous perspective, as Martin Luther University College always does at what I think is a really important conversation that you are having here.

*Editor's note: Luisa D'Amato introduced Daniel Maoz.*

Our final panelist is a very special individual who helped devise and create this entire conference, a conference which, I should note, has been described as historic by Rabbi Moishy Goldman who cannot be here today but is the Rabbi at the Rohr Chabad Center for Jewish Life here in Waterloo. He has a family wedding in New York and could not be here, but he did say it was historic – that the university college has reached out in this way And I think we all at this point understand how special and unique it is, and how lucky we are to be here. So, Daniel Maoz is part of the reason we are so lucky – a big part of the reason because he, as Jewish Scholar-in-Residence at Martin Luther University College and as Professor of Hebrew Scriptures here helped to organize this this conference and brought Rabbi Tulishkin here. He is also the Vice President of the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies, the director of Jewish Midrash and Christian Literature for the World Congress for Jewish Studies, a prolific author, and the staff person to three Salukis who drag him around the neighborhood. He is a very good friend and one of the most brilliant people I know. Dr Maoz.

*Editor's note: Dr. Daniel Maoz gave this response to the keynote address.*

## **A Jewish Response to Dysfunctional and Destructive Passion by Daniel Maoz**

**T**his morning we listened to Rabbi Telushkin address the topic of “Martin Luther and Antisemitism” by framing his keynote address in the context of how passion can blind one from ethical propriety. In so doing, he looked at five historical figures to reveal

how passion blinded their reason and judgement: 1) Martin Luther's passion for faith over ethics; 2) Immanuel Kant's passion for truth over ethics; 3) Elijah of Vilna (the Vilna Gaon)'s passion for Torah study over ethics; 4) General Robert E. Lee's passion for loyalty to one's state over ethics; and 5) Mahatma Gandhi's passion for non-violence over ethics. By historically detailing the manner in which each of these five seminal figures subverted ethical propriety, Rabbi Telushkin demonstrated the inherent danger of passion and its tragic effects throughout history. In returning to Luther, he traced the early years when Luther appeared to be Philo-Semitic to later Luther when he, in hostility, turned anti-Judaic and antisemitic upon realization that Jews who heard his Gospel message would not wholesale convert to Christianity, pointing to undeniable documentation such as his venomous tractate, "Against the Jews and Their Lies."

This afternoon, I have been given the opportunity to express my reflections on how passion has played a seminal role in my own community tradition and, in so doing, to further the conversation about ethical propriety. It occurs to me that there are a number of methodological approaches available, each with their own merit and each with their own potential pitfalls. For example, I could trace throughout Jewish history examples of passion gone wild, in instances of individuals as well as collectively. To begin this path of investigation, individual passion is recorded in the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures with one brother killing another in passionate pursuit of divine acceptance (Rosenberg and Rosenberg 2001-2002). Collective passion created a golden calf in similar search for the Divine (Kahan 2013). After tracing specific documented episodes of passion gone wrong individually and collectively throughout Jewish history, I might have concluded with recent examples that elicited names such as Bernie Madoff, widely known for financial crimes of passion (Scott and Ajmera 2019), and Lev Tahor, a Haredic Jewish cult of contemporary notoriety charged with communal crimes of passion including kidnapping, sexual abuse, and child abuse (Swenson 2019). But in order to properly address this approach, I feel that I would have to spend much of my time balancing the approach with a conversation about moral equivalency and false moral equivalency, given the propensity of our generation (and past generations) to consider singular transgressions within Jewish history as equal to or greater than atrocities committed against Jews, not to mention the need to address pejorative Jewish stereotypes and damning tropes about the Jewish community. Another method that occurred to me would look at passion-driven transgressions against Jews throughout history around the world – a kind of who's who and what's what of antisemitism. But, again, I feel that I would have to spend far too much time framing the enormous catalogue of data and be particularly careful to remain positive and constructive, all the while rehearsing societal bias against Jews and Judaism in various forms and permutations of anti-Judaism, antisemitism, and Judeophobia. Those who know me know well that I tend away from negatively framed narratives on any topic. As well, I am not an effective apologist able to dispassionately counter irrational forms of bias and bigotry. I will leave this to those who are both called and gifted in this field.

There is, however, an approach with which I am familiar and comfortable, an approach I have both learned and had reinforced through the teachings of Rabbi Moshe Goldman of the Rohr Chabad Centre for Jewish Life in Waterloo. Rabbi Goldman is a regular guest lecturer in classes I teach that form part of a newly minted Minor in Judaism at Martin Luther University College here at Wilfrid Laurier University. Too often when Rabbi Moshe was scheduled to speak in my class there has been a national or international incident

representing an attack on a Jewish congregation somewhere in Canada, the United States, or Western Europe, whether by stabbing during a Hanukkah celebration north of New York City (Tarinelli et al 2019); or as a Jewish yarmulke/kippah wearing pedestrian attacked by a taxi driver while coming out of his apartment in Montreal (Oster 2019); or being spit at while walking in a Parisian street for wearing Star of David jewelry (Nossiter 2018). No academic term seemed immune to headlines that warranted a common question from my Jewish students: ‘How should Jews react to such public expression of hatred?’ Rabbi Goldman’s response was calm, consistent, and comforting. He would begin by saying that there is no standard response that Jews throughout the world and in the span of history abide by. But, he would add, his sectarian community of Chabad follows the teachings of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson Z”L (of beloved memory), who taught that only light overcomes darkness. Only love suppresses anger and hatred. Reason alone fills irrationality’s cognitive void. And, so, in following this line of thinking relevant to our context, I looked for an appropriate anecdote for misappropriated and destructive passion. So, I first turned to the Talmud, Judaism’s foremost interpretive lens for the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Talmud records the familiar adage of our great first century CE sage, Hillel, “If I am not for myself, who am I? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” In breaking down Hillel’s maxim, we understand that we must be for ourselves in order to realize fully our identity: thus, “If I am not for myself, who am I?” We also know that a self-serving life is a hollow life, one that disregards the needs of those in our midst. We become less than what our potential can be if we remain indifferent to others: thus, “If I am only for myself, what am I?” But Hillel also knew that what he was pointing out demanded more than intellectual assent. It called for putting our positive potential into action; thus, “If not now, when?” Self-preservation and self-service are essential for ontological balance. Over-emphasis of being for oneself, however, crosses a line and transforms into an expression of passion – an “intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction” (Merriam-Webster). Once that line is crossed, consideration of others tends to fall aside as I become only for myself. What have I become as passion has taken control of my sense of self and propriety?

But passion as an energizing and motivating force can also be positively construed. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel identified a religious person as one who holds God and humanity “in one thought at one time,” a person who internalizes harm done to others, whose strength is realized in love and defiance of despair, and “whose greatest passion is compassion” (Kasimow 2015, xxi-xxii). Heschel’s last clause underscores a valid and effective response to excessive passion, compassion as one’s greatest passion.

By linking compassion with voluntarily bearing the weight of the burdens of others, Heschel apophatically mimics a Talmudic teaching that “anyone who does not have compassion for God’s creatures, it is known that he is not of the descendants of Abraham, our forefather” (*Bavli*, Beitzah 32a, in Sefaria 2020). And, “although in theory they are distinguishable,” “there is no bright line between ... the traits of kindness and compassion” and the attributes of generosity and charity (Pies 2011, 10). In Jewish tradition, a *tzadik* (righteous person) is known by their kindness, compassion, generosity, and charitable giving. The biblical proverb instructs, “If your enemy is hungry, provide food; and if your enemy thirsts, give water to drink” (Proverb 25.21). But beyond material provision, charity and compassion both may seek to address the root cause of that which endangers, hampers, or otherwise causes harm or diminishes the well-being of a fellow human being. While one may literally fulfill the mitzvah to not put a stumbling block in front of a person who cannot

see it for them self (Leviticus 19.14), Jewish tradition expands the obligation to remove that which will cause a person to stumble rather than, in being aware of what they are not, permitting them to stumble by not removing it. Practically and literally speaking, remove anything on a sidewalk that a sight-challenged person might stumble over, and even extinguish discarded cigarettes lest a child come along, pick it up, and get burned (Telushkin 2000, 297).

Charity and acts of kindness are distinguished in that charity is given to the poor whereas acts of kindness are given to both poor and rich. The Talmud points out that while charity is for the living, acts of kindness serve both the living and the dead. For this reason, the Talmud considers acts of kindness greater than the giving of charity (*Bavli*, Sukkah 49b).

In a prior study (Maoz 2016), I identified compassion as essential fabric of Judaism. If compassion is, as Heschel says, the greatest compassion one can express, and if addressing crimes of passion is best done by exercising a positive alternative to dysfunctional excesses of passion, as our Chabad community friends advance, then the method I choose to consider as a response to passion that usurps ethical propriety centres on compassion in Jewish tradition.<sup>3</sup>

In order to do justice to the topic of compassion as understood and expressed in Judaism, I have first considered the actual words that the Hebrew Scriptures use to express the notion of compassion. Next, I looked at a few key contexts within Judaism in which the concept of compassion has been applied traditionally. Finally, I have considered the contemporary usage of the term in the light of its linguistic beginnings and historical employment.

## Linguistic and Scriptural Origins of the Term

The first instance of the Hebrew word for compassion sees Moses standing on Mount Sinai early one morning awaiting God's arrival in a cloud with promise that God would inscribe instructions on the two tablets that Moses had carved out of stone in obedience to a command God had given him just the day before. The scene was becoming somewhat familiar to Moses.

Moses had earlier, in ascending the same mountain, received ten "words" of instruction on stone tablets. He had descended to deliver these commandments to the Israelites who were encamped at its base. Enraged, he "hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain" in response to witnessing the golden calf that they had made in his absence. And now Moses was once again on the mountain awaiting God's bidding. It was at this point that God self-revealed:

The Lord! the Lord! a God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.... Exodus 34.6b-7a (all English translations follow the translation of JPS TANAKH unless otherwise noted)

The Hebrew word *rachum* (compassion) is used sparingly in Hebrew Scriptures, appearing only a dozen more times. (i.e. Deuteronomy 4.31; Psalms 78.38, 86.15, 103.8, 111.4, 145.8; Joel 2.13; Jonah 4.2; 2 Chronicles 30.9) The word itself, however, tells an

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<sup>3</sup>Hereafter, the former study is presented with minor modifications to accommodate present applications.

intriguing linguistic tale, seeing the concept of compassion generously distributed throughout Scripture by means of its root word and cognates. The plural form, *rachamin*, variously translates as “mercy” (e.g. Genesis 43.14; Isaiah 47.6; Jeremiah 42.12; Daniel 9.9) and “compassion.” (E.g. Deuteronomy 13.18; Jeremiah 16.5; Zechariah 7.9; Nehemiah 9.17, 19, 31) That both English ideas of mercy and compassion can serve to express a singular Hebrew word is telling. The divine act of holding back a judgement that one deserves (mercy) is an action borne from a profound sympathetic sentiment toward the person’s well-being (compassion). And so, the terms compassion and mercy can be interchangeable when translating *rachamin*. However, in contexts that focusing solely on mercy, the term *chesed* is used. Even so, *chesed* emanates compassion. (See Maoz, 2005)

Contemporary feminist hermeneuts such as Phyllis Trible (1978) have further advanced our understanding of the Hebrew concept of compassion by noting that the Hebrew tri-consonantal root (*r-ch-m*) for compassion / mercy, when vocalized with different vowels, conveys the physical organ specific to woman. There are ten occurrences of *rechem* in the Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis 20.18; Exodus 13.2, 12, 15; 34.19; Numbers 3.12; 8.16; 18.15; Hosea 9.14; Job 24.20. In acknowledgment of the linguistic association between compassion / mercy and the female womb may represent a minor observation. But, when this link is treated as an interpretive lens, one readily sees the deep impact it has on pivotal texts of Scripture.

According to the Psalmist, it was God who delivered him from the womb, acting as a midwife and thereafter assumed the role of mother, “I became your charge at birth; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.” (Psalm 22.10, 11)

Torah has already informed the Psalmist that as a father, God created a designated people and as a mother, God gave birth to them. (Deuteronomy 32.6, 18) On this point, Trible (2015) comments:

Though the RSV translates accurately “the God who gave you birth,” the rendering is tame. We need to accent the striking portrayal of God as a woman in labor pains, for the Hebrew verb has exclusively this meaning.

Trible rightly opines,

How scandalous, then, is the totally incorrect translation in the Jerusalem Bible, “You forgot the God who fathered you” in reframing heretofore patriarchal readings of texts, “male idolatry that has long infested faith,” that signal the motherhood of God. (Trible, 2015)

Judaism historically has interchanged the words mercy and compassion based on Scriptural interdependence of the meaning of the two terms in English, as demonstrated in

Friedlander’s acrostic translation of Psalm 145:  
Holding us in your grace and compassion (*rachamin*),  
You are patient and enduring in love.  
In your goodness, Eternal God,  
You have mercy (*rachamin*) on all your creatures.



## Compassion in Jewish Context(s)

Within Judaism, the concept of compassion has been traditionally understood and applied in a wide range of contexts. To illustrate this, I will look at three such contexts: the home, when ushering in the Sabbath; ethical texts that attempt to explain difficult passages of the Hebrew Scriptures for subsequent generations; and Jewish mystical thought.

*The Jewish Home:* Jewish service to God begins in the home. Among the many rituals that uniquely express themselves in the family context is the welcoming of the Sabbath on Friday evening. Traditionally, while the husband attends Kabbalat Shabbat service in the synagogue, the wife prepares the Sabbath table, the table spread, lights the Sabbath candles, and recites Sabbath prayers. Compassion plays a central role at this defining moment in the Jewish week.

An example of this is The Kaf HaChaim which is a 10-volume masterpiece on *halakhah*, the *Kaf Hachaim* (the palm of life). This was composed by Yaakov Chaim Sofer, a late nineteenth early twentieth century Orthodox rabbi of Hungarian origin. This work has become a standard reference work of *halakha* (the path one walks) for both eastern (Sephardic) and western (Ashkenazi) Jewish communities. The Kaf HaChaim offers the following prayer text to be recited by women at the time of Friday evening candle lighting:

May it be your will ... that you have compassion and mercy, and may your kindness to me be increased to grant me children, who will follow Your will, and learn Torah for its sake, and may they shine forth the light of the Torah, in the merit of these Shabbos candles, as it says “for a mitzvah is a candle, and the Torah is light.” The prayer ends: Also, have mercy and compassion on my husband, [Blank] son of [Blank], and grant him long life and full years, filled with blessings and success and help him fulfill Your will fully, may it be your will. Amen. (Kaf HaChaim, 263.34, as cited in Simcha Fishbane, 2016)

*Ethical Literature (Aggadic Midrash):* Judaism has an entire corpus of writings, ranging from the second century BCE to the thirteenth century CE, that addresses the path one walks (*halakha*) from an ethical vantage. Earliest aggadic compositions are Targums (interpretive translations / paraphrases of Hebrew Scripture) although some scholars point out that one can see aggadic passages earlier than this, in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. By the end of the thirteenth century CE, no single collection of ethical stories (pl., *aggadot*) contained original narratives but instead compiled a patchwork of previously written stories with, in some instances, original aggadic content added. Fantastic in nature and imaginative in spirit, aggadic texts engage animals in conversation, embellish biblical narrative, and otherwise create discussion of important matters of life in order to imbed spirituality into the body of legislation that obligates an observant Jewish life.

Genesis Rabbah is a verse-by-verse exposition of the first book of the Bible. Genesis Rabbah (Heb., *Bereshit Rabbah*) introduces Midrash Rabbah (the great midrash), a 10-volume collection of aggadic texts. It is considered one of the earlier aggadic collections, thus offering a window into early rabbinic thought on matters of Jewish ethics. As one can imagine, a patriarch’s action of sacrificing his son would have been a topic of much discussion and debate, including the role God had to have played in demanding such behaviour. Was Abraham heartless in doing so? Would Abraham’s relationship with God change as a result? If so, how? Mercy from which compassion emanates plays a central role in these expositions.

Not only is Abraham's compassion validated, but also it is used as a bargaining chip in negotiating reciprocity of divine compassion for future generations. Many biblical texts encourage Israel to reach an understanding with God (Isaiah 1.18), prove God's faithfulness (Malachi 3.10), and otherwise struggle with God (the very meaning of the word Israel).

Isaac said to him, 'Father, I am young and I suspect that my body might move from fear of the knife and I will cause you sorrow, or the slaughter will be invalid and the sacrifice will not rise for you, you should tie me very tight.' He sent out his hand to take the knife and tears were flowing from his eyes and his tears were falling into the eyes of Isaac because of the compassion of a father.

R. Bibi Rabbah said in R. Yochanan's name, He (Abraham) said to him (God), Ruler of the universe, when you ordered me, "Take your son, your only son" (Gen. 22.2), I could have answered, Yesterday you promised me, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named" (Gen. 21.12), and now you are saying, "Offer him there for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22.2). But I did not respond in that manner, but suppressed my feelings of compassion in order to do your will. Therefore, may it be your will, O Lord our God, that when Isaac's children are in trouble, you will remember the binding (of Isaac) in their favor and be filled with compassion for them. (Genesis Rabbah 56.8, 10)

At times, aggadic texts subvert tradition, such as in *Yalkut Shimoni*, a comprehensive thirteenth century CE aggadic collection.

When the daughters of Tslafchad heard that the land was being divided to the tribes but not to the women they convened to discuss the matter. They said, "God's mercy [hesed] and compassion [*rachamin*] is not like the compassion [*rachamin*] of humankind. Humankind favors men over women. God is not that way. God's compassion [*rachamin*] is on men and women alike." (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 27)

*Jewish Mystical Thought:* Kabbalists engaged the known world with the Other World, having eyes to see beyond the physical to the transcendental world of God. Kabbalists were also aggadists, meaning that they often expressed their understanding of the path one is to walk (i.e. *halakha*) in ethical and narrative terms. In the Zohar, biblical themes are taken up such as we saw earlier in aggadic midrash. The *Zohar* (a commentary on the Torah and the Megillot) is a primary text of Jewish mysticism, or kabbalah, traditionally said to have been composed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (a fourth generation Tanna who taught many of the great rabbis of Early Judaism including Rabbi Akiva), although Moses de Leon more probably should be credited (a thirteenth century Spanish kabbalist) either with its authorship or final redaction.

In the Zohar, compassion plays a central role in mystical thought and expression as Abraham's heart is revealed through compassionate action of intercession.

Noah and Abraham, not in relative perfection, but in relative compassion, caring for others and being willing to defend them against one's superior. ... Breshit Rabbah saw Abraham as the older more independent son, here in the Zohar he is depicted as a better father, for his task will be not only to grow up and become an independent adult but to extend his love to others – first towards his fellow human beings and then

towards his children. (Zion & Israel, 2005) Rabbi Yehuda said: Who has seen a father as compassionate as Abraham? Come and see: Regarding Noah it is stated (6.13) “And God said to Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me; ... and behold I will destroy them from the earth. Make you an ark of gopher wood ...;” And Noah held his peace and said nothing, nor did he intervene. But Abraham, as soon as the Holy One said to him: “Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see ...;” Immediately, as it is stated, “and Abraham drew near and said: Will You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”

The style of some passages of the Zohar employs words that echo each other. This structure is often lost in translation. Lewis divides the Aramaic text into poetic lines to reflect the original. In doing so, this portion of the Zohar exemplifies the all-inclusive nature of the theme of compassion embedded within the very fabric of Jewish thought and life.

Just as a rose among thorns is colored red and white,  
so Assembly of Israel includes judgment and compassion.  
Just as a rose has thirteen petals,  
so Assembly of Israel has thirteen qualities of compassion.  
(Barrett & Lewis, Fox, Maoz, and Meacham 2019, 368)

### Contemporary Usage of the Term Compassion

In the light of its linguistic beginnings in the Jewish Bible and its historical employment in Judaic literature, the term compassion is an indistinguishable and inseparable part of the fabric of Jewish thought and life, of moral and ethical code. By embedding Rabbinic thought with Aristotelian rationalism, twelfth century medieval philosopher Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides forever altered Jewish tradition. The Rambam’s influence cannot be overstated as his *Mishneh Torah* offers an accessible systematic codification of Jewish oral law (the Babylonian Talmud) that represents the highest legal authority in Orthodox Judaism today. Maimonides explains that the purpose of Torah and its contained laws is to “promote compassion, loving-kindness, and peace in the world.” (*Yad Hazachah*, Hilchot Sabbath 2.3)

Compassion occupies a central role in how Jews engage in self-betterment (Jewish ethics) and responsibly act within society (morality). Unlike secular ethical codes, whether philosophical, public, deontological, or whatever, the primary emphasis of self-improvement remains core to Jewish ethics. (See Telushkin, 2006) Former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth, Jonathan Sacks, addressed the topic of human morality in terms of compassion lost, compassion sought, and compassion gained. In his challenge, one recognizes the dangers that insensitivity, even passionate insensitivity can produce through lack of compassion.

Morality ... binds and blinds. It binds us to others in a bond of reciprocal altruism. But it also blinds us to the humanity of those who stand outside that bond. It unites and divides. It divides because it unites. Morality turns the “I” of self-interest into the “We” of the common good. But the very act of creating an “Us” simultaneously creates a “Them,” the people not like us. Even the most universalistic of religions, founded on principles of love and compassion, have often seen those outside the faith as Satan,

the infidel, the antichrist, the child of darkness, the unredeemed. They have committed unspeakable acts of brutality in the name of God.

Rabbi Sacks highlighted a wide range of positive and negative outcomes when humans passionately focus on morality. Compassion opens our eyes to that which passion can blind us. Heschel, who reminded us that “compassion is one’s greatest passion,” once said: “When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.”

At the onset of this study, I set out to address Jewish tradition’s response to passion that displaces ethical propriety. In the spirit of Chabad, I conclude that words and deeds of kindness offer a valid and effective path ultimately to address corrupted passion. As Jews, in becoming a (more) compassionate people, in the words of Rabbi Tarfon, “Ours is not to finish the task (for it is a dynamic, ever-challenging, life-long process); ours also is not to abandon it.”

*Editor’s note: Luisa D’Amato introduced the afternoon question session by selecting questions from the audience and allocating them to the keynote speaker and respondents.*

**Q** Dr. Jorgenson, this is a question on Denmark’s role, given the positive response of Danes to saving Jews during World War II. What was the position of the Danish Lutheran Church toward Judaism and the Jewish people?

[Dr. Allen Jorgenson](#)

I cannot say I know exhaustively an awful lot about the Danish Church’s position vis-à-vis Jews. When I was in Copenhagen some years ago, I went to a museum about the resistance and talked a little bit about the history of Judaism in Denmark. The experience of Jews was quite positive. They talked a little bit about the different layers and times at which Jewish people migrated to Denmark and their integration, and not in the communities. But I do know that the Danish Church worked hard to do what they could to help Jews who were in Denmark, hide them from the Nazis, and remained committed to that. Denmark’s social policy is quite progressive and it is not all together surprising that they were able to collectively say no to Hitler’s policies.

**Q** Thank you. Another question is for Rabbi Telushkin, but I’m not sure if others also would like to jump in. Has Lutheranism owned its structural antisemitism? Has Bonhoeffer been exploited? Why did the Church only turn against Hitler when he challenged their rights?

[Rabbi Joseph Telushkin](#)

I am probably not the right one to answer this question because I know more about the Jewish angle, but I do not know the internal workings of the Church.

In my critique, my understanding of Luther’s theology as I made clear, I think Luther put insufficient emphasis on acts, on works. I think it manifested itself in another way. People need guidance; people need direction. Ideally, they’re going to get that guidance and ethical direction from their Church. From what I understand, and I stand open to correction, I believe Luther trusted too much in decisions that we might consider ethical decisions as being made by princes and rulers. I think that is very dangerous because we would expect a higher level of ethical behavior from Church leadership than from rulers who often rule by

rather ruthless means. I believe that Luther actually knew that, but he sort of believed in his own form of divine right of kings. To my mind, that is not necessarily a good ethical standard. It is very interesting. I do not know if there is anything comparable.

According to Jewish tradition, how many of you know how many laws are in the Torah? This is widely known: 613. There are various ways of categorizing those laws: a positive law; a negative law; laws between people and each other; laws between people and G-d. But my favorite way is in a thirteenth century book called *Sefer Ha'Hinnuch* (the book of education) in which the 613 laws are listed in order of their appearance in the Five Books of Moses. The 613th law is – I think Lutherans would be comfortable with this one – that every person is obliged to write a Torah. You are supposed to write out the laws of the Torah. But the law concerning kings is that a king, upon becoming king, is also supposed to write out a Torah to remind himself that he is under G-d; that G-d is over him. Luther, it seemed to me, had too much respect for even secular rulers.

Obviously, my knowledge of Luther is inconsistent, but I came across a letter he addressed to a group of Christians who had been captured and were serving as slaves in Turkey in which he told them that, as slaves, their masters owned their bodies. I always thought it did not strike me as quite the right spirit. There is a law in the Torah in Deuteronomy 23 verse 16, “You are forbidden to return a runaway slave to his master.”

When they discovered Hammurabi's Code around 1900, they found all these parallels to the Bible. Many people thought it discredited the originality of the Torah. Walter Kaufman, a philosopher at Princeton, said, ‘No, don't look for the similarities look for the differences.’ Obviously, most legal codes are going to be more similar than different because they all deal with the same sorts of issues. Look for the differences. It was a death sentence in Hammurabi's Code if you helped a runaway slave run away. And the Torah said – it was applying it to non-Jews who fled to Israel – “You shall not return a runaway slave to his master. Let the person live where he wants.” I have no idea what Luther's position would have been on a runaway slave. Maybe you would know. I do not know, but it becomes interesting.

Now, going back to the original question, ‘Has Lutheranism owned its structural antisemitism? Has Bonhoeffer been exploited? Why did the Church only turn against Hitler when he challenged their rights?’ I think that many Lutherans in Germany, basing themselves on Luther, felt that the government had legitimacy. I do not know. I assume Lutherans elsewhere did. This has been a common problem, obviously. Look how many wars have been fought between Christians. They might have big doctrinal differences, but they share in common belief in the divinity of Jesus. Yet they can go to war against each other. I am assuming that the issue was with the confessing Church, even in Germany, and with the Lutheran Church in Germany. Many people, I assume, believe that the government had legitimacy.

[Dr. Allen Jorgenson](#)

Has Lutheranism addressed its antisemitism at a structural level? I think that the statement from the Lutheran World Federation in 1984 was an important first step. I would return again to my analogy of walking up a down escalator. This has to be something that we continue to work against.

Antisemitism, like racism, like a list of other isms is probably, generally not taught by people sitting down and being told, ‘Being white is better.’ Instead, in prayers and hymns,

devotional literature in the Church, subtle things are being used that continually bring antisemitic and other racist ideologies back into our mindset. I think it is an ongoing issue. I think a beginning has been made. But I think a lot more work needs to be done.

The one thing I would also add is, it is very hard to answer the question, “have Lutherans,” because there are all kinds of Lutherans. You are in conversation with Lutherans in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. In Canada alone, there are probably about a dozen different Lutheran bodies. Many of them are very small, but some of them would decidedly not be very interested in this conversation.

**Q** Well, in somewhat of the same vein, the next question is for Elder Jean Becker. How can progress be made to deal with Indigenous issues when there is no single voice or any unified means of working with Indigenous communities?

Elder Jean Becker

That one is easy. You have to talk to all of us. I mean, everywhere else in the world, nobody has objected that you go to Europe and how many nations do you have to deal with? You go anywhere else in the world. You deal with all the different people. Why is it so incomprehensible? Why do we have to have a unified voice? So, I will ask you the question, “Why do we have to be unified? Why do you have to only talk to some chief? I do not think that our not being unified is an impediment to beginning to deal with issues, especially if you localize them. It is easy here in the Haldimand Tract.

Let's start here: easy, easy, easy. We have clear representation here. We could quite readily find the political structures among the Indigenous groups who have an interest in this particular territory. An hour from us is the largest reserve in Canada. They are the Haudenosaunee people. They are the people of the Haldimand Tract. Right next door to them is the other people of the Haldimand Tract, the Anishinaabe. They also have a government that we could interact with. So, I think that is a red herring, whatever a red herring is. Never saw one but I heard of them. Oh, they cost 20 rupees.

**Q** Thank you. This was a question for Rabbi Telushkin. If ethics is fundamental, not secondary, what is the role of or significance of faith for Jews?

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

Faith is what underlies ethics. If there is no faith, if there is no G-d, what are the determinants of human behavior? Imagine for the moment that all that exists in the world is the physical. There is no metaphysical. All that exists in the world is the physical. It seems to me that the determinants of human behavior are two things, heredity and environment.

In the United States, probably the most famous criminal defense lawyer ever was a man named Clarence Darrow. Darrow also was America's most famous religious skeptic. Darrow, not surprisingly, was a criminal defense lawyer who opposed capital punishment. Actually, he opposed all punishment. His rationale for opposing it was exactly this: he said human beings are the product of two things, and two things only, heredity and environment. Therefore, you really cannot blame anybody for anything. What religion adds to the mix and what faith adds to the mix is the belief that human beings have a soul, that human beings have free will. So, people say to me, ‘If there is no G-d, murder is not wrong. And I say, ‘You think it is wrong. I think it is wrong. But we know that during Hitler's time in Germany not

only did Hitler not think it was wrong, a lot of Germans did not think it was wrong.' And we know that if Hitler had run the world, a lot of people living today would have very different conceptions. The same thing would have happened if Stalin had won the war. We know that Stalin probably killed even more – I should not say killed – Stalin probably murdered even more people than Hitler did. There was no shortage of people who were pro-Communists who were sympathetic to Stalin and who really did not think it was wrong. Certainly, Lenin did not think it was wrong, as Churchill – who was smart on many issues – said, 'Lenin's birth was Russia's greatest tragedy. Lenin's death was Russia's second greatest tragedy,' because he was replaced by Stalin. It is not so self-obvious. At a time when many hidden things are revealed, somebody once put it that many revealed things are becoming hidden and the most basic moral attitudes are taken for granted because a belief in G-d brought about those things.

I am not saying that belief in G-d makes people good. I do not think the greatest contribution of the Hebrew Bible to the world was monotheism. I think it was ethical monotheism, by which I mean the contribution was a belief that there is a G-d whose primary demand of human beings is ethical behavior, not primary demand is belief in that G-d. Belief in that G-d is manifested by the behavior by the person's deeds so you shall know what the person was.

Whether Luther disagreed with this or he was misinterpreted to believe that he disagreed with that, the ethical aspect somehow seemed to have become diminished in its significance. But how do you know? A man says to a woman, "I love you." How is the woman supposed to know if he loves her? Is it not supposed to be? Or, the opposite, is it not supposed to be by the way the person treats her? That is why I think faith is very central and I think it is a tragedy in the Jewish community that a lot of people have lost faith. It is very interesting.

Years ago, I had occasion with my friend Dennis Prager in LA. We were interviewing people on their values. We conducted what was called, "A Forum on Contemporary Values," and it struck us one year: we had interviewed the Vatican's representative. The Vatican is really run like a government. So, this was the person responsible for relations with the Jewish community. I remember the representative said to us that in his entire life he had never had any doubts about G-d. – I am just curious. How many people here have had doubts about G-d? Okay. – Then, one year we interviewed a rather controversial figure, a man named Jerry Falwell, who was an Evangelical. After spending a day and a half with Reverend Falwell, I never want this man to get any political power in the United States but, as I told the Jewish community, he is not an antisemite. Jews have an unfortunate tendency when they dislike somebody's politics to often accuse them of being antisemites. You can have politics that I really dislike and not be an antisemite. Anyway, Falwell told us that since he had a conversionary experience as a young man he had also never had any doubts. I remember Dennis and I, who both grew up in Orthodox households, said we never had met any Jews who said they never had any doubts. One of the reasons was, and this was a good thing, that if you really doubt Christ's divinity, it seems to me, it is hard at that moment to call yourself a Christian because the religion is known by the name Christ. Judaism, as I mentioned, stands on three pillars of G-d, Torah, and peoplehood. You can still be a committed Jew as long as you are affirming one of those. In our case, we continue to affirm Jewish law (Torah) also, and the sense of peoplehood. Because you had people like leaders of Israel, David Ben-Gurion who was by no means a regular practicing, religiously observant Jew. Or, for that matter, Golda Meir. They were not, but they had other ways of identifying. But, if all of a sudden

people really lost all faith in G-d, there would be no ultimate rationale for the continuity of Judaism. Then it would just be an emotional thing.

The only reason 90 percent of the people root for a specific sports team is because they grew up in a city where that team was the team. There is no great moral reason why. This would be like something else, but behind it all with the loss of G-d.... I believe there is – you like vanilla, I like chocolate; you like killing people you dislike, I like saving them. It sounds ridiculous for people to say that. But when you really think about it, what is the rationale in the absence of G-d? Now, just believing in G-d will not make a person good, at least it establishes that there is a standard of goodness. We can argue about what G-d wants in a given situation, but we assume that there is a standard, external to ourselves, that does insist that certain types of behavior are better and worse. And if we have that argument, then maybe one of us can convince the other. But if all ethics is rooted in a person's subjective decisions, there is no objective ethic. So, that is the role faith plays, I think.

Q Another one for Rabbi Telushkin. Somebody who has read one of your books and questions you about it says, “In your book, *A Code of Jewish Ethics, Volume One*, you suggest if you cannot inquire about someone's behavior directly you should imagine the most reasonable explanation for their behavior. Although Luther's antisemitic remarks seem totally unreasonable, if you could imagine a reasonable explanation what would it be?”

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

Interesting. There is a law in the Torah. If you want to get a sense of Jewish Torah ethics or biblical ethics, there are two good places to look. One, obviously, is in Exodus 20 where the Ten Commandments are listed and the other is in Leviticus 19 which lists dozens of laws. Many of them are ethical laws. The chapter begins, “You shall be holy.” That is the chapter in which “love your neighbor as yourself” appears. Another one of the laws that appears there is, “You shall judge your neighbor fairly.” I would argue that of the 613 commandments in the Torah, this command might be the one that is the least observed because people do not tend to judge other people fairly. We often ascribe bad motives to other people. When we gossip about people, we often assume the worst about them. It is in the political arena, in many other arenas, and it is in personal behavior.

If I had to come up with a rationale in defense of what Luther was saying, I will offer one. Luther probably thought that the only way to lead an ultimately righteous life in G-d's eyes was through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and having faith in Jesus and understanding that all human beings are sinners and a belief that anybody who tried to teach people otherwise was ultimately leading them to damnation and to hell. So, if I can save you from eternal damnation and eternal punishment by G-d, I'm doing a good thing. If what the Jews were teaching was going to lead to your damnation or lead to your utter frustration, if they were teaching you that the way to righteousness in G-d's eyes was through doing the laws that are commanded but, in actuality, but trying to keep those laws will lead to you only going to end up failing them, then I'm saving people from pursuing a life that would be utterly self-destructive. I would assume that that is how he would rationalize it. If anybody else has a different perspective, I would be quite interested in hearing it.



### Dr. Allen Jorgenson

I think you pretty much have Luther right on that front. That emphasis that that Judaism is problematic because it can mislead people as to what exactly was the driver. Luther was not a religious pluralist. He was living in a time when there is one right way and it is the Christian way.

Can we judge Luther using our perspectives? Yes and no. No, he is a historically situated character. We have to understand his historical situation. But, yes, we do have to judge him because he does not stay in his historical situation. He keeps showing up for good and for ill. And, so, when he shows up for ill and says this sort of thing we do we have an ethical obligation to say no to this.

### Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

Again, and to be fair, Luther would probably have a similar rationale for his opposition to Catholicism, to the Pope – that these are ways that are going to mislead people and I am trying to save people from being misled.

**Q** The next question is for any and all of the four panelists at the front of the room and it is a very big question. Is there any way, apart from genuine one-to-one connection, to address the polarized and divisive rhetoric that results from internalized invisibility, internalized victimization, internalized racism, superiority, or shame – all the interaction of these? Elder Jean talked about the indigenous people being invisible. Sometimes we take on a cultural identity where we are not only not seen by others but we feel invisible. The same sort of thing with victimization. We are the victims as a culture. And the same sort of thing with racism – whether we own it or not – where we were raised in the system and we can think, ‘Gee, I’m white. What does that mean?’ And then I start recognizing the systemic injustices and then I feel shame. So that all becomes internalized, and not necessarily conscious. So, how do we actually engage conversation apart from on a one-to-one meeting with each other where we are?

### Dr. Daniel Maoz

When I teach, “Jewish Ethics and Bob Dylan's Lyrics and Writings” and get a lot of people taking it because their parents told them, ‘You have got to take a course on Bob Dylan.’ They are almost if not exclusively a class of 50 students who are Jewish. It is an anomaly in the sense that we do not usually fill our classroom with only or almost only Jewish students, to start with, at a Lutheran undergraduate program. But, secondly, one of the things that we do is we read Bob Dylan's *Chronicles: Volume 1* to get an idea of how he chronicles his life rather than writes an autobiography. We talk about the differences between chronicling and biographical writing. Then we use *Jewish Ethics Volume One “You Shall be Holy”* by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin and, year after year, I hear myself saying at the beginning and then at the end of the term “Good people sign up for a course on Jewish ethics. Whether they're Jewish or not, good people sign up for a course on personal ethics, Jewish ethics.” And then, secondly, as we walk through the various challenges and the various opportunities to look in the mirror and say, “I commit myself to self-betterment,” and, “Here are my personal wrinkles and warts and challenges,” and keep going back to that mirror and keep applying the insights from this 850 some page Volume One text. By the end of the term, we have good people who have become better people. So, as a professor, I am spoiled.

Is there any way apart from one-to-one connection to address polarized and divisive rhetoric? I think there is. I think it is the one to zero. I think it is, when we as individuals realize that one of the reasons why we identify or recognize issues in others is because they are in us first. And so, rather than going to the one person that we see has a problem, we go to the person that has elicited the awareness of that – and that is the person in the mirror. I think if we start with and end with a commitment to self-betterment, and get that word out, it is a way of *Tikkun*, a way of repairing everything else. As a famous Greek author, Heraclitus, said, “*Ho potamos hrei*,” (the river flows) and the Gemara or the commentary on that is, “No person enters into the same river twice.” It is just never the same. I would modify that to, “The same person never enters into that river twice,” because we are in constant change ourselves and, if we live in the here and now as Baba Ram Das would say, and acknowledge that we, too, are ever changing, then we are not locking ourselves into the person that transgressed, the person that was bigoted, the person that was biased, the person that made the mistakes. We may repeat. You know, *Mishnah* (repetition) is a big thing in Judaism as well. We may repeat these mistakes. But if we are aware that we can change – and that famous and glorious and hopeful promise of psychology, “Men and women change” – if we are constantly looking in the mirror and wondering who we are seeing today, because of what we learned and how we experienced, and maybe even felt the pain of someone else and start admitting the sensitivities, I think that gives us the hope to be a different person for someone else. Therefore, we are addressing the person in the mirror rather than anyone else or any other situation. For me, that is what I am watching every term that I teach “Jewish Ethics and Bob Dylan's Lyrics and Writings.” I am watching good people become better people. By the end of the term, we have a 10-minute consultation. I meet with each student separately and ask them, “Who were you at the beginning of this class and how have you become a better person?” That is all we do. It is astounding to me how aware they have become and, in hindsight, how vulnerable they allow themselves to admit who they were before. But often we – like Bob Dylan said, “I don't talk about my problems until they're over” – so we give a forum for the students, recognizing the problems they had at the beginning of the term that they have now managed to address by looking daily in the mirror.

Dr. Allen Jorgenson

So, beyond the one-to-one – I like the one to zero – I think also there is a role for social on a public ethics to be looking at what are systemic issues and how can we as a public address these things. It is a little bit messier but I think it is absolutely critical as part of the solution.

**Q** Next question is to Rabbi Telushkin. What, if anything, is new about antisemitism today than 20 years ago?

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

I will tell you an aspect of it that is a little frightening. In the twentieth century, there arose at different periods groups that were exceedingly antisemitic. The obvious instance that always comes to mind is Nazism in Germany. That was the most extreme.

As I had occasion to mention in passing before, communism really wanted to wipe out Judaism. Stalin boasted that the Soviet constitution was the only constitution in the world that had a prohibition on antisemitism, which was ridiculous because it had a campaign that

closed up almost all the synagogues in Russia. There was a very great movement against Soviet antisemitism, largely initiated by North American Jewry, that got a lot of Jews out of Russia.

Subsequent to the creation of Israel (whatever one's political views are on Israel), it triggered an enormous amount of antisemitism culminating in Jews fleeing the entire Arab world. Today, all three of those forces are basically working together: the far right, the far left, and the Islamist world who are all simultaneously very anti-Jewish. I am not talking about the whole Muslim world but only about the Islamist world. It is very, very frightening to the point where when you hear something bad happens in the United States you have absolutely no way of guessing. As a general rule, a lot of Jews tend to be politically liberal. Shlomo Carlebach, who was a Jewish folk singer, used to say, "If you ask a young student, 'What are you?' and he says, 'I'm a Catholic,' you know he is a Catholic. If you ask a young student, 'What are you?' and he says, 'I'm a Protestant,' you know he is a Protestant. But if you ask a young student, 'What are you?' and he answers, 'I am a human being,' you know he is a Jew, because Jews tended to want to have a universal ethic.

A lot of Jews who are liberals do not want to see antisemitism coming out of the left. They do not want to recognize it as such. There was a period in the 1930s when a lot of Jews were pro-Communists. Relatively speaking, a relatively small percentage of Jews were pro-Communists, but a large percentage of people in the United States who identified as communists were Jews. They do not want to recognize it, but it is coming out of all three groups. It is hard to have a large percentage. Jews today are assumed to number about 14 million people in a world of over 7 billion people and we are a declining number. Jews have not caught up to their numbers prior to the Holocaust.

In 1938, the Jewish population in the world was assumed to be about 18 million and the world's entire population was only about two billion. Jews were almost one percent of the world's population. Today, it is assumed to be 14, maybe 15 million in a world of over 7 billion, so we are declining in numbers. One of the nice things about being a relatively small people, somebody said it to me recently, "We Jews might be the world's smallest religion, but we're the largest family." There really is a familial feeling, which is why there was that big a movement on behalf of Soviet Jewry. I remember I was once doing an interview with William Buckley, a well-known conservative columnist in the United States. Buckley said, "I only hope when a few Jews succeed in getting the Jews out of Russia, you leave some Jews behind so at least the Jews in the United States will go on protesting the mistreatment of Jews in the Soviet Union and of religious people." He said this because he was very angry at Jimmy Carter, the President of the United States. Carter is a deeply religious Christian, but there is no evidence that when he was President he raised the issue. There were dozens of people in Soviet prison camps for the underground crime of printing the New Testament. There was not that same sense of peoplehood animating President Carter. This becomes a commodity. This is why Jews are worried. One of the lessons of Jewish history is that when somebody threatens, you take them seriously.

**Q** Thank you. There are too many questions for our time, but there is one question that was asked over and over again by several people so I will attempt to summarize it. Basically, it asks of each panelist, "What can Martin Luther University College do, going forward, to build on this work today? Some people have asked, "What can

the interfaith community do? The community of ecumenical people? What can ordinary people do? What can this institution do?"

### Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

There is a word – how many of you are familiar with the word *Chutzpah*? It is one of those Jewish words that became somewhat well known. I feel it is some *Chutzpah*, some arrogance for me to come to Martin Luther University College and tell you how you should teach things going forward. I do not know how much you can play. Let me ask you this question, because this is important. “How many of you in your heart of hearts believe that unless a person has faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of G-d who died to atone for their sins – how many of you believe that if somebody does not have that faith, they will be damned, they will go to hell? Okay, if that, in fact, is accurate, and I realize people might not raise their hands because they might feel somewhat impolite while I am sitting here to say that to me. But I recognize that, if in fact you don't believe that, am I safe in saying that, in that regard, you have a belief that Martin Luther did not have? And, if you do, how comfortable are you in teaching that doctrine?”

I remember once speaking before an audience, a largely Christian audience – I forget the name of the organization –it was not a Christian group, *per se*. The night before, I was taken out to a very beautiful restaurant. I was sitting there with one of my daughters. Suddenly, one of the women at the table said to me, “But what if you are wrong?” I could see her husband was already getting uncomfortable, and I was wondering what she was going to say. “What if you are wrong? What if your beliefs about Jesus are wrong and you and your whole family are going to end up in hell?” I knew she had children because she had mentioned her children earlier, otherwise I would not, so I said to her, “How many children do you have?” She said, “Three.” I said, “How important is it to you that they all turn out the exact same way?”

If we pin our religion on ethics, there are a lot of ways G-d could be happy with people. For example, those of you who have children here, do you get more pleasure when your children say “Thank you” and act lovingly towards you or do you get even more pleasure when you see your children acting lovingly towards each other? I find that when I see my children acting lovingly towards each other I get even more pleasure. Which is, indeed, one of the reasons why I believe ethics is more important to G-d even than ritual observance, and, believe me, I am a big believer in ritual observance. I have occasion I know to make some remarks at the end I want to say something about ritual behavior. I think there are a lot of different ways that one could act if one is acting in light of what might be about the most important verse in the Bible, that human beings were created in G-d's image. If we can maintain that belief....

When one of my daughters was seven years old, she was walking home with my wife and my wife put a quarter into a beggar's hands. In those days, this was 25 years ago. Today, you would not normally give a beggar a quarter. You would give a bigger sum. My daughter, Naomi, said to her, “Mommy, you didn't do the *mitzvah*, you didn't do the commandment properly.” Devorah said, “What did I do wrong?” She said, “You have to look into the person's eyes when you give them the money. Instead, when I looked into the person's eyes I saw the image of G-d. I saw them. They were not just a beggar. I saw them as a human being.” So, we as religious people are united around the belief that fewer and fewer people have in the world. In the United States atheism is the fastest growing religion. We're sitting around here

and we believe that human beings were created in G-d's image, and that's going to entail a certain sort of behavior.

I think that would be a wonderful unifying thing. It does not answer every question, but it establishes a certain set of principles. This could be one of the sets of principles that signifies Martin Luther University College.

#### Dr. Allen Jorgenson

A couple of things come to mind. 'How do we keep this conversation going forward?' There is an institutional answer: the commitment to do an ongoing legacy conversation is a start of that. Beyond the institutional answer there is an atmosphere answer. The question is, 'How can the school cultivate an atmosphere where conversations such as these are not only allowed but actually encouraged?' I think we are looking at some curriculum reviews around the Master of Divinity (MDiv), and other programs as well. I think there is an ethical obligation to the school to be asking the question, 'How can we the school be a place where people's voices can be heard – diverse voices – where people's integrity can be respect? These are ongoing tasks that we have to do – not just to answer the institutional question but also the atmosphere question, so that people feel that this is a place where these conversations can take place. Without those two together, I think we are stymied. I think we have to be working on them simultaneously.

#### Elder Jean Becker

Just to build on what Alan has already said, I think that what Martin Luther University College could do is with regard to the MDiv. One of the questions that he looked at recently in his sabbatical was indigenous knowledge inclusion in that program. I think that indigenous knowledge inclusion throughout the program is really important. I also think that including indigenous people on staff and in the faculty is critical.

There is a popular saying among indigenous scholars today: "Nothing about us without us." I think that, until institutions are actually hiring and having indigenous people who can speak from an indigenous perspective, that cannot really happen because it will always be somebody else talking about us as is traditionally the case in the academy. Those are my thoughts about the future for Martin Luther University College.

#### Dr. Daniel Maoz

Before Mark Harris became the Principal Dean, the former Principal Dean asked me in a cafeteria setting, privately, 'If we change the name of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary to Martin Luther University College, what are your thoughts as a Jew?' I remember, not tongue-in-cheek (although it certainly, even to my own ears, sounded cheeky), I said, "Simple. Hire a Jew." I was not working full-time here at the time and I realized that it might have sounded like self-promotion, so I added, "It does not have to be me, but if you are going to convince people that this is not about the antisemite Martin Luther, then you had better have the Jewish community engaged at first level. During that same time period, I was walking down the hallway and the current Principal Dean, who was not then the Principal Dean, asked me to come into his man-cave, his office. He said, "Can I ask a question?" Again, context: I am not full-time. I am just teaching Greek, Hebrew, and Latin – a bunch of independent studies. "Why is it that we have 27 religious communities represented in our student body, but we do not have any Jews?" I remember saying, "Martin Luther. Jews. You got me on that one." Again, we had that conversation. There would be some easy on-ramp or at least visible on-ramp and

potential on-ramp for Jewish students to come if you had Jewish people hired here as full-time. Again, I did not expect a position offered (and did not get one, so you know nobody cheated).

I want to rewind to when Laura and I first moved here from Winnipeg in the summer of 2000. One of the first things I wanted to do, and did, was buy a house within walking distance of an Orthodox Synagogue and become a member and served on the board. I also learned of the Waterloo Region Holocaust Education Committee, which Barbara Pressman headed up. So I joined the executive and began to become aware of the antisemitic incidents that were way too frequent and certainly not at all common knowledge that were happening in this region regularly, and we were commissioned to dealing with. Manya Kay, a Holocaust survivor, was a member of that committee along with a number of wonderful people. Our first pamphlet responded to this question. It was acceptance. I do not think I have the exact title but it was something like, "Acceptance, Not Tolerance." Rather than tolerating differences; rather than simply going to a certain point after which we break; getting ourselves into a position of accepting varying positions and perspectives and voices authentically presented; rather than simply saying, 'We will tolerate this and we will live with it and we will abide by it as best as we are humanly able.' I find that Martin Luther University College has been part of a healing process for what I know about antisemitic voices and acts that happen, and I also know that the Waterloo Regional Police Services are very aware of that, and very active in addressing it. So, the idea given to me by the Waterloo Region Holocaust Education Committee has become a guiding light: acceptance, not tolerance.

*Editor's note: Closing remarks by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin.*

I want to speak a little about Jewish law and Jewish ritual law. The reason I want to do it is because I am assuming that the audience that I am addressing here is disproportionately comprised of people who are Lutherans. If you are schooled in Luther you might have a somewhat negative view of law because Luther did think that the law was a bit of a curse. I want to show what are some of the blessings of the law so I will just give examples of things that come to mind. You had occasion in speaking about the Shabbat and the inauguration of the Shabbat. One of the rituals that even Jews sometimes have drifted a bit away from the tradition, and I have always been very moved by, according to the Talmud, the Sabbath is inaugurated by the lighting of two candles. It is a commandment very much associated with women, and many, many people do it. There is a *minhag*, a custom, among many Jews to light an additional candle for each child in the family. So, in other words, the Sabbath is always inaugurated with a minimum of two candles; and they light one more candle for each child. For example, in my household, I had an older sister and me. So my parents would light four Shabbat candles.

I was speaking once with a very distinguished man, Abraham Twerski. Twerski comes from a major Hassidic dynasty. He is an ordained Rabbi but he then studied Psychiatry, and his area of expertise became addiction. He is an older fellow now, so when he studied that it was in the early 60s when addiction was particularly associated with alcoholism. By the late 60s, it started to include drug addiction, and today the word addiction is often used to refer to a whole host of self-destructive behaviors. I remember Twerski once told me he was speaking with a recovering alcoholic and, obviously, the biggest problem for recovering

alcoholics is to not take that first drink. The man said he realized when was he most apt to take a drink – because, as you know, at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings people get up and say, “Hi, my name is John. I am an alcoholic, and I have now gone 118 days without a drink.” You know, they will make statements like that, and they make it publicly. The man said, “I realized when am I most likely to take a drink – when I am in tension; when I am in a fight with somebody.” You know, the sort of thing where you get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and then you cannot fall back asleep because you are thinking about this. So, he said, “I realized I had to stop holding on to grudges.” And he made a brilliant comment which I always say when I teach it anywhere. This is such a helpful comment whether or not you have a drinking problem. He said, “Holding on to a grudge is like allowing the person in the world whom you most dislike to live in your mind rent free.” That is great!

So Twerski – he was the youngest of five children in his family – said, “Knowing that because I existed, every Friday night in my parents’ household another candle was lit. Extra light that was brought into my parents’ household made me feel very good about myself.” What Twerski was talking about was the ability of law to also speak the language of poetry. Many parents grow up, hopefully, telling their children that they love them. At the age of 20, many of those children end up in a therapist's office saying, “My parents never loved me.” He said, “This is a poetic way to express it.”

I will give you another Jewish tradition. At the beginning of the Sabbath is the tradition of parents – usually it was fathers but today in a more egalitarian world it can be mothers as well – the tradition was that fathers would bless their children. The blessing to daughters was, “May G-d make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah,” who are the four matriarchs of the Jewish tradition. In the case of boys, if that was the blessing to girls, what do you assume the boys would be told? You think, probably, ‘G-d, make you like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,’ the three patriarchs. But it was not was like. It was, “May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasha.” And, the reason is because if you look at the end of Genesis, Jacob really blesses his two grandsons, Ephraim and Menasha.” That is where the blessing comes from. A friend of mine, a Rabbi in Israel, Shlomo Riskin, once said, “The other reason is, those are the only two brothers who get along in Genesis.” May G-d make you like Cain and Abel? May G-d make you like Jacob and Esau? But, I was reading a book by a woman named Rachel Naomi Remen. It is a book called, *My Grandfather's Blessings*, and I read something in that book – how often do you read something in a book that actually permanently affects your behavior? – and she said that she grew up in a household where her parents were both quite secular Jews and very professionally ambitious. She said it was the sort of household where, when she came home with a 98 on a test, her father would say, “What happened to the other two points?” She said, “I spent a good part of my life pursuing those two points.” She said, “The one place where I did not feel that was at my grandfather's house. Because every Friday afternoon when school ended, she would go to her grandfather's house – her grandfather was a somewhat pious Jew – and he would sit with her and, as it started to get towards evening, he would light the Sabbath candles. And he would give her that blessing. But her grandfather had an addition. See, this is the great thing about laws. You can add things onto them. So, then, in addition to giving her the blessing, “May G-d make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah,” he would always mention something she had done that week that was good, that he was impressed with, when she was a little kid, so that she was able to sleep for a few hours without having to have electricity on in her room. If she did not do well on a test, he would say that she had tried. If she did well on a test, he would acknowledge it. It was a

very interesting thing. Many parents watch their children and point out whenever their children do something wrong. He was always watching her because he wanted to have something to say about her at the end of the week. He was looking out to catch her doing something good. The great tragedy of her young years was when she was only seven years old, her grandfather died. She said she remembered how afraid she was when he died. She remembered thinking, 'Who's going to present me now before G-d?' Then she says a remarkable thing, "I came to realize that through his blessings I had come to see myself through his eyes and that a person once blessed remains blessed forever." I have learned that. I did not grow up in a rabbinic model of going around dispensing blessings, but people now often come to me for blessings. And I have gone to people for a blessing.

I have a very part-time congregation in LA. There was a woman in my congregation who was 107. She really was. She showed me her birth certificate from 1893 and she died in 2000. I realized she had lived in three centuries. I remember when she met my children. I said, "Please bless my children." She lived a remarkable life and, until only a few months before she died, she had our full wits about her. She said, "I had learned to see myself through my grandfather's eyes and, 'A person once blessed remains blessed forever.'" Some years later, to Remen's great surprise, her mother started to become a more observant Jew. Her mother, in her 80s, suddenly started lighting Shabbat candles. One Friday night, she was sitting around with her mother and for the first time ever she told her mother the story of the blessings that the grandfather used to give her. When she finished, her mother said to her, sadly, "Naomi, I want you to know I have blessed you every day of your life. But, unlike your grandfather, I did not have the wisdom to say the blessings out loud." Ever since I read that story, I have always done that with my children. It attaches you to them in a great way of loving.

A number of years ago, I wrote a book called *The Book of Jewish Values*. What motivated me to write it was this. The problem in so far as I could say it from my perspective, and then I am going to point out the problem in Jewish life is, I said that I think Luther put too much emphasis on faith. Faith, ultimately, if it manifests itself in deeds, then it is faith. That is why it sounds so horrifying to say you can be saved even if you committed a murder or things like that. In Judaism, the emphasis on religiosity is those often become ritual behavior so that if two Jews are speaking about a third, which is not an uncommon occurrence in the Jewish community, and the question is raised, "Is so and so religious?" the answer often will be given based exclusively on ritual observance. He scrupulously observes the Sabbath. She scrupulously keeps kosher. She is religious. She does not keep kosher? Then she is not religious. From which one could form the impression that in Judaism, ethics are a nice thing but ethics are like an extracurricular activity. But ethics are really quite central.

There is a famous story told in the Talmud about two extremely famous Rabbis. [I am curious because I often do not have a way of checking if these people are known outside of the Jewish world. How many of you have ever heard of a Rabbi named Hillel? Okay, a fair number. How many of you have ever heard of a Rabbi named Akiva? Okay. There are others who are also well known.] Anyway, Hillel was an extremely well known Rabbi. There's a story told in the Talmud where he summarizes the essence of Judaism while his questioner is standing on one foot. [If any of you have heard this story, what did you hear? Tell me what you know about the story. I give you my word, if you get it wrong or make errors I am not going to say anything that will, G-d forbid, in any way embarrass you. But I want to hear.] The way the story is normally told is, 'A non-Jew comes to Rabbi Hillel and says to him,



“Teach me the essence of Judaism while I am standing on one foot.” It was during a period of time when Stoicism was a philosophy and one of the aspects of Stoicism was, “Can you define something simply?” Which is true. I know that.

It was mentioned in my bio this morning that I used to do some writing for television. I wrote for a show – I bet some of you might have actually watched. There was a show called “Touched by an Angel.” Can you remember that show? I had a member in my congregation there who was a well-known American actor, Kirk Douglas. Mr. Douglas told me on one occasion, “Before I die, I want to be in a movie in which I put on *tefillin*.” What are *tefillin*? *Tefillin* are phylacteries. We say to people, “Now you know what they are.” I had occasion to put them on this morning. You wrap it around your arm and you put it on your head while you are wearing a *tallit*. That is traditional Jewish prayer. We know it goes back a long time because they have been found in Masada, where people had revolted against the Romans.] I was speaking about Hillel. What happened was a non-Jew came before Hillel and asked him to summarize the essence of Judaism while standing on one foot.

But, first, the non-Jew came before Hillel's contemporary, a Rabbi named Shammai. Shammai was so annoyed by the question that he chased the man away with a stick. Why was Shammai so annoyed? How many people here – I am speaking to academics – how many of you have PhDs? So, by definition – I dropped out after I passed my orals at Columbia and started doing popular writing. I never wrote my dissertation. But any of you who has a PhD probably worked on it for at least three years. I understand Shammai's annoyance. This guy says to him, “Tell me in one sentence what you did.” So he was annoyed. Then the non-Jew comes before Hillel and Hillel says to him, “What is hateful unto you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now, go and study.” So now, go and study, basically, how to be a good person. It is not enough to want to do the right thing. “The hardest thing,” as one American President once put it, “is not doing the right thing, it is knowing the right thing to do.” Because, it is like idealism. Is idealism a good thing? Yes! No! It depends what you are idealistic about. There was no shortage of idealists, for that matter, in Germany.

Hillel said, “What is hateful unto you....” It is interesting. Jesus in the New Testament is quoted emphasizing two laws, “Love your neighbor as yourself” and “Love the L-rd your G-d.” Rabbi Akiva, who would have lived about 100 years later, said, “Love your neighbor as yourself, this is a or the major principle of the Torah. Why did Hillel, who lived before both of them, why did not he just quote a biblical verse? Why did he just say, “What is hateful unto you, do not do unto your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now, go and study.” I think Hillel realized something interesting. What is a cliché? A cliché is an overused phrase. If you start reading a novel and you come across one cliché after another, you are going to, soon, throw the book down. You will not want to read it. It is boring. But the reason clichés entered the language is because originally they were fresh. “Love your neighbor as your as yourself” is something we have all known, probably, since we are assuming we grew up in a somewhat religious household. We probably have known that verse since we were little kids. [“How many of you within the last month, when you had to make a decision on an ethical issue, thought of the verse, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ to give you guidance? What ends up happening is, it became a cliché.] I think Hillel wanted to shake the guy up, so he said, “What is hateful until you, do not do to your neighbor.” If I say to everybody here, “It is now 4:12.” If I said, “Just go tomorrow at 4 12, and just be guided by that principle,” it will affect us. It will affect the way we speak to others. I think that is what

Hillel wanted to do. How do we find things in a religion that religion does not become rote? So it can make us think?

Another thing I was thinking of is also directed toward parents. Some of us here are older. I am not such a youngster myself. So it is applicable if you have children, it is applicable if you have grandchildren, it is applicable if you have friends who have children, or you have friends who have grandchildren. What I would love to see happen is if parents would reserve the highest praise of their children for when their children do kind deeds. I know in the United States, and I am assuming Canada is probably somewhat similar – in many ways we are pretty similar countries – but what does that mean? As a general rule, I find in the United States' children get their highest compliments for one of four things. First, for their academic achievements (for example, “my son, Sean, is so brilliant the teacher says he is the best student she has had in years”); for their athletic accomplishments; for their cultural achievements (for example, “oh, the way she plays piano;” “the way she dances;” “the way he acts;” and, in the case of girls – it is with boys, also, but in case of girls – often for their looks. A child who gets their greatest compliments for that is happy. Believe me, We all need all the compliments we can get. But when you hear our parents say, “Oh, but so and so s really a good kid,” it means that they feel like they have nothing that they can brag about. Parents should reserve their highest praise when children do kind acts. Because, do you know what ends up happening? Children will then associate being loving to others with being loved by their parents. If they knew that this is what their parents really take pride in.... A lot of parents think – and I know from testing this out in speeches – that their children know that what matters most to the parents is that their children be ethical good people. But the kids know at home that that is not true. They know at home that their parents speak with most enthusiasm about grades, that they came home with stories about the touchdown that they scored in a football game, or whatever it was.

Parents are pretty transparent on what they think really matters. How can we be transparent in making it known that it is goodness that matters most? I remember somebody challenged me, “What if a kid really is smart and really is culturally good? Are those not values in and of themselves?” I say, “No, they are not.” They are only values in and of themselves if goodness is at the top of the list. Germany did not lack intelligent people during World War II. And it certainly did not lack cultured people. It lacked enough good people. And that is true of all societies in which a lot of evil goes on. It is a different way that I am saying. What I am trying to offer are religious ideas that do not necessarily need to be tied to any one specific tradition, even to one specific religious tradition.

Take gratitude. Gratitude is the prerequisite trait for being a happy person. What is the mindset of a grateful person? “Hey, look how so and so spoke up for me. She must really like me.” “Hey, look what he did for me. He really cares about me.” What a grateful person cultivates is the sense of being loved, that they feel loved by other people. What is the mindset of an ungrateful person? “Yeah, I know, the only reason he spoke to so and so on my behalf is now he is going to expect me to do that for him.” “Yeah, the only reason she helped me is now I am going to be expected to help her.” Ungrateful people reveal about themselves not only that they have an emotionally stingy disposition but they feel profoundly unloved. They live in a loveless world where everything is a trade, and where people only do things for very pragmatic reasons. And it is hurtful.

Related to that, there is an economist in the United States, sort of an economist and a bit of a popular philosopher, a man named Adam Grant. He wrote a book called *Give and Take*.

Grant has for years been the most popular professor at a school that is part of the University of Pennsylvania, the Wharton School of Business. You might be impressed with this story. I was. You might not be impressed with the story, but I will tell you what it was. In his book, he did an analysis. There is no field in which so many studies are done as in business because people are so anxious to learn ways to make more money and other things. So there are an enormous number of business studies – dividing people into one of three groups: givers, takers, and matchers. Givers are people who have a more giving disposition. Takers are people who take and do not really give back. Matchers are people who do for you exactly, basically, what you will do for them. Studies show that, in the world of business, givers earned the least amount of money of the three groups, which is disturbing. Grant spent a lot of time studying and teasing out these studies and he found out something interesting. Givers, as a rule, earned the least amount of money. But a subcategory of givers earned the most amount. You want to check it out. He then explained who they were. What distinguished them from the others? It was givers who gave to other givers and who gave to matchers, but who stopped giving to takers. It made a lot of sense to me. Reward good people. Reward people who, as a result, will then go out and do more good for other people. There is a whole application and practical sensitivity.

Take the notions of forgiveness. There are three attitudes towards forgiveness in Jewish sources. When I was working on my *Code of Jewish Ethics*, I did it the way I learned as a kid, with note cards. I had about 150 cards on forgiveness, and I wanted to see what things popped out. Forgiveness is normally mandatory. If somebody has hurt you and asks for forgiveness, and the damage that they inflicted on you was not irrevocable, you are obligated to forgive. What if you were so hurt, even if the damage was not irrevocable, but what if you were so hurt that you could not forgive? Maimonides codifies the ruling in his *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Jewish Law). You have to forgive by the third request. And the person cannot make all three requests simultaneously, “Do you forgive me? No. Do you forgive me? No. Do you forgive me? No.” ... and then you walk away. You have to have a few days to think about it. The idea is that during those three days you should struggle with yourself. You are obligated to forgive. When is forgiving optional? There are two instances when forgiving is optional. One is if the damage that was inflicted on you was irrevocable. You are not obligated to forgive somebody who, all drunk, drove a car and crippled you for life. No matter how sincerely penitent the person is, you are not obligated to forgive. You certainly can choose to do so. And, you are not obligated to forgive people who do not request forgiveness.

There are two reasons why it often is good to forgive. It can be very self-destructive not to forgive. One of them is the one I just alluded to, what Twerski was speaking about. Carrying around a grudge is like allowing a person in the world whom you most dislike to live in your mind rent free. You are thinking about it all the time. Another friend of mine, a Rabbi named Harold Kushner, wrote a book that got a lot of fame many years ago called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It is funny, when I first heard the title of the book, I misheard it and it also struck me as a conundrum: When Good Things Happen to Bad People. That is also annoying. Harold told me he had a case in his congregation of a woman whose husband had left her in a very disgusting way. He left her for a younger woman. They still had two young children. Though he was an affluent man, he was extremely terrible about making payments. He did everything bad. So Kushner said this woman was totally enraged and he totally empathized with her rage. But, ten years later, when she was carrying around the same rage, he said to her, “You are walking around with a hot coal in your hand and you

want to throw it at your ex-husband, but all you are doing is burning a hole in your hand.” In other words, that level of anger and rage is miserable. I have friends who are raised by parents who were Holocaust survivors. Every Holocaust survivor, morally speaking, had the right to walk around angry a lot, and yet, children were raised like that. They had miserable childhoods. Even if the rage was justified, they created an atmosphere in the household that was just extremely unpleasant. So, even in optional cases, it is worth forgiving.

Jewish law has an odd thing though. There are times when forgiveness is forbidden. That is, you cannot forgive a crime against another person. It is not in your hands to forgive. An interesting example happened. If I had one of my books in front of me, the first one in my *Code*, I would have the exact details. I am forgetting the name man's name. He was a Methodist minister in the Boston area who found out that President Clinton was going to be at his Church that Sunday. The reason he found out was because the Secret Service had come to check out the Church. So, he had a very rare opportunity. You can imagine. There is no shortage of Pastors here. There is no shortage of Bishops here. If you suddenly found out that the President or the Prime Minister was going to be at your Church, you would work out a speech that probably was somewhat related to a message. You have one chance. (I was going to say you have one shot at them, but that doesn't sound too good.) You have one chance to address them. So, this Minister decided to give his talk on forgiveness.

In the middle of his speech, knowing that the President would have to be paying attention, he raised a big photograph of Timothy McVeigh. Timothy was an American terrorist who had blown up a building in Oklahoma City, killing about 160 people including 24 children. It was from him that I learned an expression, “collateral damage.” When McVeigh was asked if he felt bad about the 24 children, he said they were collateral damage. The Minister said, “I am showing you this picture. You must forgive this this man. As Christians we are commanded to forgive this man.” Why are we commanded to forgive somebody who murdered 160 people? How many people here actually know somebody who was murdered? I do. And I know how many people are destroyed. How many of you know people who have committed suicide? We all know how many lives are destroyed as a result. I consider all murderers to be mass murderers because what they inflict on the families of the people is just so horrendous.

Another example is of a man for whom I have extraordinary respect, Pope John Paul II. A lot of my respect for him emanates out of Jewish feelings. But, number one, he played a major role in bringing down Communism in Eastern Europe. As Pope, he also went to pray once in a Synagogue, and he visited Israel. He established Vatican relations with Israel. Another interesting story about John Paul II. I once told this story in a Synagogue and the grandchild of the person about whom I was speaking, unbeknownst to me, was in the Synagogue. In 1942, there was a Jewish couple living in Poland. They were in a city where Nazis were taking people away. Once people were taken away, they were never heard from again. And they were in a ghetto. They were able to get out of the ghetto, and went to a Polish family that they knew. They were not going to ask the family to hide them because it would just bring about the death of that family. And they were not going to join the partisans because, unfortunately, most of the partisans in Poland were antisemitic, even though they were anti-Nazi. But they were also antisemitic.

So they found a couple that they knew who had been very good to them, and they entrusted their this couple with their two-year-old child. They said, “Listen, if we come back from the war, please return him to us. If we do not come back” – and then they gave them

addresses of families. One family was in Canada, Montreal, I think, and the other was in Washington, DC – “please write to those families and see if they will adopt the child.” The couple undertook to take care of the child and, believe me, it upset their lives because people in the town knew that the woman had never before been pregnant. So they could guess what it was. So they had to, themselves, run from town to town and hide their identity. The war ended in 1945. By 1946, it became clear that the parents were not coming back. So they went to their local Parish Priest. They were very devout and they loved this little boy. They went to the local Parish Priest and they said to the Priest, “Please baptize the child and we will adopt him.” The Priest, though, said, “Tell me exactly what the parents said to you.” They were honest people, and they told him. So the Priest said to them, “Write to the two families. If neither one adopts, we will do the baptism and the adoption. They wrote and both families were open to adoption. The child actually originally went to Montreal and, a short time later, went to Washington because that family was an even closer family to him. They stayed in touch with this couple.

Needless to say, the family in Washington was not a well-to-do couple. They helped them out in many ways. Over the years, the husband died and they stayed in touch with the wife. Then, one day in 1978, they got a letter from the wife who, for the first time tells them the story about the Parish Priest and what had happened with him. She says, “Why am I writing to you about this now? Because, yesterday, that Parish Priest became Pope John Paul II.” So if I am going to say anything a little critical about the Pope, I always tell the other stuff first because I love that man. I actually had occasion to meet him, but, on 9-11 2002, he said, “We pray, today, for the victims of what happened last year.” and “We pray, today also, for the souls of those who carried out this attack.” I do not know why they deserved ... the only thing they regretted was they did not attack an hour later because they attacked before a lot of people had gotten to work. The first building was attacked at 8 45 in the morning. A lot more people would have been killed. Having said that, obviously, in the overwhelming majority of cases, forgiveness is what is commanded and demanded. I just wanted to point out when it is optional, and this one rare instance when I think it is forbidden.

I will just conclude with one last thought. There was a Hassidic Rabbi named Nachman of Bratzlov who lived a little over 200 years ago. He had a short life. He only lived about 38 years, and he died in 1810. One of his statements was, “If you are not going to be a better person tomorrow than you were today, what need do you have for tomorrow?” I once concluded a speech with that, and somebody said, “Joseph, that is a real downer way to end the speech. So let me rephrase Reb Nachman and wish all of you a good today and an even better tomorrow. Thank you very much.

I just want you to know this has been an extraordinary day for me. I am so honored and so moved. And, really, I am proud, and pride is not considered a great religious virtue, but I am proud that I had the opportunity to speak at what this could be the first of a series of annual events. And I want to go out and speak to a lot of people other than just Jews. And it is very moving for me to have had this opportunity and it is very moving for me to know about your introspection and how this whole thing came about. Daniel explained it to me at great length and I feel great love for you. Thank you very much.

*Editor’s note: Closing remarks by Principal-Dean Rev. Dr. Mark Harris.*

We are so very grateful to all of you who have joined us for today's conversation. Rabbi Telushkin, thank you so very much for challenging, for your wisdom, for your wit, for the gift of your presence. Thank you to the members of our panel for helping to enliven and expand upon our conversations and reflections today.

I would like to conclude today by reading a letter to you. We received a number of letters from dignitaries, from our regional chairperson who was here this morning, from several of our mayors.

We also, just within the last day, received a letter that comes from Chief Brian Larkin who is the Chief of Police for the Region of Waterloo, and I think his words are a good way of concluding our day. He writes:

As we read police and community reports about the rise in antisemitic attacks, as we hear stories from our family members and friends who have been directly afflicted, and as we try to understand something that simply cannot be understood, we are left with one question: Why? Why is this happening?

These recent attacks across the globe do not tell the whole story. We know that there are many incidents like this that happen every day. These attacks do not affect just one person or one group of people. They impact us all because they are attacks on our values, our rights, our freedoms. We are very blessed to live in a community where different beliefs and faiths are not only recognized but respected. But when someone is attacked for what they believe, for how they look, for their choice of religion, it is the responsibility of all of us to stand up, to denounce such action, and to commit to making significant change.

As we continue to question why these horrible senseless attacks occur, we know that we can offer no words to take away the hurt, anger, and sorrow felt by so many. But we are compelled to take action.

As your Chief of Police, I encourage all of us to work together. We must speak up against hate and talk to our children and friends and colleagues about the consequences of such horrific violence. We must reject all incidents of antisemitism, extremism, and hate and defend the rights of all people to practice their faith. Finally, we must recognize that it is our differences that unite us and make us stronger. Only by recognizing and celebrating that will we be able to make our community, our cities, and our nation one that is stronger and safer for us all.

Thank you, Rabbi Telushkin, thank you all for your presence with us today.

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