



## DR. MARCIE LENK: STAYING OPEN TO THE FAITH OF "THE OTHER"

**Joshua Holo:** Welcome to the College Commons Podcast, passionate perspectives from Judaism's leading thinkers. Brought to you by the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, America's first Jewish institution of higher learning. My name is Joshua Holo, Dean of HUC's Jack H. Skirball Campus in Los Angeles, and your host.

**JH:** You're listening to a special episode recorded at Symposium 2, a conference held in Los Angeles at Stephen Wise Temple in November of 2018. I'm very excited for this episode of the College Commons Podcast, to introduce Dr. Marcie Lenk, Dr. Lenk has devoted her intellectual life and career to organizing educational programs and teaching Jews and Christians, as well as people of other faiths, to understand and appreciate the basic texts, ideas, history, and the faith of the other. She lives in Jerusalem, and she teaches Jewish and Christian texts at Ecce Homo Convent and the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, as well as the Ratisbonne Monastery. Dr. Lenk, thank you for joining us on the College Commons Podcast.

**Marcie Lenk:** It's great to be here with you.

**JH:** I want to begin with a little bio from you, so you can tell us who you are.

**ML:** Well, I grew up in New Jersey, in an Orthodox Jewish community. I got a good Orthodox Jewish education; day school, high school, even university, I studied at Yeshiva University. And I moved to Israel when I was 22.

**JH:** Was this an ideological Zionist move, Aliyah, or was it going to study a new state?

**ML:** No, it was definitely ideological. I felt that I had prayed every day, three times a day, to return to the Land, and all it would take for me to return was to get on a plane. And that if I meant what I was praying, I had to at least give it a chance. And then I liked it and I stayed. I started out as a teacher of Jewish studies, teaching Tanakh and Talmud in Jewish seminaries. And had I stayed in that, I don't know how I would have done, because there are a lot of Jews teaching Jewish studies in Jerusalem.

**JH:** Yeah.

**ML:** But somewhere along the line, actually in the early '90s, a reform Rabbi, who's a very, very close friend of my family's, urged me to join him and his wife in their interfaith study group. And for a few years I pushed it off and I said, "Oh, not for me. Orthodox Jews teach Judaism to Jews, and it's not a thing that I should involve myself in." And then one day I got curious, and I

went, and they were right. There was so much there that I didn't even know existed, and it changed my world.

**JH:** Wow, so that still seems a long way from teaching patristic Catholic texts or late anti-Christian texts to Jews and Christians, I guess you teach.

**ML:** Right. So, in that group I met Christians, really for the first time in my life, because...

**JH:** Go to Jerusalem to meet Christians, that's a...

**ML:** I know it's so strange, right? But there were two issues, I think, for me. One was, I just grew up in such an insular Jewish world, where I didn't meet anybody who wasn't like me. I went to school with Orthodox Jews, I went to synagogue with Orthodox Jews, I was in youth groups and summer camp with Orthodox Jews, so there was... I didn't even meet other Jews, let alone Christians.

**JH:** Evidently, from the way you described your encounter with a reformed Rabbi, I get that.

**ML:** Right, right. But Israel was different. From the very beginning, my world expanded. The schools where I'd grown up were not only Orthodox in terms of Jewish practice, but we were also Zionist, so we were taught to respect the people who built the state of Israel. And a lot of them were not Orthodox the way that we were Orthodox. So I had to come to terms with what it meant to respect people who weren't like me, and it took a lot of inner work to figure out what it meant to me...

**JH:** Interesting.

**ML:** To respect people who weren't like me. So in a certain sense, I was already open.

**JH:** You were primed to engage with the other...

**ML:** Right. So that was one issue, was being open to other Jews in Israel. And then I think I also grew up being afraid of Christians.

**JH:** I get that.

**ML:** Being afraid that Christians... I'd learned my Jewish history, and I knew that historically, Christians either wanted to kill us or convert us, and essentially, my teachers kind of warned us that if we got too close, we would not be Jews anymore, we would lose something.

**JH:** There's also another narrative, I think it's a common enough experience in American Jews who grew up as I did, I didn't grow up Orthodox but I grew up in a conservative community and reform institutions. So I got some breadth. It's not only the more threatening components of Christianity being a physical or ideological threat, it's also a question of assertion of our dignity, not in the face of a threat, but in our need to assert that Christianity is constitutionally, it's designed in such a way as to be an appropriation of our "property", our heritage, that which we

claim in this universe. I have always marveled that we're so open to the word "Abrahamic" when we describe Abrahamic faith, because if anything, I would think that we would resist the term, as it to say, "Well actually, we're the only Abrahamic faith." And I know it's complicated, and I know that you can argue the history and all that, I'm just putting out an attitude that I think many Jews were raised with.

**ML:** Well, I do think that the term "Abrahamic faith" is used by people who want to do the Kumbaya thing.

**JH:** Yeah, right.

**ML:** And say, "Look at how much we share, and we're all in it together," and there certainly have been scholars who've said, like Jon Levenson at Harvard University, for example, who said, "You wanna say we share Abraham, I'm not sure that we actually share him, because we do very different things with him, we have very different stories about him." And it was actually for that reason that I think it would never have even occurred to me to want to meet Christians, if I had continued on the trajectory that I had been on here in the United States. But in Israel, I had this feeling that, "We're the strong ones. We are in the majority, the army is ours, we're strong." So the Christians, the few Christians that are there, they're not trying to kill us.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** And even if they are, they're not gonna succeed. And they're not gonna convert us. I said, "I'm such a Jew." There's no question about that, it's just not... That's not the issue. And all of a sudden, or not really all of a sudden, but I realized, I felt, that I didn't have to be afraid there, and I could open myself up to learn.

**JH:** Interesting, that's a powerful Zionist experience in a somewhat counterintuitive way. But I get it, I totally get it. So you were open to this possibility, and clearly it charted your course?

**ML:** Yeah, it really did. Basically there were people in the group, there was professional Jews and professional Christians. And a lot of the Christians in the group were directors of seminaries in Jerusalem. And as they got to know me, they saw that I was a teacher of Jewish texts, and I was invited to some of their seminaries to give lectures to Christian groups about Judaism. And that was fun.

**JH:** And those are usually Christians who are not Israeli, who are coming into Israel to these monasteries or these houses, 'cause there are these places peppering Jerusalem, Christian houses or retreat centers or monasteries or what have you. And they're basically foreigners who would come visit, spend time, and you were part of the curriculum that they would experience.

**ML:** Right. One of the interesting things about those institutions that, as you say, pepper Jerusalem, is many of them have big walls up around them, and so Jews don't see them. We learn that we don't have access to them, so maybe the first time you walk past it, you wonder what it is. But the 10th time, you just don't think about it...

**JH:** It's just a wall with a plaque.

**ML:** Because it's just a wall.

**JH:** Yeah, and they have these, you know, 6 x 4 inch plaques that are bronze, they have some innocuous title, the "Whatever, whatever Institute." Right. It's sort of like a synagogue in Europe. Some synagogues in Europe are very synagogal and monumental, but many of them are, you wouldn't know them if you passed, walked right in front of them.

**ML:** Right. So I think at the beginning part of the fun of it was that I got access.

**JH:** To the Secret Garden.

**ML:** Yeah. I got to see these amazing places that are in Jerusalem.

**JH:** Right, right. They often have beautiful courtyards, and... By the way, isn't it the case that the entire Armenian Quarter is walled, basically? If you walk through the Armenian Quarter, it's... Whatever greenery there is, whatever courtyards, they're all behind walls.

**ML:** Right, right. So just going behind them... I mean now, there's a time of the year, actually, when there's a project in Jerusalem of Open Doors, where a lot of institutions and beautiful homes open their doors to the public.

**JH:** Wow.

**ML:** For a few hours, for a few days on a particular week in the year.

**JH:** That's nice.

**ML:** And more and more people have access and just learn more about the other. But this was in the '90s, and part of the fun was to have access and to meet people who I otherwise wouldn't have met.

**JH:** So you did that, you became part of their curricula?

**ML:** Right. But as I did that, the more I taught Christians about Judaism, the more I realized how ignorant I was about Christianity. Because people in the groups would ask questions, and we were all speaking in English, but they would ask questions that I didn't understand. And I realized that I was saying things that they didn't understand. And at a certain point, it occurred to me that I was speaking in Jewish, expecting them to understand me without understanding Christian. And they were asking questions in Christian, and I didn't understand the language.

**JH:** I get it.

**ML:** It was very humbling, it was very humbling. And I knew that I was a good teacher, but I didn't feel that I was good enough because there was something that I couldn't do. There was a

place, a communication gap that was very, very deep. And I'd also kind of hit the professional glass ceiling. I had a Master's degree from Yeshiva University in Hebrew Bible, but I felt that I could continue to do what I was doing; I could teach, I was teaching at the Pardes Institute at that time. And I could keep teaching as I was teaching, but I wouldn't... There was no up to go. And I'd been thinking about doing a PhD for a while, and all of a sudden I realized that I wanted to go back to school and do a doctorate in early Christianity, that that's what I wanted to spend the next decade or more thinking about. And it's turned into the "Or more".

**JH:** You did early Christian texts, right? Patristic texts, is that right? So, patristic texts are the post-Biblical texts of the church fathers.

**ML:** Right. Roughly contemporary to the time of the rabbis.

**JH:** Right. So the Mishnah and the Gemara, the first half of the first millennium of the Common Era, roughly, in largely the Mediterranean Basin, North Africa, Italy, the Byzantine Empire, the Land of Israel.

**ML:** Right. And I felt that my Jewish education had given me the Jewish side of what was happening during that period, by studying, particularly by studying Talmud, but I didn't know anything about what the other, everyone else... Well, not everyone else, but at least the Christians were saying.

**JH:** You said, if I remember correctly, that one of the motivations for you to go to Israel was this recognition of the fact that you're a committed Jew, an Orthodox Jew who prays, as one does, for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and you feel that had some kind of consistency, if you take your prayers seriously and you can go, why wouldn't you go? And it raised an issue that I always find interesting, which is the very notion of the very desirability of consistency in prayer, or ideological consistency at all. And I'm always moved by it, perhaps a little intimidated by it, largely because I've never been motivated by it.

So I wanna ask you as a Jew, what does that kind of consistency mean? Not as a person who actually acted on it, or both, as a person... But do we really aim for that? Do we... Is there a point at which, if you aim for it, you're just gonna tie yourself into a pretzel? Or, am I lazy?

**ML:** I wanted to take my Judaism seriously. And if something is of value, I wanna test it. And maybe that's a better way, 'cause I don't think I fulfilled it, and I don't think I'm consistent, actually. I'm sure I'm not consistent, but I wanna know what does it mean to fulfill Judaism, whatever that means. I mean, it's huge.

**JH:** Sure.

**ML:** But fulfill Judaism in the Land, and have power, what does that mean? How do we do it? And in particular, given the trajectory that my life has taken, what does it mean to think about others when we have power? It happens that my expertise has become Judaism and Christianity, but when I think about others, of course, I'm thinking about Muslims as well. And so when I pray, for example, and when I pray for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and I see that Jerusalem is so

rebuilt that there's no room to rebuild anything else anymore. There's no room to build.

**JH:** Unless you destroy something in its place.

**ML:** Right, so I think about that. I think about what should we be meaning? Or it happens that when I stand on the balcony outside of my apartment, I see all of the old city, I have an unbelievable view.

**JH:** Sounds amazing, yeah.

**ML:** It's amazing, but it's a huge theological challenge, actually, to pray there, because, what do I mean when I think about Jerusalem? And I'll tell you, I want al-Aqsa Mosque to stay there. I want the Dome of the Rock to stay there. So, and when I pray for peace, I'm looking at Palestinian homes and Jewish homes. So, it's practical.

**JH:** I think I heard you say that it's a challenge to look out your balcony and pray, but I actually hear resolution, not challenge. I hear that maybe there was a challenge, but the way you bear yourself when you said that you actually want al-Aqsa Mosque to stay as is, that didn't strike me as a person who is struggling with that. That struck me as a person who has resolved on that.

**ML:** I know what I want, but I also know that I'm part of a big community of people who want all kinds of things. And there are lots of Jews who agree with me, and there are lots of Jews who disagree with me. And I think that that's part of the struggle, is...

**JH:** That is a challenge, I see.

**ML:** Yeah. I wanna remain a part of my people.

**JH:** Which forces a challenge upon you, if you take that seriously. Now can I ask you if you are both Orthodox and orthopractic, or one or the other, or neither?

**ML:** That's always a hard question.

**JH:** I know, I'm trying to make you say you're a heretic as well.

[laughter]

**JH:** No, I'm not trying to, I'm just...

**ML:** No, I don't think I'm a heretic, because God and I are actually pretty good. I think God can contain all kinds of ideas and disagreements. So I'm less worried about my relationship with God. I think that denominations are really about how we group each other. And I like to say, and I believe that it's even true, that I've been deeply influenced by all of the Jewish denominations, and I am a reformed Jew, and a conservative Jew, and an Orthodox Jew, and a Reconstructionist Jew, and a secular Jew, also. Which also means I'm a confused Jew, some of the time, but it also has enriched me.

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**JH:** Before we return to the podcast, we wanna let you know about digital learning on the College Commons platform. Beyond this podcast, which is available to the public at large, check out the online courses at [collegecommons.huc.edu](http://collegecommons.huc.edu) for in-depth learning, digital syllabi, assignments, inspiration for teaching, and one of our most influential courses called "Making Prayer Real". Subscribe with your synagogue for all this and more. Just click "Sign up" at [collegecommons.huc.edu](http://collegecommons.huc.edu). Oh, and one more thing, help us out, and rate us on iTunes. But whatever you do, do not give us five stars, unless we deserve it. Now, back to our podcast.

**JH:** So let's get back to the gap between Christians and Jews, insofar as we appreciate that the other can take many forms, and we are the other to many, but this is where your expertise is. So tell me the story of an encounter you had in class, or out of class, that captures perhaps an emblematic or a core gap that we have.

**ML:** Two weeks ago, I was running a program, a week-long program about Jewish spirituality for a group of Catholic priests. About half of them were from the United States, but from all over the place. And some of them from pretty rural parishes. The other half were from Australia and Ireland. And they came, they signed up to spend a week delving into Judaism, which for Jews might not sound like much; we expect more of ourselves, more than a week.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** But for Catholics who've never learned much about Judaism, even the Americans, by the way, these American priests, most of them knew very, very little about Judaism, had barely met Jews in their lives.

**JH:** Well, if Marcie Lenk can grow up in New Jersey not having met many Christians, why should a Catholic priest have met so many Jews?

**ML:** Right. From Montana.

**JH:** Right, it's a...

**ML:** So there you go. First of all, they were incredibly open-minded and eager to learn. They were deeply, deeply respectful, but they really, they had very, very basic questions. And I think we need to understand that, that what we know about ourselves, other people don't know.

**JH:** Which is part of the definition of being other to one another.

**ML:** Right. So we need to know what needs to be explained. What I also tried to do was to give them a sense of different kinds of Jews. We spent some time on the development of modern denominations in the west. They met with a Jew whose family came from Kurdistan, so to get a little bit of a sense of what it means to be Mizrahi. They met with a secular Jewish educator to get a sense of what it means to be, in a certain sense, Israeli.

**JH:** Right, right.

**ML:** And not denominational in that way. And they loved it, they loved it, but they had a lot of questions.

**JH:** When you said "basic", do you mean basic as in they are slightly trapped in a notion of Judaism that is biblicized for the consumption of Catholicism itself? Which does happen, Catholicism has assimilated an understanding of Jew as the "Other", which is really intended to be a foil to Christianity for its own self-understanding. As opposed to the other, which is this living group, that... That's a common misunderstanding among some Christians I've encountered. Or when you say that they mean there's some basic info that they need to get, do you mean that they asked, "If you don't believe in Jesus, are you atheist?" type question. Yeah.

**ML:** Let me start with the last part.

**JH:** Yeah.

**ML:** I have had people in my classes who've said, "Well, what do you believe about Jesus? Clearly, you must believe. Jesus must play an important role in your life. So please just explain to me what that is." And there are some Christians, usually they're really from countries where they wouldn't have encountered Jews, not non-Western countries, that I get questions like that. But from this group, it was more of, "We know that Jesus was a Jew. We know the apostles were all Jews. But it's just never occurred to us to think of what happened to Judaism next." Right, because in Christian theology, Judaism as you say, was made into the "Other", against which Christians measure themselves. Right, so the blessing that comes to believers is over against the cursedness of the Jews, historically. And most Christians, and this is actually also important for Jews to know, most Christians don't know that that's been their theology. In other words, Jews know about the history of Christian anti-Jewish teachings and persecutions and all of that, but most Christians, and even Catholics today, they know about Jesus teaching, "Love your neighbor."

**JH:** Right, right. It's not part of the catechism anymore, "lower case c" catechism, it's not part of... They're not actively taught to revile us or to...

**ML:** Well, since 1965, and the famous and important statement that came out of the Vatican out of Vatican II, *Nostra aetate*, Christians have been taught to reject anti-Semitism. Not to think that Jews today, or historically, killed Jesus. So it hasn't been, for more than a generation now, this has not been a part of the way that certainly Catholics have experienced their Christianity and Christian-Jewish relations. And although *Nostra aetate* came out of the Catholic Church, there have been many, many, many statements by pretty much every Christian denomination against, anti-Semitism.

**ML:** So, Christians, they just don't know about that. And when they learn about it... I had one priest in this group who, when I made reference to Christian anti-Judaism, he said to me, totally sincerely he said, "But how could anybody say that?" And then he quoted a few different



passages in the New Testament that teach about peace and respect, and I said, to him, "You're right. I don't know, but it happened. That's part of the history." So that history that we know so well, we Jews know so well, Christians don't know about it. And so they don't understand why we're afraid of them. And that history, it's important to share that history. It's important for Christians to know about it, so that they can understand what's changed, actually.

**JH:** I hear you saying, and it's certainly my experience as well, that that lack of exposure to the ugly teachings of the past is a kind of positive naïveté. They don't know it because they weren't taught it, and it's a good thing that they weren't taught it, because we all don't want that ideology to be perpetuated. And so the fact that they're not aware of it is not dysfunction, it's actually, it is a kind of naïveté, but it's a function. It's a good function of development, since as you say, Nostra aetate, second half of the 20th century developments in Christianity for various reasons, not least of which is the Holocaust.

But would you agree that there is another side to the same naïveté? Which is also one of goodwill, but one that even if they're not so naïve as to assume that if you don't believe in Jesus, you must be an atheist, you encounter people who are sometimes nevertheless naïve enough to not really grasp what it means to be a religious being, or even why one would bother being a religious being if not Christian?

**ML:** Yes, I've met many, many Christians. Not only Catholics...

**JH:** Sorry for the tortuous wording there, but yeah...

**ML:** Yes, not only Catholics, but various Protestants as well, who wonder what I am. I've had students, particularly young men who were staying for the priesthood, who come from countries where they've never met a Jew before, who think of me as an unbeliever or non-believer because I'm not Christian. So replacement theology, in other words, the idea that Christians have come and replaced Jews as God's people, as the chosen people, that ideology is alive and well in many, many, many Christian communities, and there are many Christian theologians who've written about this, and against it, and have worked on, some people call it post-replacement theology, but we have tried to work out other theology. And so there's work that's been done, but it hasn't all trickled down and it hasn't all been accepted.

**JH:** Yeah, it hasn't right. Right, right, there are some denominations that are aware of it, and reject it.

**ML:** Right, I mean...

**JH:** Aware of the attempt to reform it.

**ML:** And one place where that's particularly interesting to think about this, actually, is in the evangelical world, where the except... Evangelicals are many and varied.

**JH:** Indeed.

**ML:** Okay, so one cannot speak of all evangelicals by any means, and even of all evangelicals in the United States. But some of the theological statements that have come out of assemblies of evangelicals have insisted, that at the end of the day, the only people who are saved are those who believe that Jesus was the Son of God, was Christ, was the Messiah, or is, in their... You know, as they would say. And so, how Jews think about that, and particularly where I live in Israel, how Israeli Jews form partnerships with evangelicals is something that perhaps pay attention to it, something that I certainly pay attention to.

**JH:** Me too.

**ML:** What about evangelical practice and theology is good for the Jews, and what isn't? In contrast to that, the Catholic Church, as well as a number of mainline Protestant theologians, and in even church bodies, have said in recent years, that essentially that God's Covenant with the Jews stands. God made a promise to the Jews, and God doesn't go back on God's promises. And the fact that we don't believe that Jesus was the Messiah is not our problem. It doesn't have to be a problem for us. And actually, there's a statement that came out 50 years after *Nostra aetate* in 2015, stating just this. Essentially stating, "Everybody needs Jesus; the Jewish Covenant with God stands without Jesus. These two things, statements seem to contradict one another. That is a mystery." And that's where they left it. But I think that that's fascinating.

**JH:** It is fascinating. Do you think it matters? For us, I'm speaking parochially now. If we lived in a world where we could trust human safety and civility, and we had nothing to fear, ever, anywhere, nor did any other minority, in this imaginary world, would we care? Would it bother us that... Even the most traditionalist version of replacement theology, the most aggressive, except for the appropriation, which it implies, insofar as we wouldn't grant the point, do we care if they insist on it?

**ML:** Well, I find the relationship between evangelicals who love a certain kind of Jewish state in Israel, and Jews who love having that evangelical support, I find something in that relationship deeply cynical, because each side is using the other. Right? I mean, essentially the Jews...

**JH:** And both sides know the other side is doing it.

**ML:** Probably deep down, they do.

**JH:** Isn't it explicit? Isn't it even on the surface?

**ML:** I don't think it's on the surface.

**33:15 JH:** Really?

**33:15 ML:** On the surface is, "We know you're my... I know that you're my brother, I love you, you love me."

**JH:** Really? That's...

**ML:** That's when, no, when...

**JH:** Wow, that's...

**ML:** When Israeli politicians go into megachurches and hug the pastors, and the pastors are honored by major Jewish organizations, I don't think it's explicit, that the cynicism is explicit. I think on the surface, it's all love. "We need each other, and we love each other, and it's all great."

**JH:** On the surface, surface, of ceremony, fine, it's all love. But just below the surface, and in the surface of the internal dialogues on each side, in my experience, every single Jew who willingly and welcomingly accepts evangelical support knows perfectly well that the evangelical theology is one of aggressive replacement theology. And the Jews say, "No, well, that's their problem. I don't care. They can have the ideology they want, it's all messianic anyway, we're not gonna be here to see it. Who cares? In the meanwhile, I will cynically, or not even cynically, just in a rationally self-interested way, accept their help." Meanwhile, the Christians on the other side say, "We don't expect the Jews to welcome replacement theology. They're not actually telling us that they accept Jesus." They know that. They're saying, "Nevertheless, we can make inroads with them, we can make relationships with them, and we care about Israel for our own reasons." I've never felt an iota of cynicism insofar as cynicism means ulterior motives. I've only encountered frank and frankly legitimate self-interest.

**ML:** I don't know, I'm troubled by it.

**JH:** Well, I'm troubled. I mean I'm of... As you know, the American Judaism is divided with respect to the acceptance or rejection of evangelical help, and I tend to be on the rejection side for lots of reasons, but not because I attribute to them cynicism. I think they're playing fair, and I think we're playing fair even though I disagree with the alliance.

**ML:** See, I think that what's troubling is there's a sense that I hear from Jews, that those evangelicals, they're the ones who are our best friends. And as a Jew, and as an Israeli, I don't think that they're our best friends. I actually think I would rather have friends who really respect me and us for who we are, and out of that respect, sometimes criticize us. But it needs to come from a place of respect.

**JH:** I would rather have an ally who thinks what he or she thinks of me, but the terms of the alliance of which are reasonable, mutually self-interested enough to be reliable. And, and...

**ML:** I guess I just wonder if it's reliable. I mean...

**JH:** So yes. Okay, that's... But that's a tactical question.

**36:23 ML:** I wonder if it's reliable. And then there's also the question of ultimately, what's good for Israel?

**JH:** Right, right. So I agree...

**ML:** Like which positions are good for Israel. That's a separate discussion.

**JH:** Well, I'm against the alliance 'cause I don't think it's reliable, but that's an assessment, it's not an attribution of cynicism. It's just my assessment of their position, and I think it is a position upon which we cannot or ought not rely.

**ML:** I think, maybe cynicism is the wrong word, I think that there's a disrespect though.

**JH:** Well, supersessionism...

**ML:** There's a basic dis... Right? Supersessionism is disrespectful, it doesn't respect who I... But I... So I try, when I teach Jews about Christianity and Christians about Judaism, I'm really trying to get each side to respect the other, but we have to know about each other's flaws. I don't try to present Christianity as all good. I know the history, alright?

**JH:** Right, right, right.

**ML:** And I don't try to present Judaism, when I'm teaching Christians, I don't just give them Shabbat, and...

**JH:** Right, right, right, right. A beautiful lighting of the candles and a hymn. Right. But if you really, really, really get to the root of respect, which I think we would all welcome and aim for, does it not boil down to then, the respect for the irreducibility of the conflict between us? And to me, I can live with that. I mean, I would say that for the vast majority of world Christianity, replacement theology is embedded irretrievably in the DNA of what it means to be Christian. There is no recognizably Christian thing without replacement theology. And at the margins, the liberal margins, people have tried to massage it, or downright get rid of it, at the far left. The massaging bothers me, because it's just massaging. But the far left that really gets rid of it, I respect and appreciate it as far as it goes. But the truth is that if you really want me to respect Christianity writ large, then I have to respect it as it is, not as I want it to be. And Christianity writ large has replacement theology embedded in its nucleus.

**ML:** So, I'll tell you something, you may be right, but if I want those Christians to respect Jews, I need those Christians to understand why their need to make us all into Christians, okay, which for most of them is coming from a place of love...

**JH:** Absolutely, the problem, by the way...

**ML:** Okay, and I know that.

**JH:** Yeah. Right. That's the hurdle.

**ML:** Okay, I know that. But I need them to understand why it's so problematic for us. And if they don't fully understand why that is, then I have a problem with them.

**JH:** So, we're agreeing. Because my position of what respect means is, respecting the

irreducibility of the conflict. And what you're saying is, you can sort of see where I'm coming from, and all you're asking for is the same thing in return, which I would also articulate, you articulate it better than I could, but I fully agree in the reverse direction. So the two-way street, they need to know that for Jews to remain recognizably Jewish, and for them to claim that they recognize Jews, they have to recognize Judaism and Jews as we are, and as our religion is. And that it is... It fundamentally cannot recognize their claim. Which brings us to the irreducible conflict.

And then we look across a gap which is unbridgeable, but it doesn't mean we can't see each other across it. It doesn't mean, it's like Sarah Palin; we can see across the Bering Strait, it's great, it works perfect. And I find the honesty embedded in that, and the frankness. It doesn't have to be acceptance in the sense of, "I don't have any problems with you," but it can be respect and a kind of acceptance where we say, "Look, these are the terms, and those terms may be absolutely unmoving, but there's a million things between here and the Messiah that those terms, for all of the conflict they represent, actually do not impede. We can do so much together in the shadow of this conflict, without really any problem.

**ML:** See, the one piece that I disagree on is, I think that the repercussions of replacement theology are enormous. I'll give you an example. I think that the idea of Jews as strong...

**JH:** As what?

**ML:** As strong.

**JH:** Like the Israelis...

**ML:** The having power.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** Not being powerless.

**JH:** Right, Right.

**ML:** Right, is a challenge to supersessionism.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** Right? And so I...

**JH:** Supersessionism. Supersessionism is...

**ML:** Is another word for replacement theology.

**JH:** It's a synonym.

**ML:** Right, right. So supersessionism or replacement theology is the idea that basically Jews have been replaced, right? So...

**JH:** Right. That our Covenant has been superseded.

**ML:** And the idea that not only have we not disappeared, but we're not suffering, okay, and this is not only true in Israel.

**JH:** We're not on our knees, we're not...

**ML:** In the United States, Jews are strong. You know, Jews are successful. It's an amazing, beautiful thing. And I think that this is an enormous challenge.

**JH:** And we're not asking for permission.

**ML:** Right. So we have power.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** And that's great. How we use our power, that's a different question.

**JH:** It's subject to critique, but it's...

**ML:** Okay, but I think we all, everyone values... We talk about empowering our daughters.

**JH:** Right.

**ML:** Right? Power is a positive thing if we use it right. And the idea of Jews who are alive and strong is a challenge to a certain traditional Christian theology, and I think it's important to challenge Christians to think about that.

**JH:** Fair enough. We agree. I mean, I'm all for the challenge, but I do think that if all parties are of good faith and honest, that they will come to this irreducible bottom line. And then you can just see it for what it is, but that does mean a mutuality, and I agree with you that it has to be... It has to be both ways. But I've been there a lot, I've landed there a lot, and I've gotten very comfortable there.

**ML:** Look, I think that this is true of all "Others", right?

**JH:** Right. It's the nature of otherness to...

**ML:** How do we work with anyone with whom we disagree, and we're not going to come to an agreement on something?

**JH:** And if you're a pluralist, not just within your group, but across groups, and if you believe in pluralist exercise, certainly in the new world, and we have no choice, no matter what your

politics and ideology is, it's the truth, it's a fact, but I welcome it, I love it. And I say, "Vive la différence". As long as it doesn't devolve into harm.

**ML:** Right. No, I agree, I also agree with you about the issue of difference. It's in the difference that we expand.

**JH:** Right. And we find beauty in the world and our curiosity is ignited. These are great things. These make life worth living.

**ML:** Absolutely. So difference is fine, but I'm always concerned about the respect issue. I think that Jews don't always respect Christians, partly because of our history and our fears, partly because of our ignorance.

**JH:** Yes, I agree.

**ML:** And Christians often don't respect Jews. So I really find my place, my work, in messing with everybody on both sides, but trying to get them to better understand one another.

**JH:** From my perspective, where I have frankly, rarely if ever, encountered anything other than respect. Truthfully, the Christian encounters I have, they may be ignorant, but I too may be ignorant. In fact, we're all guaranteed that we're all ignorant of 99.999% of everything, so that doesn't bother me in the least.

The hardest thing, the most intractable hurdle to me is goodwill. Because what happens is, when we have that mutual respect, where we really lay our cards out and we expose the violation that we feel, and we insist on the hopelessness of their ambitions vis-à-vis us, as part of our dignity, we puff up our chests and we say, "Yeah, you can think that all you want, but you ain't getting nowhere with me." You know... All of that becomes harder because of goodwill, because they are, by and large, again, as you described your own experiences, they're coming to us out of Christian love, for lack of a better term, and to encounter both the reverberations of the harm that their history has caused, and our reaction, which is somewhat defiant, and somewhat can be hurtful to them. It can be off-putting, and it can force them in ways that aren't always productive, to feel bad.

**ML:** Right, I agree. And I think we need to think about how to, on the one hand, feel proud of who we are and present that to the outside world.

**JH:** Right, they need to, right.

**ML:** And at the same time, be humble. You know, we're not good at humility. Our Jewish...

**JH:** Is anyone? [chuckle]

**ML:** Yes, yes!

**JH:** Who is?

**ML:** I have met many Christian leaders, priests, nuns, pastors, lay people, who are humble.

**JH:** Really?

**ML:** Who are deeply humble people. We, Jews, our texts teach us about humility; humility is a Jewish value, but we kind of missed it along the way. Or at least lately, we've been working on other things, and we forgot about humility, and...

**JH:** That's quite a critique.

**ML:** A little bit, a little bit of humility to say, "We have a lot, and we wanna show you what we've got, but we don't have everything. And maybe you have something to teach me." Look, we're traumatized by our history, and by recent events. Pittsburgh just happened.

**JH:** Right, right, it's...

**ML:** So, we are traumatized. But I think we need to also be aware of the fact that we are strong, and we're strong enough, I believe, to allow ourselves to be more open, to not have all the answers. I think that we will be the richer for it, I know that I have been myself.

**JH:** Well, that's a good place to end, because that's a beautiful notion. And I wanna thank you for taking the time. It's really been a pleasure to talk to you, I have enjoyed it very much.

**ML:** Thanks for inviting me, Josh.

[music]

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