



5. Metaphors for a Unique Relationship

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

1. Rabbi Lehmann observes that a distinction needs to be made between images that described the Jewish and Christian relationship in past centuries from those that have emerged in the last third of the twentieth century. For centuries, Christians assumed that the Church had superseded Jews as God's chosen people and this theology of "supersessionism" was reflected in Christian art. Although Jews were censored by the dominant Christian society, how would you imagine Jews pictured supersessionist Christianity, if only in their imaginations? How might Jews, for example, have depicted the relationship of Synagoga and Ecclesia?

The purpose of this question is to develop skills in seeing the world through the other community's perspectives. Some Christians will probably be disturbed to see their faith community as oppressive and frightening. Some may voice their dismay that what understands itself as a religion of love and concern for all people should have behaved so contrary to these principles. Jews hearing such sentiments and Christians working through them may reflect on how religious convictions can be distorted and corrupted.

2. The video presents a number of different approaches to picturing the relationship between Christianity and Judaism today. These include: mother and daughter, siblings, branches from a common root, First and Second Blessing, study partners, and partners-in-(active)-waiting. What strikes you as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Which of these metaphors captures the relationship best for you? Or could you suggest an alternative?

This question will draw together many of the elements of the first four videos in WALKING GOD'S PATHS, including the history, beliefs, and practices of the two communities. See the [Information Sheet](#) for an analysis of many of the metaphors that the video mentions. Keep in mind that there is no single "correct" answer to this question because the relationship may be more complex than any one metaphor can express.

3. Your discussion group is a committee that has been appointed by the president of a secular university. The university is in the process of building on campus a small Christian (or Catholic) chapel and a small Jewish synagogue for religious services for its students. The buildings will be near one another and will be entered by means of a common courtyard or atrium in which it is hoped some common celebrations might be held (e.g., at Thanksgiving). Your committee has the task of developing the concept for a sculpture that will be placed in the center of this common space. It should express a positive relationship between Judaism and Christianity that will inspire Christian and Jewish students to respect each other's traditions and to work together in the world. Role-play that your committee is convening for the first time and is to give a report of whatever conclusions it has been able to reach thus far to the president after the meeting.

This role-playing exercise builds upon the previous questions, but seeks to apply them in the reality of a college campus. Given the scenario that has been devised, perhaps too much is being demanded of the prospective artwork. There may be a peril of the two religions being relativized or marginalized by being placed together somewhere on the campus of a self-defined "secular" institution. Students who are aware of the troubled history of the two traditions will be critical of a sculpture that is too optimistic or fails to acknowledge past hostility. On the other hand, the artwork is meant to inspire the commitment to work together. It may well be that total agreement consensus would be impossible to achieve and that instead a compromise that most people could live with would be a more realistic goal. Still, the exercise should move the discussion from the abstract to the lives of real communities. Depending on the demographics and meeting space, it might be possible for each small group to give their "report to the president" to the entire group of participants at large.

4. Reflect back on the conversation your group has experienced this session. Which of the ideas that were voiced are common knowledge among members of your own community? Which would be highly debatable? What do these considerations suggest about future tasks for those concerned about deepening positive Jewish and Christian relations?

Continuing the last question's move from the abstract to people's lived experiences, this question invites reflection on the participants' own congregations. Jews and Christians who have been profoundly affected by interfaith dialogue often are frustrating when their co-religionists seem apathetic or uninterested in their experiences. The conversation will help equip participants for this possibility.