

CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM – CONSULTATION

Topic: Freedom
 Convener: Nicole Reibe, Loyola University Maryland
 Moderator: Mia Thecharis, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto
 Presenter: Andrew Massena, Loras College
 Respondent: Bethany Slater, Denison University

Nicole Reibe opened the session, welcoming everyone, and made a few announcements about next year's convention in Baltimore. She encouraged attendees to start thinking about the rich, often complicated, relationships between Jewish and Christian communities in the Baltimore region as possible paper topics. Reibe then turned it over to Mia Thecharis, the moderator and incoming administrative team member.

Andrew Massena (Loras College) presented his paper entitled "Freedom with the Law: Proposing a Christian Practice of *Torah Lishmah*." Rooting his paper in personal narrative, Massena described his attempts to read through the Bible, cover to cover, only to struggle with the legal materials of the Pentateuch. He also noted the Christian tendency to dismiss Torah study or to reduce it down to love of one another, based on a Christian reading of Galatians. Yet, the continued presence of the Law in the Bible must serve a greater purpose than that of a religious-legal artifact for Christians. Many Christian Hebrew Scripture scholars have approached the legal materials for their utility ("it can sharpen one's understanding of God, hone one's ability to love or act morally, put one in one's place"), but Massena sought a way to engage in Torah for its own sake, suggesting that Christians take up the practice of *Torah Lishmah*, "a late antique rabbinic concept that interrogates and develops the motivation behind one's action." Turning to the rabbinic tradition, Massena presented the interpretations of *Torah Lishmah* in Rava, R. Eleazer, and R. Meir as a way for Christians to approach Torah study. Christians should study Torah, not for its utility but because it is divine teaching. Readers should wrestle with the challenges that Torah presents because the Torah was given by God to be studied. Torah study is a disposition and a practice. Returning to his narrative, Massena reflected on the effect of his own *Torah Lishmah*, which he has practiced for eight years. While his practice has had periods of frustration and boredom, it has also developed into a form of worship that engaged his whole self and made him more reflective about his Catholic identity. It also became a kind of ascetic practice, requiring mental and physical strength and endurance. Finally, Massena has come to thoroughly enjoy Torah study, engaging with the voices of the rabbis to expose what he could not see, and giving himself out of love, not a quest for utility or a singular "right" interpretation.

Bethany Slater (Denison University) responded with a paper entitled "Servitude for its own Sake: Freedom and God's Law." Building upon Massena's paper, Slater introduced a quote from Simon the Just, "On three things the world stands: On *Torah*, On *Avodah*, and On *Gemilut Hasadim*." Slater focused her presentation on *Avodah*, "the service of God for its own sake, and on deeds of loving kindness." Rooting her exploration of *Avodah* in the Exodus narrative, Slater drew on multiple sources (Torah, Mishnah) to reflect upon the meaning of *Avodah*. The freedom of the Exodus was an

end of slavery (*Avodah*) to the Egyptians. The freedom from the Egyptians allowed the Israelites to rightly serve (*Avodah*) YHWH. The Israelite servitude to YHWH is a gift to them; it is for their benefit. This develops an approach to the Torah in which Jews are bound to keep Torah as part of *Avodah*. *Avodah* creates a new type of freedom. Both papers approached the notion of freedom within God given boundaries. Freedom that is not easily maintained, but requires effort and discomfort (both intellectually and, sometimes, physically). Yet, it is through these efforts that freedom is experienced.

NICOLE REIBE
Loyola University Maryland
Baltimore, Maryland