



Christians and Jews Discuss Views of Afterlife

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At a recent dialogue in Montana (U.S.A.), more than 70 Jews and Christians gathered at Bethel Lutheran Church in Great Falls to discuss 'Jewish and Christian Views of the Afterlife.' The dialogue was part of a series of annual events flowing from an Agreement signed in June 1995 between the Montana Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Montana Association of Jewish Communities. Reaffirmed in May 2000, the Agreement describes the shared rootage of Jews and Christians in the heritage of Abraham, welcomes opportunities to learn of one another's traditions, and pledges to work together for the common good.

The Jewish speaker at the dialogue was Rabbi Laura Rappaport of Congregation Aitz Shalom, Great Falls, who noted the variety in Judaism through the centuries, wherein the afterlife can be expressed as sheol, 'living beyond your deeds,' resurrection, immortality of the soul, or even as reincarnation. The Christian speaker was The Rev. Dr. Paul Seastrand, ecumenical officer of the Montana Synod. Emphasizing the biblical teaching of resurrection, he stated that the afterlife can be expressed 'doxologically' (little can be said other than that it is the experience of praising God) or 'sociomorphically' (described in terms and pictures drawn from earthly experiences). Seastrand also noted the ethical implications for this life of various views of the next.

A lively discussion ensued, moderated by The Rev. Jessica Crist, director of the Northern Rockies Institute of Theology. Future dialogues are planned on such topics as 'Jewish and Christian Understandings of Scripture,' 'The Meaning and Methods of Prayer for Jews and Christians,' and 'What Do Rabbis and Pastors Do?'

F.S.