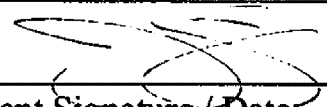


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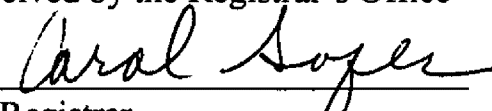
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**Jewish-Christian Relations:  
From Tolerance to Pluralism to Partnership**

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**Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion**  
**Los Angeles**  
**2006**

**Jewish-Christian Relations: From Tolerance to Pluralism to Partnership**

**By Jeremy A. Schneider**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination  
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## Introduction

What is the status of Jewish-Christian relations? Where is Jewish-Christian dialogue heading? When did Christianity and Judaism part company and go their separate ways? How have we reached the present situation in which Christianity and Judaism are manifestly separate religions?

Christianity has traditionally defined itself in opposition to Judaism. Two events of the twentieth century have strongly challenged this traditional Christian position. The Holocaust has called into question Christian anti-Judaism. And the establishment of the State of Israel in modern times has cast doubt on Christian triumphalist assumptions that Jews are politically powerless, Jewish culture a fossilized anachronism.

Judaism, or certainly the Hebrew Bible, does not engage in theological speculation; does not contain a catechism; nor does it even make doctrine a determinant factor in worship. Indeed, to serve or worship God is defined precisely as "walking in His ways"<sup>i</sup>, "observing His commandments."<sup>ii</sup> In other words, the basic criterion for determining whether Jews worship God or not, is Judaism's religio-ethical conduct. The Divine self-designation in the book of Exodus "I am that which I am" or more literally, "I shall be that which I shall be," has been understood precisely to mean that no two people have the same conception of the Divine.<sup>iii</sup> Indeed, even within any one tradition and denomination one will find very differing perceptions of the Deity. Sometimes there are serious divergences, if not conflicts, over such understandings. Certainly Judaism and Christianity have defined limits to pluralism and theological diversity, but it is actually

not at all necessarily contradictory to affirm that someone worships the same God and at the same time contend that the other's perception of the Deity is problematic and/or flawed.

Theologians and scholars of both Judaism and Christianity are today radically rethinking the relation between their two covenant communities. While Christians and Jews have always been aware of the connection established by their shared and disputed claim to continue the history of Israel and by their shared Scripture of the *TaNaKh* or Old Testament, that awareness has not given rise to a coherent Jewish theology of Christianity or, conversely, a Christian theology of Judaism. This thesis will summarize the history of Jewish-Christian relations over the last two millennia and identify that relationship as it moves from one of tolerance, to pluralism, to engaging in partnership and developing a theology of the other in recent years. Yet caution will be raised as to the mixed messages Jews receive from Christian leadership.

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- <sup>i</sup> Deuteronomy 28:9
  - <sup>ii</sup> Deuteronomy 30:8
  - <sup>iii</sup> Exodus 3:14



## Common Origins & The Parting of Ways

IN THE BEGINNING, some 2000 years ago, Jews and Christians were siblings; separated but within one family. Their common identification was with Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. But having lived side by side for nearly 2 millennia, Jews and Christians have continually contested as to which was the true heir of the covenant with God. Christian and Jewish separation has often in recent years been referred to in terms of the 'partings of the ways'.<sup>1</sup> Where did this separation happen? When did the 'parting of the ways' begin?

I believe the story of the Apostle Paul best explains the common origins and the parting of the ways<sup>2</sup> for the Jews and Christians.<sup>3</sup> We know that Saul (Paul before he 'converted'<sup>4</sup>) was Jewish<sup>5</sup> and a Pharisee<sup>6</sup>, from the book of Galatians<sup>7</sup>. This means that he was scrupulous to obey the Mosaic Law, written and oral. It was while Saul was on the road to Damascus with the intention of harassing Christian<sup>8</sup> Jews that he was converted.<sup>9</sup> Though he was a latecomer to the ranks of the Christian apostles, Paul became the most influential theologian among them.<sup>10</sup> Both his ideas and his apostolic work had profound consequences for the interrelations of Christians and Jews.

The distinctive characteristic of Paul's apostleship was that it was addressed to Gentiles.<sup>11</sup> This did not mean that Paul as a missionary for Jesus ignored Jews and synagogues. It was his custom to begin by going to the synagogue and preaching there when he arrived in town.<sup>12</sup> But he made contact with the gentiles in marketplaces, public forums, lecture halls, and wherever else he could get an audience. Paul's missionary field was not Palestine – it was Asia

Minor, Cyprus, Greece, and Macedonia – areas inhabited predominately by gentiles, although probably containing Jewish communities.<sup>13</sup>

Paul admitted gentiles into the fellowship of Jesus, without circumcision and without requiring obedience to the Law of Moses.<sup>14</sup> Paul was breaking not only with Jewish practice, but even with some understandings of previous Christian practice.<sup>15</sup> In the book of Acts, for example, the Apostle James's style of Christianity was founded on being Jewish in every way and then adding to what being Jewish required: believing that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah who had come and was to come again and living by Jesus' "midrash" on the law of Moses.<sup>16</sup> James represented a kind of Christianity that was a sectarian expression of Judaism, not a departure from Judaism. To be a Christian, according to James, one must be a Jew first.<sup>17</sup>

The era of Paul was the time of the ascendancy of the Pharisees, with their emphasis on obedience to the law as the essence of Judaism.<sup>18</sup> Yet, here was Paul, the former Pharisee, proclaiming that "Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified."<sup>19</sup> Clearly, as far as Jews were concerned, pagan converts to Paul's teachings did not become Jews and could not be equivalent to Jews in the sight of God.<sup>20</sup>

Paul's radicalism in rejecting the law made him a mystery to the Jew in the first century as well as today. To an observant Jew, the law of God is not a burden, it is a delight. Every aspect of the law has to do with bringing human nature to perfection, in respect to reverence for God, love for neighbor, humaneness, sensitivity, responsiveness, and every positive human potential. How could a Jew like Paul simply throw the law away? The answer seems to be that

Paul does not throw the law away because to Paul Jesus is the law in a new and effective form.<sup>21</sup>

Paul had thrown away the written and oral law, not as one who no longer believed in its holy purpose, but as one who found it ineffective to accomplish its purpose. Jews understood the purpose of the law to be to bring the people of God to obedience to God, that is, to righteousness. As a Christian, Paul continued to believe in righteousness as God's purpose for human beings. To transfer his loyalty from the law to Jesus was, in his view, to shift from an ineffective means of bringing people to righteousness to an effective one, to one that not only indicated what God's will was, but enabled persons to obey it.<sup>22</sup>

A modern Jew, if he is told that a Christian feels about Jesus the way he, the Jew, feels about the Torah, can understand how a Christian feels. A modern Christian, if he is told that a Jew feels about the Torah the way he, the Christian, feels about Jesus, can understand how a Jew feels. But it is quite clear that neither Jews nor Christians in Paul's time saw any equivalency here.

1. To the Jew, the gentile Christian was a strange sort of pagan who claimed that he loved the true God, but boldly rejected the one thing God asked of him, that is, obedience to God's law.
2. To the Jew, the Jewish Christian was at least erratic in mistaking a rabbinical teacher for the Messiah.
3. To the Jew, both gentile and Jewish Christians were absolutely preposterous in claiming that their sect was the true Israel, the new chosen people, and that the historic Jews were not God's people anymore.

4. To the Christian, whether gentile or Jewish, the non-Christian Jew was a strange sort who, after looking for the messiah so long, failed to recognize him when he came and forced him to find a new people for his kingdom.

We are left with two religious communities that were actually very close to one another, that for a time actually shared one scripture, the Hebrew Bible, but were driven apart by incompatible, exclusivist claims.<sup>23</sup> Each community saw itself as the true people of the biblical God, and saw its rival as the impostor. Jews generally could not see Jesus as a new and better version of the Torah. They could not see Paul's kind of Christians, those who abandoned the *mitzvot*, as people of God equivalent to themselves. Christians generally, like Paul, could not see Jews as anything but "trespassers" and "unbelievers" for failing to recognize the Messiahship of Jesus. The "Parting of the Ways" was set in motion.

## Christianization of the Empire

The separation of Jews and Christians widened as time went by, and their rejection of each other hardened. In a pluralistic society, that is, a society that tolerates a variety of religions, a society in which the government makes no commitment to sponsor or even to favor one religion and regards all religions with equal favor, competing religions may make mutually contradictory claims to their hearts' content without inducing either bloodshed or loss of civil rights.<sup>24</sup> The competition operates largely in the arena of verbal argument. The early Roman Empire approximated such pluralism, although it did require of all its subjects, in addition to their voluntary religions, participation in the worship of the emperor.<sup>25</sup> For polytheistic citizens, I imagine it was no great hardship to add one more divinity to the liturgical calendar.

Jews benefited from this pluralistic tolerance during most of the first three centuries of the Common Era, especially in the Diaspora.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that Judaism had been declared a *religio licita*, a legal religion, by Julius Caesar and had given to Jews freedoms and privileges unheard of by other minority groups.<sup>27</sup> Not only were Jews not required to offer sacrifice to the emperor or serve in the imperial military, but in the years when the Temple was still in existence they were granted an exemption from a law that prohibited international trade in precious metals – so that Jews in the Diaspora could contribute to the upkeep of the Temple through the annual Temple Tax.<sup>28</sup> Early Christians did not benefit as much. But the time was to come when Christianity would secure the undoing of the pluralism, and would become the established religion of the empire.

In the early first century, when Christians seemed to the Roman authorities to be a sect within Judaism, they seemed on the whole to have enjoyed Jews' privileges in the empire at large.<sup>29</sup> But as Christianity came to be recognized as a distinct religion and as one not officially tolerated, it came under attack.<sup>30</sup> The emperor Nero, for example, blamed the burning of much of Rome in 64 C.E. on the Christians.<sup>31</sup> But as the church still continued to grow, the empire was more and more faced with the choice of eliminating emperor-worship or eliminating Christians. The emperor Decius<sup>32</sup> in the mid-third century and the emperors Diocletian<sup>33</sup> and Galerius<sup>34</sup>, from 301 to 310, systematically attempted the latter. Thousands died, but the policy failed. Then the emperor Constantine brought a whole new policy into effect, the turn toward a Christian empire.

When Constantine's Edict of Milan<sup>35</sup> in 313 made Christianity fully legal and restored the churches and other properties that had been confiscated by persecuting emperors, Christianity became overwhelmingly the popular faith.<sup>36</sup> When he became sole emperor in 324, master in the East as well as in the West, he extended his policy as patron of Christianity throughout the empire.<sup>37</sup> In 325, he called the first ecumenical council of Christian bishops, at Nicaea, in an effort to restore Christian unity upset by the Arian controversy and succeeded in uniting the bishops behind the first universally accepted creed.<sup>38</sup>

The shift of the Roman Empire to embrace Christianity as the official religion raised for the first time the question of the place of Judaism and Jews in a society ruled by Christians and committed to the advancement of the Christian worldview.<sup>39</sup> What developed was a position of moderate toleration. Judaism was seen as error-ridden and displaced; it was, however, important and valued as to necessitate Christianity's legitimization. Jews were to live a tolerated, albeit

limited, existence within the Christian commonwealth. The limitations to be imposed on Jewish life were aimed at preventing potential harm that Jews might inflict on their Christian hosts and at maintaining Jewish inferiority in ways that would highlight their error and punishment.

This position of moderate toleration, developed during the second to fourth centuries as Christianity rose to power in the Roman Empire, required theological grounding, which was developed of by a number of major thinkers, including Augustine. Although this position will be discussed further in the next section, a brief summary of this toleration follows. The position of moderate toleration was the belief that Christianity had recognized Judaism's role as the people of God's covenant. This Christian acknowledgment was tempered by the claim that the Jews had committed a sin—the crucifixion. The belief continues that God was so angry that God broke the covenant with the Jews and made a new covenant people, the Christians. God had responded to this sin with immediate punishment, exile, and degradation of the Jews. In this view, the Jews as a degraded people served a most useful role; permanent examples to the working of sin and punishment in God's universe and, in the process, to the truth of the Christian faith as well.

## Church Fathers

No movement will thrive and grow without a few heroes who are held up as role models to pass on values, identify goals, and encourage followers in times of despair. Sometimes these heroes live and triumph, but often they die as martyrs to their faith or country. In either case, their stories typically are passed on in a highly romanticized form that bears little resemblance to the original, simple account.

In the early church, the martyrologies, the accounts of the deaths of the saints, were valuable documents. While the martyrologies helped build Christianity by keeping alive the spirit of the foundational crucifixion stories, they did so at a price. In mirroring the dramatic passion accounts of the gospels, they also mirrored the latent and explicit anti-Judaic elements in Christian tradition. Heroes must have enemies, and the most obvious enemies were the people whom, it was said, Jesus came to save but who rejected and killed him.

The central purpose of Hegesippus,<sup>40</sup> Eusebius,<sup>41</sup> and their successors was to uplift the Christian message, not to slander Jews. But one of their main strategies in doing this was to develop the argument that the strength of Christianity is best represented by the degradation of the people who reject it. Eusebius opened his history with a declaration that his purpose was "to recount the misfortunes which immediately came upon the whole Jewish nation as consequence for their plots against our Savior."<sup>42</sup>



The early efforts at building the new faith through invented, highly romanticized accounts of the lives and deaths of early Christian martyrs had two important side effects. First, they clearly identified collective Judaism—all Jews and not an individual priest, and not Herod or Pilate—as the enemy who killed Jesus and Jesus' witnesses. Second, these legends allowed Christians to persecute Jews or, at the least, to explain away Jewish suffering under persecution as justified punishment by God.<sup>43</sup>

St. John Chrysostom (344–407) is representative among the church fathers of the extremes of Jewish condemnation of which the church was capable. Chrysostom gave strong expression to the charge against the Jews of deicide and asserted that for this crime there was no possible atonement or forgiveness: God will hate and punish the Jews until the end of the world, and Christians should deport themselves accordingly.<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine's<sup>45</sup> (354–430) answer to the Jewish question was all too convincing for Christians and damaging to Jews: the Jews will be saved at the end of time, as Paul taught; but in the meantime they must witness by their sufferings to God's wrath against those who reject his Son.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine's theory of the meaning of the Jewish existence would become the foundation of official church doctrine, cited by popes and other churchmen throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>47</sup> Augustine's theory had two components.<sup>48</sup> It insisted upon physical safety for the Jews: they are not to be put to death. But it also insisted that in order to fulfill their function, Jews must live under conditions and attest to their status of being accursed. For Jews to enjoy a higher standard of living than Christians, or for Jews to hold a position of authority over Christians, would violate the ground rules of tolerance.

Myths shape popular opinion, and popular opinion affects laws. Before Constantine, the Roman empire's laws concerning Jews were, on the whole, relatively benevolent in comparison with its laws concerning Christians, whom pagans scorned as unpatriotic atheists. But the tables were turned after Christianity became the official faith of the empire in the fourth century C.E. Of the two extremes in Christian theological thinking about Jews—the hatred of people like John Chrysostom and the qualified tolerance of Augustine—the legal status of the Jews tended to reflect the more tolerant attitude until the eleventh century, when the crusades brought an entirely new aspect to the relations between Jews and Christians.

In 438 all current laws were unified in the Theodosian Code (named for the emperors Theodosius I and II). Under the code, Judaism continued to be a *religio licita*, with its own clergy, holy days, and houses of worship protected from mob attack.<sup>49</sup> However, there were some indirect proscriptions that profoundly affected Jewish freedoms. While it was illegal to disturb or damage a synagogue, Jews had to have official permission before a synagogue could be repaired.<sup>50</sup> Synagogues, unlike churches, were not regarded as places of legal asylum.<sup>51</sup> Proselytism, which the pagan empire had banned because it stirred up trouble, became legal for Christians but was banned entirely for Jews; the fact that this law was necessary suggests that Jews competed rather successfully with Christians for converts.<sup>52</sup> In 425 the empire destroyed any remaining semblance of Jewish nationalism by dissolving the institution of the patriarch, who for more than three hundred years had ruled the Jewish community in Palestine.<sup>53</sup>

In these years there developed a pattern that would hold for centuries: the Jews' best friend was the emperor, who did what he could to protect them from mob rule. Sometimes this favor was entirely misleading. For example, the emperor Julian, during his brief two year reign (361-363), was called "the Apostate" because he rejected Christianity in favor of paganism. He promised to return Jerusalem to Jewish rule in exchange for Jewish support for his invasion of Persia.<sup>54</sup> Some construction began in Jerusalem during the Jewish reoccupation (the first since 135 C.E.), but Julian was killed during the war, and soon the city was back in Roman hands.<sup>55</sup>

Some popes, too, protected Jews. Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) defended the rights granted Jews under the Theodosian Code—for example, ordering the reconstruction of synagogues destroyed by Christian mobs and opposing forced baptisms of Jews.<sup>56</sup> Yet with equal energy he observed the code's restrictions and encouraged ever-stronger efforts at conversion.

Charlemagne (768-814) appointed an official called *magister Judaeorum* ("master of the Jews") to protect Jews from attacks by the clergy, and his son Louis the Pious (814-840) declared apostolic backing to "follow divine mercy and make no distinction between faithful and infidel."<sup>57</sup> Jews were now permitted to testify against Christians in court. Jews were even allowed to prevent their slaves from being baptized by Christians.

While these improvements were welcome, by no means did they end anti-Jewish sermons and occasional popular uprisings against Jews. St. Agobard, the archbishop of Lyons (778-840), fought a nasty and unsuccessful campaign against imperial toleration. One of the major influences on later anti-Semites, Agobard once argued in a letter to another bishop that Jews are

cursed in the city and cursed in the country, cursed in their coming in and their going out. Cursed is the fruits of their loins, of their lands, of their flocks; cursed their cellars, their granaries, their shops, their food, and the crumbs of their table.<sup>58</sup>

As it turned out, this reminder of the old hard days of Chrysostom was a hint of even worse things to come.

The eleventh century was a major turning point for Jewish-Christian Relations.<sup>59</sup> Before then, reasons given by Christians for persecuting Jews fell into three general categories: first, as collective punishment for something that "they" once did, i.e. the murder of God; second, as punishment for something that "they" refused to do, i.e. convert to Christianity; third, to separate "them" from Christians. In the late eleventh century and thereafter, Christians who harassed or killed Jews continued to cite these reasons, but they also added another: Jews are to be persecuted for the devilry that they do now. Here is the acting out of the demonization of the Jews of John 8:44: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning...."

The starting point was the first crusade in 1096. This first mass Christian revival took the form of a military expedition to Palestine to attempt to win Jerusalem back from the Muslims, who had seized the city in 637. The main catalyst for the first crusade was the news of the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over Christ's tomb. Pope Urban II urged the crusade with the words "Deus volt" (God wills it).<sup>60</sup> The first crusade succeeded, and Jerusalem was conquered in 1099, only to be lost back to Islam in 1187. By 1272 a number of other crusades had been undertaken; most of them with the aim of retaking Jerusalem, but Palestine remained under Muslim rule until 1917.

The issue concerning Jews was not Jerusalem, where few Jews lived. Rather, the issue was the massacres of Jews that preceded and paralleled the first crusade and many of its successors. The chronicle of Richard of Poitiers describes the crusaders' early activities:

... before journeying to these places, they exterminated by many massacres the Jews of almost all Gaul, with the exception of those who accepted conversion. They said in effect that it was unjust to permit enemies of Christ to remain alive in their own country, when they had taken up arms to drive out the infidels abroad.<sup>61</sup>

The Jews of the Rhineland were considerably more accessible, more vulnerable, and more familiar as villains from the Christian scripture than the "exotic" Muslim enemy, and some Crusaders found it difficult to understand why one infidel should be destroyed and the other left in peace.<sup>62</sup> This is the importance of the statement attested in Jewish and Christian sources alike:

"We are marching a great distance to seek our sanctuary and to take vengeance on the Muslims. Lo and behold, there live among us Jews whose forefathers slew [Jesus] and crucified him for no cause. Let us revenge ourselves on them first and eliminate them from among the nations, so that the name of Israel no longer be remembered, or else let them be like ourselves and believe in [the Christ]."<sup>63</sup>

This last option may have been motivated by the popular belief that the battle with the armies of the Antichrist, which was beginning with the Crusade, must also include the conversion of the Jews.<sup>64</sup>

The accusations of ritual murder of Christians made against various Jewish communities beginning in the twelfth century<sup>65</sup>, preposterous as they were, charged that Jews fiendishly desecrated the host, conspired to poison Christians' wells and were responsible for the Black Death in the fourteenth century. All of these unfounded allegations caused the massacre of thousands, further contributing to the degradation of the image of the Jew.

By the end of the fifteenth century, Jews had been driven out of virtually all of Western Europe. In 1290, the Jews of England, having been completely stripped of their property, were expelled from England "permanently."<sup>66</sup> In 1391, Spanish Jews were offered the choice between death and baptism.<sup>67</sup> In 1394, Jews were expelled from France.<sup>68</sup> Germany and Italy, not being unified, could only expel Jews city by city and did so.<sup>69</sup> In 1492, Jews were expelled from Spain.<sup>70</sup> Even the *Morranos* (Jews who had accepted baptism but continued to be Jews privately while Christians publicly) were so threatened as heretics by the Spanish Inquisition that they too fled.<sup>71</sup> Many of those who remained in Europe settled in Poland, where they enjoyed relative security till the massacres of the middle seventeenth century. In 1519 (during Lent, when Jew-baiting by Christians was particularly prevalent), all the Jews were expelled on only four days' notice from Regensburg, one of the largest and oldest ghettos in Germany and the center of the Hasidic movement of the twelfth century. The instigation appears to have been a local uprising by Christian peasants against all authority, including the "idle, lecherous, and greedy" Jews.<sup>72</sup> In 1519 the bishop of Speyer said of Jews, "They are not human beings but dogs."<sup>73</sup>

It is little wonder that when an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther initiated a movement that appeared to be shattering the foundations of the universal church, Jews thought this must be a sign of better times. However, it did not take long to conclude that even the old order was preferable.<sup>74</sup>

## Martin Luther & the Protestant Reformation

The Reformation was one of the great turning points in the history of Christianity,<sup>75</sup> but made little difference for Jews. But what is its relevance to our Jewish-Christian Relations? The Reformation would appear to be an exclusively internal Christian matter.<sup>76</sup> Constantine's move to make Christianity the official religion of Rome had obvious ramifications for millions of pagans in antiquity, and the Crusade was by definition a holy war against the Muslim infidel. But the Reformation pitted Christian against Christian; why should Jews be affected at all?

In his early years as a reformer, Martin Luther denounced the typical Christian treatment of Jews and thought it was no wonder that Jews were not won over to Christianity. He expected the church of the Reformation to win the Jews as converts. When it became apparent that it would not, Luther became as violent against the Jews as Chrysostom and reached a larger audience.

In his 1543 tract, "On the Jews and Their Lies," he urged the burning of synagogues and Jewish homes, the seizing of prayer books and Talmuds, the banning of teaching by rabbis, and the end of safe-conduct passes for Jews.<sup>77</sup> In his final sermon, preached three days before his death in 1546, he declared the end of toleration: "If they turn from their blasphemies, we must gladly forgive them; but if not, we must not suffer them to remain."<sup>78</sup>

In the early days of his reform ministry, Luther's polemic was relatively tame. Not only was he hopeful for Jewish converts, but he was sufficiently aware of the failings of what he called "us wicked Christians" (including himself) to tolerate the existence of the Jews no matter



how much he might mutter about "their" hard-heartedness. In other words, as long as Luther believed that Christianity still needed reforming, he did not deny the Jews' right to exist. But all this apparent tolerance was overthrown when he came to believe that Protestantism had triumphed and that he had won over sin, that he and his followers were no longer *reforming* but rather *reformed*.<sup>79</sup> Then he felt free to unleash an anti-Jewish polemic which rivals that of John Chrysostom's homilies. "Gentle mercy will only tend to make them worse and worse, while sharp mercy will reform them but little," he wrote in the tract "On the Jews and Their Lies." "Therefore, in any case, away with them!"<sup>80</sup> Luther's attitude stands in striking contrast with the one expressed by his contemporary John Calvin when, in a sermon on Jeremiah 16:1-7, he said that the Jews only mirrored Christian rebellion against God: "when we read this passage, we appreciate that we should not condemn the Jews but ourselves."<sup>81</sup> "Luther," says one of his biographers, "no longer let God be God."<sup>82</sup> The lesson seems clear: if Christians are to tolerate Jews as Jews, Christians must understand themselves as sinners.

In the context of Christian-Jewish relations, the Reformation provides an object lesson for what can happen when one group defines the other in terms of an agenda completely alien to the other group's self-definition. The result, on both sides, was bitter disillusion and increased hostility.<sup>83</sup>

Life during the Reformation led many Jews to wonder whether there was indeed a future for Jewish life in Christendom at all. When the Ottomans were welcoming Jewish refugees, one Turkish rabbi argued that no Christian country could be safe for Jews, and that Jews who settled in a Christian land rather than in the Ottoman Empire should be considered in the category of

those who recklessly endanger their lives.<sup>84</sup> Despite these reversals, however, in the long run the impact of the Reformation was not altogether bad.

Historians agree that part of the enduring, though unexpected, legacy of the Reformation was the birth of that cluster of ideas that includes freedom of conscience, religious tolerance, and the separation of church and state.<sup>85</sup> When these ideas became enshrined in the institutions of democratic governments, Jews, unwittingly, were major beneficiaries.<sup>86</sup> The Reformation, together with the Enlightenment, was instrumental in laying the foundations for a new kind of society in which Jews, Catholics, and various Protestant denominations could live together on an equal basis. Yet in Europe, at least, this society would have to withstand the challenge of a demonic twentieth-century ideology that would appropriate the worst elements of Luther's anti-Judaism and push them to extremes that even Luther had never imagined.

## Enlightenment

The church's language of intolerance has influenced any Christian who has paid even the least bit of attention to the teachings about the life and especially the death of Jesus. How hard it can be even for tolerant men and women to eradicate from their minds the anger that they were taught in their youth. If it is true that we never forget the prayers we learned as children, then it is equally true that we never forget the prejudices that accompanied those prayers.

However, if historic Christianity's involvement in anti-Judaism is so deep, how then do we explain the fact that the very worst persecution of the Jews occurred not under the medieval church but under a nation-state in the rational twentieth century? If the roots of anti-Judaism lie in the church's soil, in the centuries that we like to think of as modern, they are fertilized by a tradition that is decidedly anti-church: the great wave of rationalism and humanism called the enlightenment.

No doubt, the enlightenment did away with many of the ancient prejudices and brought a new age of liberation and hope. One of the liberators was himself a Jew, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Spinoza was excommunicated by his synagogue in Amsterdam for claiming that not only was there no validity for the observance of the Torah, there was even less reason to hold religion as a foundation of human history.<sup>87</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, French philosophers inspired by Spinoza were declaring that a new age of reason had come to eradicate superstition, prejudice, and blind faith. Practically this meant the end of the domination of the church in daily affairs. The ruling powers would be nations governed by the reasoning powers of free human beings.

That agenda would seem to be entirely beneficial. On its surface, it does away with the superstitions about Jews that were so widespread in the Middle Ages, and it encourages individual freedom. Unfortunately, this was far from the case. When it dealt with Jews, the rationalism of the enlightenment had a dark side. No less than the church fathers and the crusaders, the philosophers set an absolute standard of what they perceived as being ideal behavior, and they expected all people, whether Christians, Jews, or pagans, to meet it. This universalism allowed no room for particularisms; all people were meant to drop their unique group identities and conform.

The humanists said that the Jews simply did not meet the standard because Jews were different. Instead of assimilating, Jews continued to hold themselves separate in dress, in language, and especially in religious practice. In these beliefs, the humanists held that anybody who was different was automatically untrustworthy. Difference meant disloyalty. Inspired by the classical call for conformity, the philosophers turned to Spinoza for contemporary justification of their attack on Jewish differences. Echoing an old anti-Semitic argument that the Jews were responsible for their own degradation, Spinoza claimed that Jews invited the world's contempt by continuing to separate themselves in appearance and customs.<sup>88</sup>

The neo-classicists of the eighteenth century accused Jews of disloyalty to absolute values of culture. While they claimed to be rational, the language of their criticism was purely polemic. Denis Diderot (1713-1784) accused the Jews of lacking "any tightness of thought, any exactness of reasoning or precision of style, in a word, any of that which ought to characterize a

healthy philosophy. One finds among them ... all the faults that mark an ignorant and superstitious people."<sup>89</sup> Going even further, Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778) produced a contradictory attack on the Jews that saw them as both weak and strong at the same time.<sup>90</sup> On the one hand, they were "a small, new, ignorant, crude people" whose ancestors had brought nothing of worth to civilization. Yet on the other hand, he asserted that they had a reservoir of immense power and danger, being born "with a raging fanaticism in their hearts, just as the Bretons and the Germans are born with blond hair." Jews, he went on, were "fated to be deadly to the human race."<sup>91</sup> Voltaire's schizophrenic polemic foreshadows the modern anti-Semite, who simultaneously sees the Jew as both worthless and threatening.<sup>92</sup>

The Christian absolutism of John Chrysostom and Martin Luther was replaced by a pagan absolutism. There were very profound and dangerous differences in the ways in which the old and new schools of thought regarded Judaism. Before, the Christians had attacked the Jews for something that "they" did: "they" poisoned wells and resisted conversion; above all, "they" crucified the Lord." Now, however, the humanists focused their attention on who the Jews were: "they" were a fanatical, unreasoning people whose very character was one of opposition to the new, certain truth of enlightenment. By being different from the run of Gentile society—e.g. by living in the communities of their ghettos, by observing the laws of their scripture and Talmud, by dressing in their own way and speaking their own language—all the Jews, in the eyes of the secular humanists, automatically qualified themselves not for respect but for contempt. In a phrase, Jews were disloyal to the new order of nationalistic, humanistic conformity.

Despite deep prejudices, the enlightenment and the revolutions following in its wake led to the emancipation in the nineteenth century of many European Jews and others from the serfdom that had been imposed on them since the middle ages. The Jews of France were freed in the early 1790s,<sup>93</sup> those of central Europe in 1848, and those of the Balkan countries in 1878. These emancipations were great events, but liberation came at a heavy price. In the name of their new, rational, humanistic, and egalitarian age, the liberators demanded that the Jews assimilate and abandon the special community customs and identities that had sustained Jewish peoplehood in the ghettos through all the years of official persecution. Even those who pointed out that the Jews' apparent debasement was due mostly to traditional anti-Jewish attitudes argued that in modern nations society must "raise the Jews to the level of educated and civilized people" and "develop among them the germ of social virtue."<sup>94</sup> The nationalists denied that Jewish culture in itself, apart from nationalism, had any redeeming features. Therefore, identity would be recognized by nationality. One could be French or Jewish, German or Jewish; but one could not be both. Since many Jews either wished to remain both or knew no other way to live than in the traditional Jewish manner, they were suspected of disloyalty.

The only place where enlightend ideas about Judaism did not take hold was Russia. The descendants of the residents of the "Pale of Settlement,"<sup>95</sup> the provinces that Russia seized from Poland in the eighteenth century, remained enslaved or, at minimum, degraded. After the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, a series of anti-Semitic riots called pogroms broke out. The government established a Jewish policy of thirds: one-third of the large Jewish population would be converted; one-third would be neglected until they died, and the remaining

third would be allowed to emigrate. Many if not most of the emigrees fled across the Atlantic Ocean to the next way station in the Diaspora, the United States.

- <sup>1</sup> See especially J.D.G. (ed.), *Jews and Christians: The Partings of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (WUNT, 66; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992); & *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991).
- <sup>2</sup> Bayme, Steve. *Understanding Jewish History: Texts and Commentaries*. (KTAV Publishing House, Inc in association with the American Jewish Committee: USA, 1997) 106-107.
- <sup>3</sup> For further discussion, see James D.G. Dunn, *The Status and Contribution of Paul in The Future of Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, edited by Dan Cohn-Sherbok. (The Edwin Mellen Press: Toronto, 1999) 169-182.
- <sup>4</sup> Galatians 1: 15-16
- <sup>5</sup> Porter, Stanley *Was Paul a Good Jew: Fundamental Issues in a Current Debate in Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*, edited by Stanley Porter and Brook W.R. Pearson. (T & T Clark International: New York, 2000) 148-149
- <sup>6</sup> Rousmaniere, John. *A Bridge to Dialogue: The Story of Jewish-Christian Relations*. (Paulist Press: New York, 1991) 12
- <sup>7</sup> Galatians 1:13
- <sup>8</sup> Those who became known as Christians were originally called a number of different things, including followers of the Way, disciples, etc. Acts 11:26 records that it was at Antioch that these people were called Christians, an appellation that appears to have caught on within and without the group (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.64; 1 Pet. 4.16). Whether this is what Christians called themselves or were called by others remains a point of dispute, although E. A. Judge has made a convincing case for this being an early sign of the Romans distinguishing between Jews and Christians, in 'Judaism and the Rise of Christianity: A Roman Perspective', *TynBul* 45.2 (1994), pp. 355-68, esp. pp. 363-64.
- <sup>9</sup> Acts 9:3-5
- <sup>10</sup> Porter, Stanley 148.
- <sup>11</sup> Rousmaniere, John 12.
- <sup>12</sup> Matthews, Warren. 335.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. 12. Also see discussion in Matthews, Warren. *World Religions*. (West Publishing Company: Minneapolis/St. Paul, 1995) 335-341.
- <sup>14</sup> Matthews, Warren 335.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. 335-336.
- <sup>16</sup> One example of Jesus' midrash on the law of Moses comes from Matt. 5:21-22: "'You shall not kill; ...' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment..."
- <sup>17</sup> Matthews, Warren. 335-337.
- <sup>18</sup> Bayme, Steven 107
- <sup>19</sup> Romans 10:4
- <sup>20</sup> Rousmaniere, John. 14.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. 14.
- <sup>23</sup> Bayme, Steven 110.
- <sup>24</sup> For further discussion on Tolerance, see Selgiman, Adam B. *Modest Claims: Dialogues and Essays on Tolerance and Tradition* (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2004)
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid 26.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. 26.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid 26 and Bayme, Steven 106.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid 26.
- <sup>29</sup> Brook W.R. Pearson and Stanley Porter, "Ancient Understandings of the Christian-Jewish Split" in *Was Paul a Good Jew: Fundamental Issues in a Current Debate in Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*, edited by Stanley Porter and Brook W.R. Pearson. (T & T Clark International; New York, 2000) 47-51.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. 27
- <sup>31</sup> Matthews, Warren. Page 338.
- <sup>32</sup> Walker, Williston, *History of the Christian Church* (Simon & Schuster; New York, 1985) 82.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. 95.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid. 122-124.



- <sup>35</sup> University of Pennsylvania. Dept. of History: *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, (University of Pennsylvania Press; Philadelphia, 1897-1907), Vol 4:, 1, 28-30
- <sup>36</sup> Matthews, Warren. 340.
- <sup>37</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L., *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation* (Harper; San Francisco, 1984)
- <sup>38</sup> Walker, Williston, *History of the Christian Church* (Simon & Schuster; New York, 1985) 134-136.
- <sup>39</sup> Chazan, Robert "Christian-Jewish Interactions Over the Ages" in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, et.al., eds., (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 2000)10.
- <sup>40</sup> A Jew who converted to Christianity. He was writing around 190 C.E.
- <sup>41</sup> First Church Historian. 263-339. Wrote *Ecclesiastical History*.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*. (Putnam: New York, 1926) Book II, chap. 23.
- <sup>43</sup> Rousmaniere, John. 48.
- <sup>44</sup> John Chrysostom, paraphrased from Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*. (Paulist Press; A Stimulus Book, New York, 1985) 50-52.
- <sup>45</sup> St. Augustine was bishop of Hippo in North Africa and one of the most influential theologians in the history of Christianity.
- <sup>46</sup> St. Augustine, as quoted in Edward H. Flannery, page 53.
- <sup>47</sup> Marc Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations*. (SCM Press; London, 1989) 10.
- <sup>48</sup> Chazan, Barry 115-117.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid. 117
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid. 118
- <sup>56</sup> Walker, Williston, *History of the Christian Church* (Simon & Schuster; New York, 1985) 212-217.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid. Edward Flannery, page 83.
- <sup>58</sup> Malcolm Hay, *The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism*. (New York: Freedom Library/ADL, 1981) 34.
- <sup>59</sup> Marc Saperstein, 16.
- <sup>60</sup> Dana Carleton Munro, "The Speech of Pope Urban II at Clermont, 1095," *The American Historical Review*, 11, 1906, 231-242
- <sup>61</sup> Leon Polikav, *The History of Anti-Semitism: From the Time of Christ to the Court Jews*, Richard Howard, trans. (Schocken; New York, 1974) 42.
- <sup>62</sup> Marc Saperstein 17.
- <sup>63</sup> This argument is attributed to the Christians in all three Hebrew chronicles of the First Crusade. For a similar statement in a Christian text, see *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, ed. John Benton, New York 1970, 134-5. The Hebrew chronicles are available in English translation, together with annotation and analysis, in Shlomo Eidelberg, *The Jews and the Crusaders*, Madison 1977, and Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, Berkeley, CA 1987. Cf. also Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews* Volume 4, Philadelphia 1957, 89-116, and Ivan Marcus, "From Politics to Martyrdom," *Prooftexts* 2, 1982, 40-52.
- <sup>64</sup> See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, New York 1970, 67-70.
- <sup>65</sup> Thomas of Monmouth wrote *The Life and Passion of the Martyr St. William of Norwich*, which told the story of how Jews kidnapped William, tortured and killed him as a ritual enactment of the crucifixion.
- <sup>66</sup> Marc Saperstein 25.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid. 27.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*, James I. Porter, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 95.
- <sup>70</sup> Marc Saperstein, 25.
- <sup>71</sup> Steven Bayme 213-219
- <sup>72</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, 77.
- <sup>73</sup> Eric W. Gritsch and Marc H. Tannenbaum 4.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>75</sup> Marc Saperstein 26.  
<sup>76</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 33-35.  
<sup>78</sup> Eric W. Gritsch and Marc H. Tannenbaum, *Luther and the Jews*. (New York: Lutheran Council in the USA, 1983) 1-2, 7.  
<sup>79</sup> Heiko A. Oberman 118-124.  
<sup>80</sup> Eric W. Gritsch and Marc H. Tannenbaum, 8.  
<sup>81</sup> Heiko A. Oberman 144-145.  
<sup>82</sup> Eric W. Gritsch and Marc H. Tannenbaum, 8.  
<sup>83</sup> Marc Saperstein 36.  
<sup>84</sup> Marc Saperstein, "Martyrs, Merchants and Rabbis: Jewish Communal Conflict as Reflected in the Responsa on the Boycott of Ancona," *Jewish Social Studies* 43, 1981, 215-28.  
<sup>85</sup> S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. (SRHJ: Philadelphia, 1952). 13:292-6  
<sup>86</sup> Marc Saperstein 37  
<sup>87</sup> Steven Bayme 218-219  
<sup>88</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>89</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) 306  
<sup>90</sup> Steven Bayme 271-273  
<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 311-312  
<sup>92</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, 312  
<sup>93</sup> Steven Bayme 274  
<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 334  
<sup>95</sup> Howard M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*. (United States: Vintage Books; 1990) 75

## The Holocaust

As we have observed, relations between Jews and Christians have been tenuous at best and have tended to swing widely between contempt and tolerance. It is due, in part, to Christianity's ancient tensions about its identity in comparison with the older-sibling faith that provided all its founders, much of its scripture, and many of its beliefs - but whose adherents still refused to capitulate to the new message.

For Christians, and more so for the Jews, the Holocaust, or *Shoah*,<sup>1</sup> is of overwhelming significance. The destruction of six million Jews by the Nazis was a massive systematic genocidal assault. Numbers of Christians have likewise stressed the centrality of this tragedy. How can one make sense of this modern calamity? From both the Christian and Jewish sides there have been a variety of theological responses. According to some Jewish thinkers, the Jews died in the concentration camps for the sins of the non-Jewish world as God's suffering servant and sacrificial lamb.<sup>2</sup> A second Jewish approach is to see in the death camps a manifestation of God's will that his chosen people survive the genocidal assault. Another Jewish response is to reject any kind of explanation; rather, the events of the Holocaust are seen as part of God's inscrutable plan.<sup>3</sup>

Paralleling such Jewish speculation a number of Christian thinkers have formulated theories grounded in Christian theology. One of the most important Christian developments in this regard has been the desire to reinterpret the doctrine of divine

impassibility. For these writers, to recognize God in the crucified Christ means to grasp the Trinitarian history of God and to understand oneself and this whole world with Auschwitz as existing in the history of God. God suffers by us and with us.<sup>4</sup> While most Jews would have difficulties with such a Christological approach to the Holocaust, these theories illustrate the current Christian sensitivity to the religious perplexities of the Holocaust. No longer is the Church prepared to stand by silently as the Jewish people endure persecution and death; instead, many Christian theologians are acutely aware of the horrors of the death camps and the Church's share of responsibility for these atrocities.<sup>5</sup>

A certain ambivalence is inherent in the relationship between Jews and Christians. When this ambivalence has been denied, as by the political diatribes of Chrysostom and Martin Luther, there has been a narrowing of the Christian message to only those beliefs that serve as debating points against the other faith. But when this ambivalence has been acknowledged and addressed by theologians such as Paul, John Calvin, and the Roman Catholic Rosemary Ruether and the Episcopalian Paul van Buren, there has been not only tolerance of Jews but a confident, full opening up of Christianity to what Ruether, in *Faith and Fratricide*, has called "the healing and liberating word that I have heard emerge from the Christian tradition, once freed of its distorted consciousness."<sup>6</sup>

The extremes of the Jewish-Christian relationship were reached during the twentieth century. Within a single lifetime at the end of the twentieth century, the horror of the Nazi final solution occurred, as did the creation of a Jewish state, and a vigorous attempt

by Christians and Jews to bring tolerance and understanding to Jewish-Christian relations<sup>7</sup>.

For many Christians, the shock of the holocaust's extent led to a transformation of attitudes about Jews and Judaism. In Germany, as clergy who had supported Hitler were being hauled before denazification panels in the years immediately following World War II, survivors of the German Confessing Church published a corporate statement of guilt for the part they had played in the crimes of Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup> Three years later the World Council of Churches (W.C.C) confessed, "We have failed to fight with all our strength the age-old disorder which anti-Semitism represents. The churches in the past have helped to foster an image of the Jews as the sole enemies of Christ which has contributed to anti-Judaism in the secular world."<sup>9</sup> In 1961 the W.C.C. declared its opposition to the ancient *deicide libel*.<sup>10</sup> In the following years Jewish and Christian clergy exchanged pulpits, formed local and national interfaith associations, and took the first steps toward sincere and often admiring evaluations of each other's traditions. Martin Buber, in a critique of Pauline influences on Christianity published in 1951, declared, "From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother."<sup>11</sup>

Stimulating the conversation was activity by a number of Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution who refused to allow the world to forget the terrible events that had occurred. This was the first time Jews had the *chutzpah* to condemn publicly Christians since the fourth century. The most valuable of these witnesses was Jules Isaac, an historian who had served as French minister of education and who, during the German

occupation, lost his family and nearly his own life to the Nazi killing machine. He devoted the remainder of his days to discovering and publicizing the causes of anti-Judaism. In 1960, during a brief audience at the Vatican, Isaac convinced Pope John XXIII of the importance of the issue. It was placed on the agenda of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>12</sup> This was not, however, the first demonstration of Roman Catholic concern after the war. In 1949 Pope Pius XII changed vernacular translations of the Good Friday phrase *pro perfideles infidels*; Jews were now described as "unbelieving" or "unfaithful" rather than by the more pejorative and incorrect translation, "perfidious." Ten years later John XXIII eliminated the Latin phrase altogether from the prayer.<sup>13</sup>

But the watershed event was the Vatican II debate in the early 1960s and its resulting document, *Nostra Aetate*, which brought the issue of Christian attitudes about Judaism to a new level of serious public awareness. *Nostra Aetate* was envisioned and written despite intense pressure from Catholic conservatives, Arab-Muslims, and Orthodox Christian representatives who, for theological and political reasons, feared any change in the church's official attitude toward Jews and Israel. Augustine Cardinal Bea and others who sympathized with a shift in church policy succeeded on October 28, 1965 in winning the council's approval of a statement favorable to tolerance. The statement is contained in Section IV of the council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.<sup>14</sup>

The statement "commends mutual understanding and esteem" between Christians and Jews, rejects anti-Semitism, and specifically states that God has neither rejected nor

cursed the Jews. Most importantly, the statement proclaims that guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus "cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today."<sup>15</sup> Many concerned with the issue would have much preferred that "deicide" or another traditional term be used in this sentence, but compromises had to be made in order to win the council's approval. While many Jews were encouraged by these developments, some were suspicious. History seemed to provide little reason to trust Christians' good intentions. What was needed was action.

Tolerance did not spring up overnight in the Roman Catholic or any other church. Nevertheless, *Nostra Aetate* inspired many Christians to reexamine their beliefs and traditions and to act on them. Parishes and denominations, advised at times by Jewish consultants, established committees to guide them in an improved portrayal of Jews. Sunday school teaching aids were rewritten, catechisms were changed, courses on Judaism were taught in parochial schools, and seminary curricula were examined.

### *Nostra Aetate* & The Catholic Church's Response

The Holocaust clearly shocked leaders and theologians of the Christian world into re-examining the thinking that made this genocide happen. The decades since the Holocaust have seen the relations between Christians and Jews radically change. The result of this re-examination was a reversal in Christian theology in many Christian movements, largely reversing the 1900-year-old Christian understanding of Judaism.

In many ways, the Catholic Church has led the reexamination of Christian views of Judaism since the Holocaust. In October, 1965, in the statement *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council declared:

"Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. ... God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues.... Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecution, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone."<sup>16</sup>

*Nostra Aetate* was followed by another Vatican document called *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, Nostra Aetate, No. 4*. This document was intended "to give ideas (on) how to start on a local level... the movement



of the universal church in dialogue with Judaism."<sup>17</sup> Consider its comment on Jewish-Christian Relations:

"To tell the truth, such relations as there have been between Jew and Christian have scarcely ever risen above the level of monologue. From now on, real dialogue must be established. Dialogue pre-supposes that each side wishes to know the other, and wishes to increase and deepen its knowledge of the other. It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all respect for his faith and his religious convictions."<sup>18</sup>

The next major Vatican document on Jewish-Christian Relations is the *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*.<sup>19</sup> Among other things, this document acknowledged that the New Testament and its Gospels:

"are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work ... Hence it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish communities. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus."<sup>20</sup>

Beyond official Vatican statements, there are also the important personal statements from Pope John Paul II. While speaking at his historic visit to the Rome synagogue in 1986, he declared:

"The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers, and in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.... it is not lawful to say that the Jews are 'repudiated or cursed,' as if this were taught or could be deduced from the sacred Scriptures of the Old or the New Testament."<sup>21</sup>

Significantly, only three decades before this visit, Catholics were not allowed to even visit a synagogue, much less pray in one! At the 50th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1993, the Pope declared:

"As Christians and Jews following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the world. This is a common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us Christians and Jews to be first a blessing to each other."<sup>22</sup>

In March, 1998, the Vatican issued a statement, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*. Although it did not, in the eyes of many Jewish observers, go far enough in acknowledging the role of the Church during the war, it was an important step.

"At the end of this millennium, the Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuva*), since, as members of the church, we are linked to the sins as well as to the merits of all her children.... We pray that our sorrow for the tragedy which the Jewish people has suffered in our century will lead to a new relationship with the Jewish people. We wish to turn awareness of past sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect, as befits those who adore the one Creator and Lord and have a common father in faith, Abraham."<sup>23</sup>

In the year 2000, Pope John Paul II inserted the following words, from a special penitential service at St. Peter's Basilica<sup>24</sup> on a note which he inserted into a crack in the *Kotel* or Western Wall in Jerusalem:

"God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your name to the nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who, in the course of history, have caused these children of yours to suffer. In asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."<sup>25</sup>

In December 29, 2000, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote a Christmas-season reflection for *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of the Vatican, titled "The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas."<sup>26</sup> The future Pope Benedict XVI expressed remorse for the anti-Jewish attitudes that persisted in the church throughout history, leading to "deplorable acts of violence" and the loss of six million Jews and others in the Holocaust. He said:

"Even if the most recent, loathsome experience of the Shoah (Holocaust) was perpetrated in the name of an anti-Christian ideology, which tried to strike the Christian faith at its Abrahamic roots in the people of Israel, it cannot be denied that a certain insufficient resistance to this atrocity on the part of Christians can be explained by an inherited anti-Judaism present in the hearts of not a few Christians."<sup>27</sup>

Since the outset of his papacy, Pope Benedict XVI has made a series of important gestures toward the Jewish community — including, most recently, his first official meeting with community representatives at the Vatican. There, in a June 9, 2005 meeting with 25 representatives from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, the official Jewish communal body for relations with the Holy See, the new pope asserted that Catholic-Jewish relations would remain one of his top priorities.

## Responses from Other Christian Bodies

The statements of the Pope and the Second Vatican Council are echoed by other Christian bodies, including the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the United Church of Christ, the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church and the Anglican Communion.<sup>28</sup> For example, in 1987, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted a statement affirming that "Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity," and that "God has not rejected the Jewish people." The declaration included the following words:

"The Christian Church has throughout much of its history denied God's continuing covenantal relationship with the Jewish people ... This denial has led to outright rejection of the Jewish people ... and intolerable violence ... Faced with this history from which we as Christians cannot, and must not, disassociate ourselves, we ask for God's forgiveness....

FURTHER, the Sixteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ expresses its determination to seek out and to affirm the consequences of this understanding of the continuing divine covenant with the Jewish people in the Church's theological statements, its liturgical practices, its hymnody, its educational work, and its witness before the world."<sup>29</sup>

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on April 18, 1994, adopted the following language in its statement on Lutheran-Jewish relations:

"In the spirit of truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also (Martin) Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews. As did many of Luther's own contemporaries in the sixteenth century, we reject his violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our day. ... we pray for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community."<sup>30</sup>

In 1999, Canada's largest Protestant denomination, the United Church of Canada, called upon its members to stop attempting to convert Jews to Christianity and to recognize that Christianity is neither superior to nor a replacement for Judaism, in part, the statement said:

"The United Church of Canada

**a) *acknowledges and does not disassociate itself from responsibility for:***

- a history of anti-Judaism and antisemitism within Christianity as a whole;
- a history of interpretation of New Testament texts which has often failed to appreciate the context within Judaism from which these texts emerged, resulting in deeply-rooted anti-Judaic misinterpretation;

- difficulty in understanding the significance for Judaism of being, at once, a religion, a people, a nation, and a covenant;
- misunderstanding and insensitivity with respect to the importance of Shoah (i.e. Holocaust) and land for Jews;
- recognition of antisemitism as an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ;

*b) rejects and repudiates:*

- all teaching of a theology of contempt toward Judaism;
- belief in the displacement or replacement of the covenant of God with Israel;
- supersessionist understandings of God's action in Christ and in the Church;
- belief that Judaism, either historically or currently, can be understood from knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures alone;
- all mission and proselytism seeking to convert Jews to Christianity;

*c) affirms:*

- belief that the covenant of God with Israel is irrevocable;
- the uniqueness for Christianity of the relationship with Judaism;
- belief that both Judaism and Christianity, as living faiths, have developed significantly from a common rootage;
- belief that the establishment of a truly respectful Jewish-Christian relationship will illuminate relationships of respect and cooperation with all other world faiths;
- the great opportunity and potential for growth in Christian self-understanding that now exists through closer dialogue, openness and respect for Judaism;

- commitment to work together with Jewish groups in advocacy of social justice, peace, reconciliation and human rights, and integrity of creation, in mutual respect, shared hope, and cooperation,<sup>31</sup>

In a similar vein, the following language was adopted by the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church (USA):

"Christians and Jews are bound to God through biblical covenants that are eternally valid. As Christians, we stand firm in our belief that Jesus was sent by God as the Christ to redeem all people, and that in Christ the biblical covenant has been made radically new. While church tradition has taught that Judaism has been superseded by Christianity as the "new Israel," we do not believe that earlier covenantal relationships have been invalidated or that God has abandoned Jewish partners in covenant. We believe that just as God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant in Jesus Christ, likewise God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant with the Jewish people... Both Jews and Christians are bound to God in covenant, with no covenantal relationship invalidated by any other. Though Christians and Jews have different understandings of the covenant of faith, we are mysteriously bound to one another through our covenantal relationships with the one God and creator of us all... It is our belief that Jews and Christians are co-workers and companion pilgrims who have made the God of Israel known throughout the world. Through common service and action, we jointly proclaim the God we know."<sup>32</sup>



The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in its call for *Yom HaShoah* observance in the year 2000, declared:

"Therefore, be it resolved that the 2000 General Conference calls The United Methodist Church to contrition and repentance of its complicity in the long history of persecution of the Jewish people..."<sup>33</sup>

Responding to the publication of *Dabru Emet*, a Jewish response written in 2000 in response to numerous statements by various Christian denominations on Jewish-Christian relations, the Committee on Christian Unity of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. stated in part:

"We recognize the generosity and hope required for these (Jewish) scholars to declare that Christian faith is a valid way for gentiles to know and serve the God of Israel. To our shame, over history our Jewish neighbors have had good reason to see the primary agenda for dialogue in simple questions of Jewish survival and safety in societies dominated by Christians. With the authors of *Dabru Emet*, we wish to believe that a new day of broader conversation and mutual religious appreciation has begun."<sup>34</sup>

Beyond this, the following statement was issued at Strasbourg on April 22, 2001 by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences:

"We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. Our faith teaches us that our Jewish sisters and brothers 'are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11.28-29). And 'to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah' (Rom 9.4-5). We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation."<sup>35</sup>

This list of statements by the various Christian Churches does not, of course reflect the view of each and every movement. For example the Southern Baptist Convention in 1996 declared:

"BE IT RESOLVED, That we, the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 11-13, 1996, reaffirm that we are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we recommit ourselves to prayer, especially for the salvation of the Jewish people as well as for the

salvation of "every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9);  
and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, That we direct our energies and resources  
toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people."<sup>36</sup>

It must be noted, however that the trend in Christian attitude toward Judaism is clear. As the Catholic theologian John Pawlikowski observes, the following are areas of common agreement of most recent Christian theologians:

1. "that the Christ Event did not invalidate the Jewish faith perspective;
2. that Christianity is not superior to Judaism, nor is it the fulfillment of Judaism as previously maintained;
3. that the Sinai covenant is in principle as crucial to Christian faith expression as the covenant in Christ; and
4. that Christianity needs to reincorporate dimensions from its original Jewish context."<sup>37</sup>

Pawlikowski's position has been substantially amplified by a statement in September 2002 issued by the Christian Scholar Group on Christian-Jewish Relations. The statement, called "A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People" presents 10 key points of agreement.<sup>38</sup>

1. God's covenant with the Jewish people endures forever
2. Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a faithful Jew.
3. Ancient rivalries must not define Christian-Jewish relations today.

4. Judaism is a living faith, enriched by many centuries of development.
5. The Bible both connects and separates Jews and Christians.
6. Affirming God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people has consequences for Christian understandings of salvation.
7. Christians should not target Jews for conversion.
8. Christian worship that teaches contempt for Judaism dishonors God.
9. We affirm the importance of the land of Israel for the life of the Jewish people.
10. Christians should work with Jews for the healing of the world.

It is important to underline how truly revolutionary this "post supersessionist" change in Christian theology is. As Rabbi Irving Greenberg put it: "Any religion that can self-critique so powerfully shows incredible vitality."<sup>39</sup> He compares the Christian churches' ability to comment on its history to the Hebrew prophets' denunciation of Biblical Israel.

I believe the sentiments cited above hold important implications for Christian-Jewish Relations. The Vatican Notes say "The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without a trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps the continuity of Christianity and Islam should be so interpreted by Jews.

## Jewish Responses

A number of Jewish thinkers, in recent decades, have addressed the question of Jewish-Christian Relations. The recent book, *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, is an excellent example with thirty-four scholarly and thoughtful essays on Jewish-Christian relations from both traditions' perspectives.<sup>41</sup> While it is well beyond the scope of this thesis to capture all modern thinking on this subject, it is important to highlight three notable examples.

1. **Irving Greenberg:** An Orthodox Rabbi and a leader in promoting intra-Jewish understanding among the movements, Rabbi Greenberg has made a number of important observations about Jewish views of Christianity. Speaking of the world after the *Shoah*, he cautions that "Jews have a vested interest in Christianity's existence. Modern values created a milieu as dangerous as, and perhaps more dangerous than, Christianity at its worst. In pure secularity, humans appoint themselves God and thereby become the devil."<sup>42</sup>

He suggests that Jesus was a "failed messiah" rather than a false messiah, the former being "one who has the right values but did not attain the final goal" in the manner of Bar Kochba.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting on the redemption of Judaism inherent in the State of Israel, he asserts: "Confirmed now in its resumed redemption and responding to the Holocaust's challenge not to put down others, Judaism must explore the possibility that through the covenant, nurtured and given birth through its body, God has called the Gentiles."<sup>44</sup>

Greenberg speaks of other valid revelations to other peoples and notes that "throughout the Bible and thereafter, there are echoes of valid revelations to other peoples and traces of might redemptive acts bestowed on other nations (Gen. 14,18ff; Num. 22-24; Is. 20, 21,23; Jer. 1:4-10). Suffice to say that at the end of days when the whole world is redeemed, other nations will have contributed their portion and will share in it fully (Is. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-5; Is. 57:6-7)."<sup>45</sup> He speaks of the revelation to the Christians as not being broadcast to the Jews, as uniquely intended for its own audience. This signal "would not be heard by the bulk of Jewry, not because of spiritual deafness or arrogant hard-heartedness, but because the signal was not intended for them."<sup>46</sup> In summary: "Christianity is a divinely inspired attempt to bring the covenant of *tikkun olam* to a wider circle of Gentiles. God intended that Judaism and Christianity both work for the perfection of the world (the kingdom of God). Together, both religions do greater justice to the dialectical tensions of covenant than either religion can do alone."<sup>47</sup> Our task is to learn "how to serve God as a favorite child, one of many favorite children! What parent will not affirm the deepest truth: I love each of my children as my favorite, and my love is not exhausted by that fact."<sup>48</sup>

2. *Emet ve-Emunah*: In 1988, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism issued its statement of faith, "*Emet ve-Emunah*." The following is an excerpt from the statement:

"As Conservative Jews, we acknowledge without apology the many debts which Jewish religion and civilization owe to the nations of the world. We eschew triumphalism with respect to other ways of serving God.

Maimonides believed that other monotheistic faiths— Christianity and

Islam—serve to spread knowledge of, and devotion to, the God and the Torah of Israel throughout the world. Many modern thinkers, both Jewish and Gentile, have noted that God may well have seen fit to enter covenants with many nations ...

Theological humility requires us to recognize that although we have but one God, God has more than one nation. Our tradition explicitly recognizes that God entered into a covenant with Adam and Eve, and later with Noah and his family as well as His special covenant with Abraham and the great revelation to Israel at Sinai. It is part of our mission to understand, respect, and live with the other nations of the world, to discern those truths in their cultures from which we can learn, and to share with them the truths that we have come to know."<sup>49</sup>

3. *Dabru Emet*. In September 2000, the editors of *Christianity in Jewish Terms* published a statement in the *New York Times* responding to the numerous statements of Christian churches. Signed by a long list of Jewish scholars, the statement endorsed eight key points:

1. Jews and Christians worship the same God.
2. Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book - the Bible (what Jews call "*Tanach*" and Christians call "Old Testament").
3. Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
4. Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
5. Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.

6. The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.
7. A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.
8. Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.<sup>50</sup>

Edward Flannery, former Director of Catholic-Jewish relations for the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island elaborated:

“Throughout the last thirty-plus years, we Christians and Jews have approached each other in a mind-to-mind embrace of mutual understanding, and, looking back, the results are epoch making. That is good news. The not-so-good news is that today our two peoples are not fully reconciled. However, the best news is that, looking ahead, we are intent on becoming so.”<sup>51</sup>

The task ahead is, in my view, (and to spelled out in the chapter ahead), to make room in our theologies for the “Other” as people or servants of God.



<sup>1</sup> Some Jews disapprove of the term Holocaust since the word has an etymological origin in the concept of a burnt offering to God. For them, the Hebrew word *Shoah* meaning "utter destruction," is more appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Kirsch elucidates this theology in *We Christians and Jews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 73-77.

<sup>3</sup> Fackenheim, Emil, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1978)

<sup>4</sup> Christian Theologian Gregory Baum writes about this in *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas de Lange, "Jesus Christ and Auschwitz," *The Future of Jewish-Christian Dialogue*. Cohn-Sherbock, Dan, ed., (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) 9-20

<sup>6</sup> Ruether, Rosemary. *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1974)

<sup>7</sup> *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and *Dabru Emet* (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Fey, Howard, ed., *The History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1948-1968* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986)

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (Cleveland: World, 1968), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Introduction" *The Future of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* op. cit., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1951) 12.

<sup>12</sup> Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: McGraw-Hill), 1965.

<sup>13</sup> This was explained during an address by Cardinal William H. Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore. The address was delivered on July 2, 2003 at the annual meeting of the International Council of Christians and Jews in Utrecht, the Netherlands. [Cited December 21, 2005] The text of the address can be found at:

[http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/keeler\\_ICCJ\\_2003.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/keeler_ICCJ_2003.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Croner, Helga, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish - Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents*, (London, New York: Stimulus Books, 1977) 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Vatican II on the Jews, *Nostra Aetate*, (n. 4), October 1965, as cited in Helga Croner, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York: Stimulus Books, 1977), 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, *In Our Time: the Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>19</sup> June 24, 1985

<sup>20</sup> *In Our Time: the Flowering of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue* op. cit., 46.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki, editors *Pope John Paul II, Sacred Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 63.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>23</sup> Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics Remember the Holocaust* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 54.

<sup>24</sup> March 12, 2000

<sup>25</sup> The Vatican, *Prayer at the Wall. L'Osservatore Romano* Weekly Edition in English, 29 March 2000, page 10.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas" in *L'Osservatore Romano*. 29 December, 2000

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> A.J. Rudin, *A Jewish Guide to Interreligious Relations* (The American Jewish Committee, 1996) 5.

<sup>29</sup> *The Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and the Jewish Community* [ro35uccj.v2] a document published by United Church of Christ, General Synod XVI, June 30, 1987, Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>30</sup> Ditmanson, Harold H., *Stepping-Stones to Further Jewish-Lutheran Relationships: Key Lutheran Statements*. (USA: Augsburg Fortress Pub, 1990)

- <sup>31</sup> *Canadian Church Urges End to Proselytizing of Jews* in the document "Bearing Faithful Witness" by the United Church-Jewish Relations Today Committee. Authorized by The United Church of Canada by the 36th General Council, June 1999.
- <sup>32</sup> *Building New Bridges in Hope: Statement of the United Methodist Church on Christian-Jewish Relations*. Adopted by the 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church (USA)
- <sup>33</sup> *United Methodist Church Calls for Yom HaShoah Observance*. Adopted by the 2000 General Conference of the United Methodist Church (USA) in Cleveland, Ohio, May 2-12.
- <sup>34</sup> The Committee on Christian Unity of the American Baptist Churches U.S.A. *An American Baptist Response to Dabru Emet*. The Baptist statement was released by the Church in June, 2002.
- <sup>35</sup> *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, Issued at Strasbourg on 22 April 2001 by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences
- <sup>36</sup> "Resolution on Jewish Evangelism," *Southern Baptist Convention*, June 11-13, 1996.
- <sup>37</sup> J.T. Pawlikowski, "Christian Theological Concerns After the Holocaust," in *Visions of the Other: Jewish and Christian Theologians Assess the Dialogue*, Eugene J. Fisher, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1994) 41.
- <sup>38</sup> "A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People" A Statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations, in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligations*, Boys, Mary, C., ed. (Boston: Sheed and Ward Books, 2005)
- <sup>39</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Covenantal Pluralism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3 (Summer 1997) 432.
- <sup>40</sup> "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church." \_\_\_\_\_, eds. *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish- Catholic Dialogue*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1990)
- <sup>41</sup> *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, and Michael A. Signer (Westview Press, 2000)
- <sup>42</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism, Christianity, and Partnership After the Twentieth Century," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 30.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 35
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 32
- <sup>45</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 143.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 150
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 155
- <sup>48</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Covenantal Pluralism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3 (Summer 1997): 436.
- <sup>49</sup> "Emet ve-Emunah" (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988).
- <sup>50</sup> *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., p. xvii-xx.
- <sup>51</sup> Edward H. Flanner, "Jewish-Christian Relations: Focus on the Future," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 34:3, Summer 1997. 322-325

## A Theology of the Other Means Partnership

Much has been achieved between Jews and Christians since the dark days of the Shoah. The majority of the churches have issued official statements which condemn anti-Judaism, renounce the charge of deicide, affirm the validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people, and fully accept the Jewish roots of Christian faith. Jews and Christians have studied difficult Biblical texts together and increased mutual understanding and respect. They have engaged with each on many different levels. One could characterize Jewish-Christian relations since the Shoah as a move from a relationship of tolerance, whose etymology implies that the "other" is "suffered or "carried" by the majority of the population, to a relationship of pluralism.<sup>1</sup> "In pluralism, one faith accepts the other, even seeks to recast its own self-understanding to affirm the ongoing validity and dignity of the other, and eventually is able to integrate insights from the other."<sup>2</sup> Pluralism, as comparative-religion scholar Diana Eck has clarified, is not merely a synonym for diversity, but rather reflects active and positive engagement with religious claims and with the reality of religious diversity.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the last decade, it appears that Jewish-Christian relations have reached a plateau. There is a sense of treading water. This is in no way to minimize the great achievements of the last forty years. We have only to look back to see how far we have climbed. But as many climbers will attest as you reach one summit you see other peaks beckoning you on.

The summer 1997 issue of *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies* contained a number of articles on Jewish-Christian relations under the heading "The Unfinished Agenda."

Shaye J. D. Cohen, then Professor of Judaic Studies at Brown University, says that the fundamental issue on the agenda can be reduced to a single phrase: "to work out a theology of the other". "It is not enough simply to believe in tolerance, not enough simply to allow the other's existence," he explains, "rather, what we need is a theology on each side to validate the other's existence."<sup>4</sup> For example, he suggests Jews should try to answer the question, "How is the divine cause somehow advanced by having millions and millions of Christians in the world?"<sup>5</sup>

Cohen wants Christians to answer the question, "Why are the Jews still here?"<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the German theologian Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt some years ago said that "We will only have Christian anti-Judaism behind us when theologically we will have succeeded in making positive sense of the Jewish "no" to Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

This is why Allan Brockway, then on the staff of the World Council of Churches, wrote, "Those churches which incorporate the continuing reality of the covenant between the Jewish people and God into their official theology establish a premise with far-reaching implications, both for their relations with the Jewish people and for Christian theology." He added: "By and large the development and implementation of those implications remain in the future."<sup>8</sup> For Christians to recognize that God's covenant with the Jewish people is still valid requires one to modify traditional exclusive claims to the truth. Indeed the concept of truth needs to be rethought. More immediately, not only are

attempts to convert Jews called into question, but so too are traditional claims on how the church has traditionally understood Jesus. These changes in turn open up the question of the relation of Christianity not only to Judaism but to other world religions. There is a steep climb ahead!

The task before us is to make room in our theologies for the “other” as people or servants of God—whereas for centuries Christians have seen all who are not of the true faith, or indeed not of the true church, as enemies of God. The task ahead is to move from pluralism to partnership.<sup>9</sup> “The concept of partnership,” suggests Rabbi Irving Greenberg, is “that my truth/faith system alone cannot fulfill God’s dreams. Therefore, the world needs the contribution that the other makes for the world’s own wholeness and perfection.”<sup>10</sup> The partnership perspective suggests that God has assigned different roles and different contributions to different groups, and that the world needs the contribution that the other religions can make for the sake of achieving wholeness and perfection for all.<sup>11</sup> Partners affirm that God assigns different roles and different contributions to different groups and that no group is able to understand, articulate or realize God’s will alone.

For both Judaism and Christianity, this is a time to reinterpret our relationships to one another. This new analysis must include a much deeper understanding of God’s pluralism – that no religion has a monopoly on God’s love. The Noahide covenant, which God made with all of humanity after God flooded the world, lives; both faiths articulate and extend its mandate, but, in doing so, they do not have an exclusive divine mission

that renders other religions irrelevant. On the contrary, they need the help of other religions to accomplish *tikkun olam*, and they can instruct and enrich the others along the way. Judaism and Christianity are the two ancient faiths that have most experienced the freedom and power, and most internalized the reconceptualization of human understanding that is the outcome of modernity. These are also the two religions that have experienced modernity directly and seen its failure. Both have much to digest and much to teach other faiths and cultures by analysis and role-modeling. But the modeling must start with the two antagonists, who built their religious claims on the invalidity of the other, affirming each other's independent dignity as ongoing, legitimate covenantal faiths. At the same time, this mutual affirmation does not negate the ongoing areas of disagreement, theological and otherwise.

But mere achievement of pluralism will not do justice to the uniqueness of the Jewish-Christian connection. Even if the two faiths enrich pluralism, by developing language and teaching models of deepened self-commitment combined with mutual affirmation, we will still only scratch the surface. Such a mutual understanding of the role of the other in the divine plan for creation is necessary if we are to truly move beyond the horrors of the past 1900 years toward a time when Jews and Christians (and by extension, members of other faith traditions) can overcome their differences in pursuit of our mission *letaken olam bemalkhut Shaddai* – “to repair the world under the rule of God.” It is our cooperative role in this partnership which should guide interfaith dialogue into the future.

## Moving Towards a New Jewish Understanding of Christianity

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is described as God's "firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). Taken literally, this would imply the existence of other children born after Israel who are loved and valued as well. Moreover, God's concern for non-Jews is evident in the biblical Book of Jonah. In order to complete creation, God has engaged in covenants with many peoples.<sup>12</sup> People were created equal, yet different. Individuals have different skills, cultures, motivations, and thoughts. Therefore, it is inconceivable that God would want all people to think alike and act alike. In this light, is it possible to hold to a theology that assumes that the rest of the world is simply wrong or mistaken? According to such a theology, what were God's intentions? What purpose would be served by misleading all from the Jewish perspective?

Stanley Hauerwas, a Christian theologian at Duke University, summarized: "... Jewish theological readings of Christianity must face the challenge that the existence of Christianity is not a mistake but is, rather, one of the ways God desires to make His covenant with Israel known to the nations."<sup>13</sup>

Once the veil of hatred is lifted from between the two faiths, it becomes clear that Judaism has a fundamental stake in Christianity's achievement. As Maimonides suggested, Christianity's success brings Judaism's end goals closer; Christians advance an outcome on which Judaism has staked its credibility and truth.<sup>14</sup> Even though Christians have incorporated new mechanisms of worship, and introduced new channels

of Divine Presence (which, in some case, are unacceptable to Jews), these clashing claims should not obscure the common interest between the two. Once it is understood that the two religions are intended to function side by side, those changes that differentiate them from each other must be judged as differing tactical steps to reach out to the world. These disagreements should be labeled "controversies for the sake of heaven," which, therefore, leave a permanent positive result.<sup>15</sup> Or, perhaps, one may borrow the terminology of the Rabbinic midrash. There is a controversy that leads to the repair of the world and to filling it with life (which is constructive) and there is a controversy that only brings chaos to the world (which is destructive).<sup>16</sup> It is time to turn the controversy between Judaism and Christianity into a positive force for *tikkun olam*.

In rethinking the relationship of Judaism and Christianity, much of the theological speculation has focused on whether the two religions represent two covenants or one. I believe both fulfill one covenant—the Noahide. In their further development, both religions grow out of one and the same covenant, the Abrahamic/Sinaitic, but by the will of God they have branched into two parallel covenants to reach out to humanity in all its diversity of culture and religious need. Nevertheless, the members of the two faith communities remain part of one people, the people of Israel, the people that wrestle with God and humans to bring them closer to each other; thus they narrow the chasm between the ideal world that God seeks to bring into being and the real world.

Being part of one people has moral consequences, at least in Judaic tradition. Extending help to humanity legitimately starts with the members of one's own family and



people. Therefore, the two communities owe special help to each other. One feels special rejoicing in the achievement of fellow citizens. Therefore, Jews who always yearned for a universal redeemer and who accept little of Jesus' message should nevertheless appreciate Jesus' service as a spiritual messiah to gentiles; he is not a false messiah, but a would-be redeemer for the nations.

Members of one faith can feel a special responsibility when other members are in danger. At the present time, a massive wave of anti-Judaism is sweeping through the Muslim world, driven by anger at Islam's failure to modernize and further inflamed by the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. This phenomenon is not unlike the tide of hatred that flowed through Christendom during the Middle Ages. Some of the images disseminated today (such as the libel that Jews use gentile blood in their ritual foods and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a purported insidious Jewish plot to control the world) are derived from old-time Christian demonizations or secularized versions. Many of the fifteen million Jews facing one billion Muslims—including a small violent terrorist Muslim minority—feel endangered and lonely. As siblings, Christians can sympathize, offer solidarity, defend, testify to Muslims and urge them to avoid repeating Christianity's past errors and sins, pointing out how the stain of these behaviors troubles Christians today. This situation offers Christians the opportunity to make amends for the anti-Jewish sins that they have repudiated at last in recent decades.

There are millions of Christians suffering oppression and discrimination, even violence, in a host of countries around the world (some, but not all, in the same Muslim

countries that are the scene of anti-Judaism). Jews have the opportunity to work for the freedom and well-being of these Christians, much as they have done, over the past 40 years, for the threatened members of their Jewish family. Thus they can practice an important form of *imitatio Dei*, (imitating God) toward Christians and others. "I [God] am with him [the sufferer] in distress. I will rescue him and treat him with dignity" (Ps. 91:15<sup>17</sup>). Maimonides says: "All of [the people of] Israel and *those attached to them* are like brothers, as it is written: You are children to the Lord your God (Deut. 14:1). And if a brother will not have compassion for his brother, then who will?"<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Maimonides insists that such compassion is a defining characteristic of a member of the people of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

So what then is the mission of the multi-branched people of Israel in this time? What does it mean today to wrestle with God and humans to bring them closer to each other? Judaism and Christianity must wrestle with God to reveal how to grow closer in loving affirmation of each other's dignity and mission. This will enable them to overcome the pattern of authority of past traditions and deep, conservative interpretation of divine revelations that set each faith at the other's throat. Each community must wrestle with God to bring both Torah and Gospel closer to the human condition, to transmit the ideals in a manner less punitive and condemning of humanity. Rather, they and God must interpret the instruction in a manner more magnetic and capable of drawing out the best in people out of freedom and choice, until all is perfected. Each community must cry out to God against a world order that is marked by hunger, deprivation, cruelty, and innocent

suffering; each must press for a divine delegation of strength to move the world toward redemption, now.

Each faith must wrestle with humanity to draw closer to God and each other, to recognize the image of God in the other and respond lovingly on a greater scale than ever before. Both faiths must struggle to push away the use of force and the vanity of monopoly and strive to witness voluntarily. They can offer each other moral support as they renounce past privilege and give up the sense of entitlement and superior status. Standing together, the two can more effectively combat aggressive secularism and scientific materialism. Linked to each other, the two can more easily acknowledge the dignity of secularists and their contribution to shaping a better world. The secular movements that knew their own limitations have played a positive role in placing constructive limits on religion. Now all groups can interact and affirmatively balance society and culture to maximize human betterment. Perhaps the spiritual comfort that the two communities can give each other can empower them to give the other religionists and secularists their due without surrendering the two religions' own norms and their distinctive witness to Creation, Covenant, and Redemption.

The two faiths need each other's help to contend effectively with rampant materialism and reactionary terrorism. The two must realize that the more they overcome the demons of the past, the more they become God's witnesses, channels of divine blessing for a suffering humanity, couriers of redemption. Yet Jews and Christians must

recognize that the two faiths together cannot accomplish the full task alone. Once they admit this truth, they can respect other faiths as well.

If Judaism and Christianity rise above past degradation and enable themselves and each other to grow closer in loving affirmation of each other's dignity and mission, then they prove that faithfulness to God can inspire heroic love and forgiveness. Then these two faiths can give unique testimony to the power of life and love to overcome death. This teaching is central to their covenantal affirmations; it is exemplified in their histories. The force of their proclamations will be even more overwhelming if they can connect to each other and prove that the "love [which] is stronger than death" is even more powerful than the "jealousy which is harder than *She'ol* [the realm of death]" (Song of Songs 8:6).

God has provided humanity with the opportunity to see each other as partners and helpers in completing the task of creation, in pursuing *tikkun olam*. If we can move to partnership, we can see ourselves as servants of God who are content to achieve God's goals even if we ourselves do not turn out to be the center or the exclusive beneficiaries of the redemption. In a partnership, each religion would ideally serve as a helper to the other and constructive critic. I would also hope that the relationship between all of the world's major religions would develop in the image of this "support in opposition."

The complex and varied demands of the twenty-first century require a multitude of religious responses, both to provide a wider range of approaches and solutions and to keep any one approach from dominating (this is the partnership element). As one

participant in a Catholic-Jewish Colloquium put it: "You can't study history adequately with your own kind."<sup>20</sup>

## Our Goal as Jews: To be a Light unto the Nations

Several of our greatest modern Jewish thinkers, most notably Hermann Cohen and Leo Baeck, identified ethics as the essence of Judaism.<sup>21</sup> Judaism is *ethical* in that it holds that God's primary demand (not God's only demand) upon us is that we treat one another ethically. It is *monotheistic* in that it holds that there is one and only one God. Through the prophet Isaiah, God calls us to more than ethics, to do more than just obey the *mitzvot*. "It is too little that you should be My servant in that I raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will also make you a light of nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth."<sup>22</sup>

If the role of Jews and of Judaism is to promulgate the message of God in the world, to bring God's name, message and deliverance to all peoples of the world, how are we doing? If our goal were to convert the world to Judaism, we could be considered a dismal failure. Of the world's 6 billion people, there are only some 15 million Jews, making us less than 0.25% of the population. On the other hand, if we ask what fraction of the world worships the God of Abraham, the answer would be about fifty percent with approximately 2 billion Christians and 1 billion Muslims in the world.

How can we make sense of God's reasons for the small size of the Jewish people? We are a tiny and often hated minority who preach the message of God's ethics concerning how to treat our fellow man. In remaining a tiny and distinct people, we have staked our survival on the success of our task of teaching ethics. If we fail to deliver

God's message successfully, surely we will be the first to suffer. It has often been observed that Jews serve as a "moral canary" signaling the arrival of moral poisons in society just as the canary in the coal mine signals the presence of gaseous poisons. In short, when societies turn evil, they go after their Jews first.

As Rabbi Martin A. Cohen observes, the Jewish people introduced an egalitarian-Utopian "Wilderness Ethic" at Sinai.<sup>23</sup> This group of newly freed slaves introduced some ideas that, while revolutionary to the larger society at the time, made great sense to those of their then-lowly status. Jews taught that all people are created in the image of God, that life is sacred, that the nobleman and the commoner are both subject to God's law and both should be treated with equal justice. Throughout history, we Jews have staked our very existence on the acceptance of the message of the Wilderness Ethic. For Jews to be safe, we must deliver and the world must accept our message of universal ethics.

Even in the United States where we are accepted as in no other country in our history, many Jews worry that, as a minority, we may yet be subject to another Shoah, that we may yet need the escape route to Israel. We are at the forefront of causes that promote civil rights and constitutional guarantees, not only for Jews, but for minorities of all races and persuasions. We hold our society accountable to high standards (which are, in fact, God's standards as enumerated in the Torah) whenever society falls short. If Jews became a majority, would we still cling to this role as though our lives depended on it? If Jews disappear, who would fill this role? Could it be that God's plan provides for a small but ever-present Jewish People?

In our own day, the largest threat to Jewish survival as Jews is perhaps not from a hostile non-Jewish world, but from an extremely friendly one. Jews are not told to "convert, leave or die." Jews are, however, tempted by life outside the discipline of living an authentic Jewish life. It will only be those Jews not lured by the other temptations of society that will remain true to the Jewish mission. It should not surprise anyone if many Jews choose not to remain Jewish. Could this be part of God's plan for Jews and Judaism? Might this be just another form of natural selection in which only those Jews most fiercely attached to their faith will remain Jewish?

Our role in being a light to nations is both interactive and catalytic. It is interactive in that we participate in the larger culture, influence it and are influenced by it. Yet, like a catalyst in a chemical reaction, there is an element in Judaism that strives to remain unchanged by the world in which we live.



## Words of Caution

Let it be stated clearly that the affirmation of Christianity and Christians as a branch of the people Israel is dependent on Christianity ceasing from the degradation and supercessionist ideology of Judaism. They must put away their pride of power. One of the great moments in Jewish history and Torah narrates the occasion when brothers, alienated and hostile to each other, overcame their past and embraced each other in forgiveness and love. Can this not happen now between adopted siblings?<sup>24</sup> Can such a reconnection not come to be within a metaphorically linked, theologically defined family?

Even as I write, I fear that Christian missionaries who work to convert Jews by denigrating Judaism or, even more insidiously, Jews for Jesus—people who (unlike the forward-thinking individuals that exist today in Christianity) believe that Judaism is superseded, and Jews have no right to exist as Jews anymore—will misuse these words. These people, who believe that Christianity has replaced Judaism, seek to abolish the Jewish religion.

Messianic Jews are even more abusive in that they use Jewish rituals and symbols as masks for a supersessionist Christianity in order to facilitate Jewish abandonment of Judaism. Such people could distort my argument that Jews and Christians are one people and use it to recruit Jews for Christianity. But one cannot be a Jew and a Christian at once. The decision that believers must choose one or the other was made in the first four centuries of the Common Era, and I believe that this separation into two distinct

covenantal communities was the will of God. Efforts to utilize the close relationship of the two faiths to trick Jews into Christianity represent a continuation of an historical abuse—using Christian religious experience to annihilate Jewish religious existence. Such efforts delegitimize Christianity.

In addition, I believe that the Shoah introduced a new reality into the history of Jewish and Christian relations. Christianity realized that the logical result of their anti-Judaism was mass murder, even if it was not official Christian policy to implement "the Final Solution." Shocked into this realization, Christian official attitudes toward Jews and Judaism have changed direction in a virtual about face in only some fifty short years. In response, Jews have responded by meeting our Christian counterparts, and even responding through the official statement *Dabru Emet*. Yet, while Jewish and Christian theologians grapple with what it means to construct a theology of the "other", and support each other as partners, some Christian leaders are releasing statements in recent years which are ironically moving Jewish-Christian relations backwards instead of forwards.

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Signer, "Memory, Reconciliation, and the Future of Jewish-Christian Relations: Boundaries and their Transgressions." Article is in draft-form, unpublished. 14.
- <sup>2</sup> Irving Greenberg, "On the Road to a New Encounter" in *For the Sake of Heaven: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity*. (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia; 2004) 42-43.
- <sup>3</sup> Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993) 193.
- <sup>4</sup> Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Unfinished Agenda of Jewish-Christian Dialogue", *JES*, op. cit., 326.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.
- <sup>7</sup> Quoted in Marcus Baybrooke, *Time To Meet*, (SCM Press; 1990) p. 59.
- <sup>8</sup> Allan Brockway in *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish People*, ed. Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff, and Simon Schoon, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988) 186.
- <sup>9</sup> This is being discussed at length in such works as *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit. and Irving Greenberg's *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth*. op. cit.
- <sup>10</sup> Irving Greenberg, "Pluralism and Partnership" in *For the Sake of Heaven: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity*. (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia; 2004) 211.
- <sup>11</sup> Irving Greenberg, "On the Road to a New Encounter" in *For the Sake of Heaven: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity*. (The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia; 2004) 42-43.
- <sup>12</sup> Firestone, Reuven, "The Problem of Chosenness in Judaism, Christianity and Islam," The 2005 Sterling M. McMurrin Lecture on Religion and Culture, (University of Utah Press, 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Christian Ethics in Jewish Terms," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, op. cit., 140.
- <sup>14</sup> Maimonides, *Sefer Mishnah Torah*, Law of Kings 11:4
- <sup>15</sup> *Ethics of the Fathers (Pirkei Avot)* Chapter 5, paragraph 17.
- <sup>16</sup> *Genesis Rabbah*, Chapter 4, Section 6.
- <sup>17</sup> My translation.
- <sup>18</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Matnot Aneeyim*, chapter 10, halacha 2; italics added.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, "The Catholic-Jewish Colloquim: An Experiment in Interreligious Learning," *Religious Education*, 91:4 (Fall 1996): 434.
- <sup>21</sup> Borowitz, Eugene, *Liberal Judaism*, (New York; UAHC Press, 1984) 381.
- <sup>22</sup> Isaiah 49:6
- <sup>23</sup> Martin A. Cohen, *Issues in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Jewish Perspectives on Covenant, Mission and Witness*, Helga Croner and Leon Klenicki, eds., (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 93.
- <sup>24</sup> Rabbi Naftali Zevi Judah Berlin (1817-1893), one of the leading Rabbis of his generation and head of the classic Volozhin Yeshiva for 40 years, writes in his commentary *Haamek Davar* on Genesis 33:4 ("Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept.") as follows: "AND THEY WEPT. Both wept. This teaches us that at this moment Jacob was roused to love Esau. So it will be for the future generations: in the moment when the seed of Esau will rouse themselves in the spirit of purification to recognize the seed of Israel and their value, then we [Jews] too will rouse ourselves to recognize Esau for his is our brother ... ." Genesis with the commentary called *Haamek Davar* (Jerusalem: *Vaad Ha Yeshivot*, 1970, p. 245)

## Which Way are we Going?

In recent decades a concerted effort was made to find common ground between Jews and Christians. In particular the Churches have been anxious to overcome centuries of hostility towards the Jewish people by issuing official pronouncements concerning Judaism. In the Roman Catholic Church the decree *Nostra Aetate* was promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in October 1965. Its section on the Jewish religion begins by recognizing the spiritual bond that links the people of the new covenant to Abraham's descendants and affirms God's continuing covenant with the Jews. In the light of this understanding, Jewish-Christian dialogue is recommended. In addition, *Nostra Aetate* renounces the ancient charge of deicide.<sup>1</sup>

In subsequent years various national and provincial synods have attempted to apply the teaching of this statement. In 1974 Pope Paul established a Commission for Religious Relations with the Jewish People which produced guidelines and suggestions for implementing its conclusions. This document insists that Christians should condemn anti-Semitism and views Jews as they define themselves in the light of their own religious experience. In addition, the document encourages Christians to pray together with Jews.

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the Commission published *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*. In this document the Church and Judaism are conceived as parallel ways of salvation; the permanent value of the Hebrew Scriptures as

a source of Christian revelation is stressed, and Jesus is depicted as a faithful Jew. Furthermore, it recognizes that the Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work; therefore it cannot be ruled out that hostile references to the Jews may have their origin in the conflict between the Church and the Jewish community.

Similar views about Judaism and the Jewish people were expressed by the World Council of Churches (WCC). At its first Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the WCC declared that the terrible events of the Holocaust must be remembered. At the Evanston Assembly in 1954 the Jewishness of Jesus was emphasized as well as God's concern for the Jews. In 1961, at the New Delhi Assembly, the WCC condemned anti-Semitism and stressed that the Jewish nation should not be blamed for Christ's crucifixion. In 1967 the WCC's Faith and Order Commission, and its sub-unit, the Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (CCJP), agreed on a report which affirmed that although God's revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures was fulfilled in Christ, God did not abandon the Jewish nation.

In 1977 the British Working Group of the CCJP highlighted the theological significance of the Holy Land for the Jewish people. In 1982 the WCC statement "Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue" was produced, which pointed out the need for Christians to abandon stereotypes. Judaism, it asserted, is not a fossilized religion of legalism, but a living tradition. Further, Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering was acknowledged. More recently the WCC has summarized a set of convictions which now guide most Churches in their dealings with the Jewish people, in

which anti-Semitism is condemned, and the covenant of God with the Jewish people is affirmed.

But if we take a closer look at these and other texts that are cited time and again as proof of the steps that Jewish and Christian theologians are moving forward in relationship, we will find conflicting messages and beliefs which lead to the next question: "Which way are we going?"

### *Nostra Aetate*

The Catholic Church has been confessing its faults and sins for many years now, particularly for its treatment of Jews. These "confessions" begin with *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. The following is from Section 4 of "*Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.*"<sup>2</sup>

If we look closer at the text and the words chosen for the document, we find a sort of conundrum of messages. [I have enlarged sections of the text for review.]

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle. In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

(1) True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;<sup>1</sup>

(2) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now,

(3) Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation.

It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

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*1) True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;*

Does this mean that these Jews were not decision-makers – that, if persons have to “press for” an action to be undertaken, this means that they in themselves lack the power to do the actualizing themselves?

In order to convey this nuance, two additional elements would need inclusion:



- a. An identification of the party who was being "pressed" (although naming Pilate would not have sufficed).
- b. A forthright acknowledgement of Caiaphas' subservience to Pilate.

*2) Still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today.*

No matter how you read this, the blame for Jesus' execution remained lodged solely with the Jews, now just a smaller number of Jews! No responsibility was allotted to Rome or even Jesus.

*3) Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation.*

Two mutually exclusive propositions – *benefit* versus *blame* – generate the "hybrid riddle." See below.

The Hybrid Riddle <sup>3</sup>		
Benefit		Blame
<i>If it was indispensable for the world's redemption that Jesus die, and if the Jews were so vital a part in effecting that "benefit,"</i>	-->	<i>then why are the Jews not praised for their role in humanity's salvation rather than "blamed" for it?</i>

In order to solve the Hybrid Riddle and explain how Jews eventually became termed, "Christ-Killers," we have to go back to the beginning. Reports of the Galilean,

Jesus, said to have been crucified and resurrected, was preached by the Diaspora Pharisee, Paul, in cosmic terms, to large numbers of gentiles, who initially as outsiders, developed a proprietary interest in, and eventually came to accept and revere, this metamorphosed Jesus-figure as their own deific "Christ" – and thereby effectively removed him from Judaism.

Starting during the 60s of the Common Era, the Jewish Revolt against Rome and a litany of other events made it possible for preservers and creators of Christian tradition to begin punctuating their then-emerging oral and written narratives about Jesus with literary devices that triggered a shifting of responsibility for his death on the Jews.

These events include:

- James being executed in 62 C.E.,
- Nero scapegoating and brutally persecuting Christians in Rome, for a fire in 64 C.E. – terrifying news that likely spread Empire-wide;
- Jews in Judea, with whom the Jesus Movement was associated in the Roman mind, revolted against Rome starting in 66 C.E. – with turbulence emerging among sympathetic Jews elsewhere in the Empire;
- Jerusalem's mother church disbanded (ca. 66);
- Christians feared betrayal to Rome, giving rise to the Judas story;
- Rome besieged Jerusalem and then, in the most devastating act of ancient Jewish, and now Christian, experience burnt her Temple in 70 C.E.

This development concretizing over succeeding centuries, especially with the 4<sup>th</sup>-century adoption of Christianity as the imperial religion, fostered the aspersion of the Jews as *the* "Christ's" killers or "Christ-killers."

It is true that popes and other Church officials have intervened periodically over the centuries to protect Jews and usher in periods of relative tolerance. But it is also true that contempt, hatred, and vilification of Jews have been at or near the heart of Christian experience for most of two millenniums. The anti-Jewish message was carried not just by excitable mobs and popular prejudice but by theologians, popes, bishops, saints and official pronouncements and councils of the church.

## **"Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past"**

**"Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past,"<sup>4</sup> published in December 1999, is the Vatican's strongest theological statement to date, combined with a confession on behalf of all Catholics by the pope and various cardinals built into the liturgy of a papal mass.**

**Yet the Vatican's statement and liturgy have many of the same flaws as earlier efforts. Once again, a Catholic expression of regret relies too heavily on the passive voice, always a sign that we are about to swerve away from candor. We read about "the suffering endured by the people of Israel" rather than the Christians who helped the Nazis impose all the suffering.**

**"Memory and Reconciliation," the new document, tiptoes up to Christian complicity in the Holocaust by saying that the behavior of Christians "was not that which might have been expected from Christ's followers." "Methods of violence and intolerance used in the past to evangelize" is probably a good enough short label for the forced conversions of native peoples, but "force in the service of truth," a reference to the Inquisition, does not really capture the flavor of people being tortured and burned at the stake.**

**Referring to the Crusades and the Inquisition, the document says: "Isn't it a bit too easy to judge people of the past by the conscience of today... almost as if moral**

conscience were not situated in time?" No. Many of the valiant crusaders used to warm up for their long trip to the Holy Land by butchering some local Jews, just for practice. The Christian moral conscience should have judged acts like those just as clearly in 1099 as the pope and most of the world would today. A call for relativism really should not show up in the middle of a confession for the Crusades and the Inquisition.

The document says the Holocaust "was certainly the result of the pagan ideology of Nazism." This expression of sorrow is a way of discounting Christian anti-Semitism as a major factor in the extermination of Europe's Jews. Apart from the scale of the killings, there was nothing in the Nazi program for the Jews that had not been pioneered by centuries of Christian practice: from the forced wearing of a yellow badge, isolation, and rituals of humiliation to expropriation of property, banishment, and pogroms. The Nazis may have drawn their direct inspiration from a post-Christian version of purely racial anti-Semitism. But Christianity clearly prepared the way and lit the fuse.

Under pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church was trying hard to come to terms with its anti-Semitic tradition. But its official statements are still clouded by verbal diversions, fears about the reputation of Pius XII, legends of (virtually non-existent) church resistance to the Nazis, and odd claims that the Christians and Jews of Germany were somehow equal victims of Hitler.

Jewish critics seem like terrible nags to so many Catholics, after all these apologies. But the critics know, as most Catholics do not, that Christians are nowhere

near getting to the bottom of their anti-Semitic tradition. This is why Catholic-Jewish relations still have a quality of polite unreality about them. John Paul II has done far more than any other pope in history to repair the damage and put the dialogue on a realistic footing.

"The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas"<sup>5</sup>  
*L'Osservatore Romano*, December 29, 2000.  
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

On December 29, 2000, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote a Christmas-season reflection for *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of the Vatican, titled "The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas." The future Pope Benedict XVI expressed remorse for the anti-Jewish attitudes that persisted in the church throughout history, leading to "deplorable acts of violence" and the loss of six million Jews and others in the Holocaust. A closer reading of the text yields troubling questions and insights.

Consider:

- In line 4, Cardinal Ratzinger refers to Jesus as the "infant church."
- In lines 5 and 6, he refers to the relationship between Jews and Christians as a mother/daughter relationship but in lines 39 and 40, he refers to the same relationship as siblings.
- In line 5, he refers to the "Church" in positive terms, yet when responsibility for who did wrong is referred to in line 6, Cardinal Ratzinger refers to "Christians" as responsible, as opposed to the "Church."
- In lines 12-14, he is saying that it was Christianity that was attacked when 6 million Jews were killed.

### A new vision of Israel-Church relations

1           We know that every act of giving birth is difficult. Certainly, from the  
very beginning, relations between **the infant Church and Israel** were often  
marked by conflict. **The Church** was considered by her own mother to be a  
degenerate daughter, while **Christians** considered their mother to be blind and  
5           obstinate. Down through **the history of Christianity**, already-strained relations  
deteriorated further, even giving birth in many cases to anti-Jewish attitudes,  
which throughout history have led to deplorable acts of violence. Even if the most  
recent, loathsome experience of the Shoah was perpetrated **in the name of an**  
**anti-Christian ideology**, which tried to **strike the Christian faith at its**  
10          **Abrahamic roots in the people of Israel**, it cannot be denied that a certain  
insufficient resistance to this atrocity on the part of Christians can be explained by  
an inherited anti-Judaism present in the hearts of not a few **Christians**.

15           Perhaps it is precisely because of this latest tragedy that a new vision of  
the relationship between **the Church** and Israel has been born: a sincere  
willingness to overcome every kind of anti-Judaism, and to initiate a constructive  
dialogue based on knowledge of each other, and on reconciliation.

20           If such a dialogue is to be fruitful, it must begin with a prayer to our God,  
first of all that he might grant to us **Christians** a greater esteem and love for that  
people, the people of Israel, to whom belong "the adoption as sons, the glory, the  
covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs are the  
patriarchs, and from them comes Christ according to the flesh, he who is over all,  
God, blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 9:4-5), and this not only in the past, but  
25          still today, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). In  
the same way, let us pray that he may grant also to the children of Israel a deeper  
knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, who is their son, and the gift they have made to  
us. Since **we are both awaiting the final redemption**, let us pray that the paths  
we follow may converge.

### 30          Israel's faith - the foundation of our faith

          It is evident that, as Christians, **our dialogue with the Jews is situated on**  
**a different level than that in which we engage with other religions**. The faith  
35          witnessed to by the Jewish Bible (the Old Testament for Christians) is not merely  
another religion to us, but is the foundation of our own faith. Therefore,  
Christians--and today increasingly in collaboration with their Jewish sisters and  
brothers--read and attentively study these books of Sacred Scripture, as a part of  
their common heritage. **It is true that Islam also considers itself as one of**  
40          **Abraham's offspring, and has inherited from Jews and Christians this same**  
**God. Muslims, however, follow a different path, and so dialogue with them**  
**calls for different parameters...**



**Declaration "Dominus Iesus":  
On the Unity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church<sup>6</sup>**

*Dominus Iesus* was published on August 6, 2000 by Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and released on September 5, 2000. The document was ratified and confirmed by the Pope John Paul II on June 16, 2000.

Consider:

- In line 4, Cardinal Ratzinger, states that Jesus is the "instrument for the salvation of all humanity."
- In line 6-7, he states that belief in Christianity "rules out...the belief that one religion is as good as another."
- In lines 10-12, he states that those who are not "in the Church" do not have means for salvation.
- Line 18-19, states that the "Church must be missionary"
- Line 21, states that inter-religious dialogue is part of the "evangelizing mission" of the Church.
- Line 27, he states "the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ."

**Introduction**

**I. The Fullness and Definitiveness of the Revelation of Jesus Christ**

**II. The Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit in the Work of Salvation**

**III. Unicity & Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ**

**IV. Unicity and Unity of The Church**

**V. The Church: Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Christ**

1 VI. The Church and the Other Religions in Relation to Salvation

5 With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of all humanity... This truth of faith does not lessen **the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world**, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of... **religious relativism which leads to the belief that one religion is as good as another.**

10 If it is true that **the followers of other religions** can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation. However, **all the children of the Church** should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond...to that grace...**they shall be more severely judged...**

Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, **the Church must be missionary**

20 **Inter-religious dialogue**, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*.<sup>7</sup> Equality, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to **the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ — who is God himself made man — in relation to the founders of the other religions**. Indeed, the Church...must be primarily committed...to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ...in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, the certainty of the universal salvific will of God **does not diminish, but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ.**

35 *The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience of June 16, 2000, granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority, ratified and confirmed this Declaration, adopted in Plenary Session and ordered its publication.*

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 2000, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

40 Joseph Card. Ratzinger, *Prefect*

# The Conundrum: How Do We Know In Which Direction We Are Going?

March '77	Tommaso Federici <sup>8</sup> – "...the temptation to create [Roman Catholic] organizations of any kind, especially for education or social assistance, to 'convert' Jews, is to be rejected." <sup>9</sup>
Jun 16, 2000	[On the other hand] <i>Dominu Iesus</i> by Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope) states that "the Church...must be primarily committed...to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ."
Sept. 22, 2000	Cardinal Ratzinger answering objections to <i>Dominus Iesus</i> : "it is not enough to continue in the religion one has inherited, but one must remain attentive to the true good and thus be able to transcend the limits of one's own religion..." <sup>10</sup>
May 1, 2001	Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews - "... the Document <i>Dominus Iesus</i> does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in order to be saved by God ... the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them because God is faithful to his promises." <sup>11</sup>
July 14, 2001	Eugene J. Fisher, Associate Director, the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, US Conferee of Catholic Bishops - [Explaining and agreeing with Federici (above):] "Missionary activities aimed at Jews ... precluded today and in the future by reason of the centuries of collective mistreatment of Jews by Christians. Such reasoning I have found is overwhelmingly understood and accepted by Catholic leaders. The result is that there exists today absolutely no Church-sanctioned organizations [ <i>sic</i> ] designed to convert Jews." <sup>12</sup>
Aug 12, 2002	Reflections on Covenant & Mission / Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues & the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs - "... A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely-given mission to Jews to witness to God's faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church." <sup>13</sup>
August 16, 2002	Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore [the U.S. Bishops' Moderator for Catholic-Jewish relations] said today a document made public August 12 represents [only] the state of thought among the participants of a dialogue that been going on for a number of years between the U.S. Catholic Church and the Jewish community in this country...not...a formal position taken by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) or the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA). <sup>14</sup>

The chart on the previous page shows in time-line form the mixed messages the Jewish community, among others, are receiving from the Catholic Church on the topic of interfaith dialogue.

Tommaso Federici, consultant member of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and speaking on behalf of the Catholic Church was quoted as saying "...the temptation to create organizations of any kind, especially for education or social assistance, to 'convert' Jews, is to be rejected."<sup>15</sup>

Yet, in 2000, then Cardinal Ratzinger stated in *Dominus Iesus* that "the Church...must be primarily committed...to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup>

Responding to the criticism of this document, Cardinal Ratzinger continues his belief by explaining "it is not enough to continue in the religion one has inherited, but one must remain attentive to the true good and thus be able to transcend the limits of one's own religion..."<sup>17</sup>

Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, stated nine months later "... the Document *Dominus Iesus* does not state that everybody needs to become a Catholic in order to be saved by God ... the Church believes that Judaism, i.e. the faithful response of the Jewish people to God's irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them because God is faithful to his promises."<sup>18</sup>

Explaining and agreeing with Federici, as if he has never seen Cardinal Ratzinger's statements, Eugene J. Fisher, Associate Director, the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, US Conference of Catholic Bishops said: "Missionary activities aimed at Jews ... precluded today and in the future by reason of the centuries of collective mistreatment of Jews by Christians. Such reasoning I have found is overwhelmingly understood and accepted by Catholic leaders. The result is that there exists today absolutely no Church-sanctioned organizations [*sic*] designed to convert Jews."<sup>19</sup>

And in August, 2002, in a statement from the Reflections on Covenant & Mission / Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues & the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs, which could have been designated a new Jewish holiday, read "... A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely-given mission to Jews to witness to God's faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church."<sup>20</sup>

Only four days later, Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore, the U.S. Bishops' Moderator for Catholic-Jewish relations, said that the document made public August 12 represents [only] the state of thought among the participants of a dialogue that has been going on for a number of years between the U.S. Catholic Church and the Jewish

community in this country...not...a formal position taken by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) or the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA).<sup>21</sup>

What do we do with such confusion? Here I speak out of my position within "progressive" Judaism, which has always seen itself as standing at the border with contemporary issues and the wider society. Our openness and flexibility give us the freedom to work with other communities on all levels, social, political, and theological. Moreover, our liberal tradition should give us certain valuable qualities we can bring to the dialogue process, particularly the kind of humility that empowers us to listen before we feel the need to speak or pass some kind of judgment on what we just heard. Our commitment to the values of the Enlightenment should give us the necessary detachment and clarity to create understanding where so much misinformation and confusion abound. What we stand to gain is exactly that which arises from accepting the challenge provided by such dialogue, namely to find within ourselves the inner spiritual resources to build trust, friendship and love in situations where so much fear and confusion abound. This is the challenge and the hope offered to Judaism and the Jewish people at this turbulent beginning of the twenty-first century.

<sup>1</sup> Helga Croner, Editor, *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations* (London and New York: Stimulus Books, 1977) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Model Presented by Dr. Michael Cook of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion

<sup>4</sup> Full text of the statement can be found online at:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000307\\_memory-reconc-its\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-its_en.html) [Cited on January 5, 2006].

<sup>5</sup> Translated from the Italian by Murray Watson Full text of speech available at

[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/research/cjl/articles/ratzinger.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/research/cjl/articles/ratzinger.htm) [Cited December 29, 2005]

<sup>6</sup> Available at:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html) [Cited on January 4th, 2006]

<sup>7</sup> Latin for “to the nations.”

<sup>8</sup> Tommaso Federici, consultant member of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, which has its office in the Secretariat for Christian Unity

<sup>9</sup> Study Outline on the Mission and Witness of the Church” presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Liaison Committee between the Roman Catholic Church and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, Venice (Casa Cardinal Piazza), March 27 to 30, 1977. Available at:

<http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Federici.htm> [Cited January 4, 2006].

<sup>10</sup> Interview with *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on September 22, 2000. Reprinted in *L'Osservatore Romano*. Full text of the interview can be found online at: <http://tcnews2.com/dominus3.html> [Cited January 5, 2006].

<sup>11</sup> Formal statement made first at the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee on May 2001, and repeated later in the year in Jerusalem – responding to Jewish concerns over the missionary implications of *Dominus Iesus* for the Jewish people. Full text can be found online at:

[http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/kasper\\_dominus\\_iesus.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/kasper_dominus_iesus.htm) [Cited January 5, 2006]

<sup>12</sup> Originally published in *The Tablet* (on July 12, 2001). Also available online:

[http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Fisher\\_New\\_Agenda.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/Fisher_New_Agenda.htm) [Cited on January 5, 2006]

<sup>13</sup> Reflections on Covenant and Mission / Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues and the Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs August 12, 2002 Available on:

<http://www.jcrelations.net/stmnts/joint8.htm> [Cited January 4, 2005]

<sup>14</sup> Press release by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of Communications. Full text of this statement can be found online at: [http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs\\_usccb120802.htm](http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/ncs_usccb120802.htm) [Cited January 5, 2006]

<sup>15</sup> See endnote #9

<sup>16</sup> See endnote #10

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See endnote #11

<sup>19</sup> See endnote #12

<sup>20</sup> See endnote #13

<sup>21</sup> See endnote #14

## Conclusion

Even with the conflicting messages from some Christian leadership as to which way we are going in Jewish-Christian dialogue, Jewish and Christian scholars are moving forward with the development of theologies of the other. Jewish as well as Christian theologians have written about the mutual theological assistance Jews and Christians can provide one another in overcoming the burdens of history. It has also been pointed out that Jewish-Christian reconciliation itself has impacted on society well beyond the bilateral dialogue. Accordingly it serves both as a universal paradigm of reconciliation and should serve as an inspiration for Jews and Christians for dialogue, especially with Islam and even beyond in the multi-faith encounter.

Christian theologians and scholars are beginning to reject supersessionist theory, which holds that in the providence of God the church is a "new Israel" in which such fashion that there can be no other, thus removing Judaism from God's saving plan.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of rereading Romans 9-11, anti-supersessionists now affirm the abiding force of God's election of Abraham and Sarah's descendants, until the end of time. Then the theological question for Christians is: How do we understand ourselves as the "people of God," and what does the answer to this question mean for future relations between Judaism and the church?<sup>2</sup>

Leading Jewish scholars have responded to new Christian theologies of Judaism with a new Jewish understanding of Christianity. In 2000, these Jewish scholars issued two publications: a manifesto and a book. The manifesto is *Dabru Emet: A Jewish*



*Statement on Christians and Christianity.* The book is entitled *Christianity in Jewish Terms*.<sup>3</sup> The essays included in the book reveal the outline of what topics may constitute this theology: Scriptural interpretation, embodiment (which the notion of incarnation), ethics, and Israel. Through this internal Jewish discussion new material from the treasure house of Jewish creativity will emerge and provide a wider horizon for Jews to enter into dialogue without the angst of "forgetting the past."

The remarkable strides in Jewish-Christian relations over the last four decades have produced a new openness. These have included seeing Judaism and Christianity in a mutually complementary role in which the Jewish focus on the communal covenant with God and the Christian focus on the individual relationship with God, may serve to balance one another. Others have seen the complementary relationship in that Christians need the Jewish reminder that the Kingdom of Heaven has not yet fully arrived, while Jews need the Christian awareness that in some ways that Kingdom has already rooted itself in the here and now.

In the years after the *Shoah* there was a standard formulation as to how Christians and Jews came to dialogue with one another: Christians come to dialogue for theology; Jews enter dialogue for politics. One explanation of this formula was that Christians felt guilty about their participation in the horrors of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, and Jews were perfectly happy to help them purify their religious traditions of these evils. Yet, there was also a sense of guilt and shame on behalf of the Jews in those early years. I believe there was a sense of guilt for not having done everything in their power to prevent

the *Shoah*. But a dialogue on shame and resentment cannot be sustained. At some point in time those who come into the dialogue no longer participate in the same culture as their parents and grandparents. Their experiences and demands are different.

The Danish philosopher and theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, once said: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."<sup>4</sup> If I might substitute the words "Jewish-Christian relations" for his word "life," it would be saying what I believe, and it would provide me the message I would like to conclude this thesis with: "Jewish-Christian relations can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forwards."

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<sup>1</sup> *Jews and Christians: People of God*, Braaten, Carl E., and Jenson, Robert W., editors (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 2003)

<sup>2</sup> *Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations*, Shermis, Michael and Zannoni, Arthur E., editors. (Paulist Press: New York/Mahwah, N.J., 1991) 26

<sup>3</sup> *Christinaity in Jewish Terms*, edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, and Michael A. Signer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Bartlett, John, *Familiar Quotations: A collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature*. Edited by Beck, Emily Morison. (Little, Brown and Company: Boston; 1980) 552

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